

Boyd Andrew  
Management Services

## PREVENTION AT WORK IN MONTANA

*Gaining acceptance into a close-knit, rural community as an outsider is always difficult process. Here is my story from McCone County. ~ Melissa Kostelecky, District II Prevention Specialist.*

Circle, with a population of roughly 600 people, is the McCone county seat and only town of significant size in this historic farming and ranching community. I live in Sidney, 75 miles away in Richland County. I grew up in much smaller Wibaux so I knew I could relate to a small town and was determined to see it through. In a year's time, with trial and error, changing strategies, and locating a few kind people to carry the message without me around, we finally started to see some progress.

During that time, I developed positive relationships and reassured the community that my role wasn't to highlight problems but to assist in finding proactive solutions and overcome barriers. Now I am privileged to have the support of the McCone County Commissioners, the Public Health Nurse, the County Attorney, the Sheriff's Office, the Circle Country Market and most importantly, the school staff and the school board. Recently, the school board asked if I could help incorporate prevention education into the prom and all that anticipatory time leading up to it. The school board felt as though the students knew they shouldn't drink, but would benefit from some of the reasons why they shouldn't that they could relate to in the context of the Prom. This launched the development of our multi-pronged awareness-raising "**PROMise Campaign.**"

We began by creating a small card that gave **5 reasons** why students should have an alcohol-free prom night, and had them attached to the prom tickets purchased by students. When the card was finished, the school board suggested a letter that could be sent home to the parents with **5 tips** on how to keep their child alcohol-free on prom night. Again, this allowed them to choose the tips they felt would be a best fit for the parents of the students in their school. PROMise flyers were also created, the students placed them prominently around town and in the school. On the big night, tote bags with the PROMise logo were handed out that contained water bottles also wrapped in the logo along with other prevention education materials.

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Can you **PROMise**  
an alcohol-free prom night?

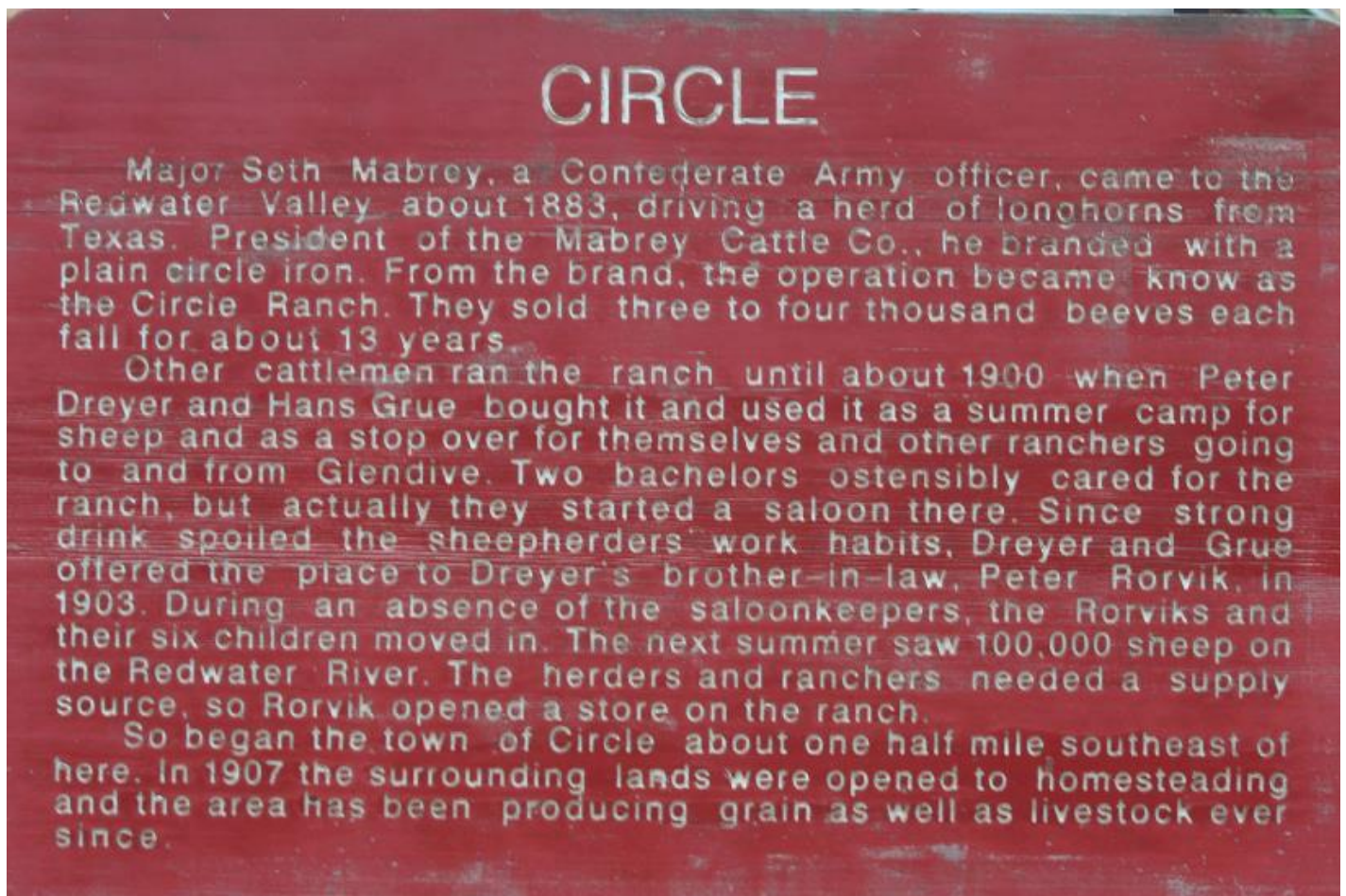
5 reasons to have an alcohol-free prom night

