

High school parents across BVSD pitch in to provide students with a safe, fun night they'll remember

RSS Feeds



Randy Barber

Mar 21 2023

A lot of magic happens in the large, nondescript shed behind Broomfield High School.

<https://www.bvsvd.org/about/news/news-article/~board/district-news/post/high-school-parents-across-bvsvd-pitch-in-to-provide-students-with-a-safe-fun-night-theyll-remember>

While there are still weeks before the big event, on this Friday morning in March the shed is bustling, as parents work tirelessly to cut, paint and mount elements that will become large set pieces that will transport students to far-away places (although don't ask about the theme because it is kept a secret until the big night).

The space feels a bit like a Hollywood backlot, packed with a lot of props, paint, paper and plastic.

"We have decades of murals, cardboard cutouts behind these walls," Broomfield High School parent Erika Pazol said. "We actually rent them out as a way to make a little extra money.

Some of the volunteers remark that it is what you'd get if Michaels and Home Depot merged – part crafts and part DIY construction.

"This is like a huge craft shed," said Broomfield parent Corrie Brockman. "[It has] anything you could ever want... all the glue sticks, materials. I was so excited to come in here and make clouds today."

Given the Broadway-like production, you'd be forgiven if you thought that the parents are pitching in to help with Broomfield High's spring musical. The work is all for the school's legendary after prom, known as JAM (Just After Midnight).



<https://www.bvsd.org/about/news/news-article/~board/district-news/post/high-school-parents-across-bvsd-pitch-in-to-provide-students-with-a-safe-fun-night-theyll-remember>

After prom celebration have a long history in BVSD, inspired by tragedy

JAM is the oldest after prom celebration in the Boulder Valley School District, started in 1990 by Broomfield High School parents and staff following a frightening car crash.

In 1995, Boulder and Fairview high schools followed suit, launching a joint after prom celebration after a series of tragic alcohol and drug-related crashes claimed the lives of eleven Denver/Boulder Metro area teens.

Now, nearly 30 years later, the events are finding new importance following fresh tragedies.

Two people were killed in a car crash after Boulder High School's prom last year.

The female student involved pleaded guilty last December to two counts of DUI vehicular homicide and one count of DUI vehicular assault and was sentenced in February to at least six months in jail with a minimum of two years of probation.

A grand jury also indicted five parents, two companies and a Boulder liquor store on suspicion of supplying alcohol to teens. Their cases remain pending.

We spoke to several parents across the district who help to organize after prom events at their child's high schools. They say that there is no question, the crash shook high school communities.

"I recall we had a post-after prom meeting and we all discussed it," said Centaurus parent Kathy Warling-Smith. "It reinforced, to us, the importance of getting the word out about after prom to our community."

"It's so tragic what happened with that young woman last year," added Monarch parent Jennifer Rotchford. "It is the worst possible outcome, and that's what we want to prevent from happening,"

Sadly, only a few months later, a Broomfield High School student died in another crash that police say also involved alcohol and drugs. According to media reports, the juvenile driver has been charged with vehicular homicide, two counts of vehicular assault, illegal possession or consumption of alcohol as an under age person and illegal possession or consumption of marijuana by an underage person.

"We are missing a senior student this year in our student body [because of the tragedy]," Pazol said. "Our mission is basically to create a drug and alcohol free environment to keep our kids safe on prom night because it's the most dangerous night of the year."

<https://www.bvsd.org/about/news/news-article/~board/district-news/post/high-school-parents-across-bvsd-pitch-in-to-provide-students-with-a-safe-fun-night-theyll-remember>

There are a lot of reasons why parents volunteer to help, but the organizers say safety is a key driver.

“There is a mix of those who, like us, remember the original incidents and new parents who are influenced by everything going on now,” said Boulder High School parent Anna Lull.

“After prom is so important because it gives [students] a safe place, ensuring that they're not risking their lives or others lives on a night that's been labeled as a party night for decades,” said Warling-Smith.



Fun, big prizes aim to attract students

The parent-organizers fully understand what they are competing against.

“I know pre-COVID, there were also a lot of big parties all over town for students to go to and often they were going from party bus to party bus,” said Boulder High School Parent Mary Pierce.

<https://www.bvsvd.org/about/news/news-article/~board/district-news/post/high-school-parents-across-bvsvd-pitch-in-to-provide-students-with-a-safe-fun-night-theyll-remember>

"The culture has shifted," added Lull. "People are concerned that some kids just want to drive around all night and they don't even want to go to prom. So we're trying really hard to make them want to go to both. It's actually kind of a movement that we're hoping to make prom cool again."