- ★ You worked hard for this night and deserve to remember it.
- ★ You paid money to look good, why ruin it by looking drunk?
- ★ You don't want to disappoint someone looking up to you.
- ★ You don't want to affect your decision making abilities.
- ★ You don't want the consequences that follow if you're caught illegally drinking alcohol.

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To bring education to Alcohol Awareness Month, the Guidance Counselor invited me to speak to a few health classes about the dangers of underage drinking on a developing brain and body. The first class I taught had thirty six 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, and the second had fifteen 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. Because the school felt this was such a huge success, they have invited me back to speak to the seniors about the negative effects alcohol can have on plans after high school graduation.

Building proper relationships, understanding the community climate in order to navigate it accordingly, along with persistently encouraging education have helped me reinforce the importance of Underage Drinking Prevention efforts in McCone County (AKA capacity development). Witnessing the community become receptive and getting involved has made all of the challenges and hard work feel worthwhile.



The **Fifth Annual Anaconda Leadership Academy Graduation** took place in April. The Leadership Academy 9th -12th grade participants commit to 10 hours of community service per month and get to meet upstairs in the historic and cozy Hearst Free Library throughout the year to learn about leadership and teamwork. It was a privilege to be invited to witness another fine group of youth pass on the torch. Many thanks to Michelle Harrington and Matthew Buerkle for the gracious hospitality along with all the good people of Anaconda who make it all possible by donating their time, talent and treasure to benefit the youth of their community.



There are also pictures from the Prom After Party mixed in here – Western Montana Mental Health Center Tri-County had over 30 hours volunteer time at the Prom.



Meanwhile, out in Glendive, Paula Marx has taken advantage of nearly every form of available media to weave her “Talk Early, Talk Often” Campaign into the fabric of Dawson County. It’s on the radio, it’s in the newspaper, and when everyone in the area piles into the arena to see the Dawson Community College Red Devils play, they’re going to leave there with the underlying idea that talking to their kids about underage drinking is a good idea. How did that idea get there? Persistence and determination, that seems to be the theme for the month of April coming out of the well appointed District II prevention team.

Now, we don’t pretend to know all the mysterious ways and inner workings of the soothing subliminal interlude pattern (SSIP) that we’ve grown familiar with along our prevention journey together. We just know those colors draw you in and make good things happen and vice versa (prevents bad things). So, even if a colorblind guy puts this newsletter together, someone else out there would hopefully concur that there are striking similarities between our SSIP and the new billboard. That’s just synergistically striking. If it’s not, make like I’m still on vacation in Moab riding the Porcupine Rim section of the Whole Enchilada. That’s my happy place now, no invoices.