"Prom is a rite of passage, where kids feel like adults and they want to have an adult experience. I mean, there are a lot of dangerous choices right? "It's the driving, all of the excess and just how everything [including alcohol and drugs] is so readily available to kids," Rotchford said. "We can't tell parents, 'don't buy a party bus'. You have to accept that's going to happen. And kids have cars. They're 17 and 18. It's a really borderline age where parents are allowing them to make their own decisions. And that's probably appropriate."

"We have to provide an appealing alternative to sway them to come," Rotchford added. "You have to make it really appealing so that kids will choose after prom."

As a result, the parents, supported by community partners, go all out.

"It is an enormous amount of work," said Pierce. "We have a big team of parents."

Whether the event is held in the school or local recreation center, many of the events have extravagant themes that would make Disney imagineers proud.

"The community walks through, they just love it," said Broomfield Parent Heather Dunham. "They're always in awe of what we can build."

At JAM parents only get \$50 to make the magic happen for small rooms and \$100 for larger places, like the gymnasiums.

"It's all about getting creative with what's already in the shed and your imagination," Pazol said.

"We have people who are amazing artists and painters who donate their time. We are talking 20 years of donated time. Their kids are grown and out of the house and they are still coming back," Pazol added.

Brockman, who attended Broomfield High School in the late 90s and still fondly remembers the JAMs she and her future husband attended.

"Now our daughter goes here, so we are all helping because it was so cool," Brockman said. "I couldn't wait to get involved."

All of the after proms have fun activities for students. Some have inflatable play structures where kids can bounce, access to an ice skating rink, pool tables, card readers, artists that do

<https://www.bvsd.org/about/news/news-article/~board/district-news/post/high-school-parents-across-bvsd-pitch-in-to-provide-students-with-a-safe-fun-night-theyll-remember>

caricatures, henna tattoos, photo booths, and even a “wedding chappel” where kids can pretend to get hitched to their date or group of friends – and get a photo with a real wedding photographer.

Nederland Middle-Senior High School parents organized a fun night UMC Connection on the University of Colorado Boulder campus, offering the kids a variety of activities from bowling to pool to video games.

"It was a fantastically fun and highly successful after-prom event," said one Nederland parent.

Many also have games and casinos, where the kids can earn prizes.

“The goal is to make it so the kids have a lot of fun and walk out of there with so many cool prizes,” Lull said.

There are also often big grand prizes with drawings at the end of the event and you have to be present to win – to incentivize keeping students from bouncing to less safe parties.

Students can win everything from Apple watches to big screen TVs, Xbox game consoles to bicycles, and of course big gift cards.

“We have somebody at the exit door that reminds students if they leave, they can't come back and they are going to miss out on the grand prizes.” Pazol said with a laugh. “We fundraise and get donations and sponsorships for tens of thousands of dollars. You would be shocked how much it costs to put this on for four hours.”

“If you have to put up money and have a raffle to get kids to come to Monarch Gym, hang out, that's the price you pay. That's really important to do,” Rotchford added.

Rebuilding following the pandemic

After proms, like many events, were put on hold because of COVID-19 and public health orders. That means that today's upperclassmen haven't heard about how amazing the events are.

The after prom organizers hope that they can regain the momentum that these events had prior to the pandemic.

“The reality right now is we are struggling a bit after COVID,” Pazol said. “JAM has been such a legendary and handed-down tradition, but the event was canceled in 2020 and then held outside on the football field in 2021 , and everyone was wearing masks and it started to rain. So now you've got these juniors and seniors who are like, ‘why would I want to go to JAM?’”

<https://www.bvsd.org/about/news/news-article/~board/district-news/post/high-school-parents-across-bvsd-pitch-in-to-provide-students-with-a-safe-fun-night-theyll-remember>

“With that COVID gap, a lot of parents don’t know that there are after prom activities for Centaurus,” Warling-Smith added. “We have had to make it that much more of a priority to get the word out to the students and families.”

Knowing how students typically work, Rotchford hopes that they can plant the seed with a few students and let it grow from there.

“If you can get buy-in with one or two kids in each circle, so they say ‘let’s give it a try,’ we will be able to get the largest participation level possible,” Rotchford said.

Ultimately, they want to make it a night the kids will remember for the right reasons.

“We want to celebrate their accomplishments and let them create one more special memory with their groups of friends,” Warling-Smith said. They will have a great time at the after prom party and recoup on their sleep the following day.”

All of BVSD’s after proms are parent-led, with support from schools, including regular communication to students. Each needs community support to succeed. Please consider donating time, money or in some other way to help ensure these safe spaces continue to exist for Boulder Valley students.