

# Ashland University Graduate to Present Alcohol Awareness Program

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ASHLAND, Ohio –Before Ashland University students head for the beaches and warmer weather during their annual spring break, they’ll have an opportunity to hear about the dangers of hardy partying from AU graduate Michael Gershe.

*Michael Gershe* 

Gershe, who in 1992 earned a bachelor of arts degree in communications with a minor in radio/TV, will present “The Magic of Life” at 9 p.m. on March 4 in Myers Convocation Center. The program is only open to AU students.

“This is a different type of alcohol awareness program,” said Gershe. “It is not doom and gloom. I do a lot of comedy. It’s about how to have fun safely. It’s also about going after your dreams.

“I want people who attend the program to leave feeling good about themselves, but also being aware of the consequences of the good and bad choices they make. If I can influence even one person to change his or her behavior toward drinking, then I’ve been successful.”

Gershe knows firsthand the consequences of bad choices regarding alcohol. He barely survived being hit by a drunk driver in a crash that took the life of his mother when he was just an infant. Just about every bone in his body was broken, his skull fractured and yet Gershe has gone on to live a very fulfilling and successful life. After graduating from Ashland, he went on to earn a master’s degree from the University of Akron and now works as coordinator of student services in the College of Technology at Kent State University.

While the program contains humor, Gershe gets serious and to the point when he talks about the drunk driving accident that changed his life. As a former student-athlete, he will talk about binge drinking, peer pressure and other dangers associated with alcohol abuse.

“I grew up in Tampa, Fla., and came to Ashland to compete as a member of the swim team, so I understand what it’s like to be a student-athlete,” he said. “I’ll tell my own story, but also talk about another Ashland graduate, John Kelly (’95).

“My friend ‘Big John’ Kelly was killed in a drunk driving incident on May 1, 2004. John is another painful reminder that being a casualty of a drunk driving incident can happen to anyone. John was like a brother not only to me, but to those who knew him through his years at

Ashland University. At Ashland, he was a member of the Orientation Team where he helped new students adjust to the university, and was a student worker for the athletic department.

“Despite being 6’4, John was a gentle giant and he continues to live on through each of his friends. John was never short of a smile and his laugh could fill the room as he made many friends quickly. For 15 years, I knew John and will always treasure the memories we shared, and his tragic death should remind us all of the dangers of drunk driving.”

In addition to presenting 10-15 alcohol awareness programs per semester on college campuses around the country, Gershe performs as a stand-up comedian, including a schedule of performances this spring at the Cuyahoga Falls comedy club. “It’s an entirely different audience than I speak to on campus, so my program is very different,” he said. “I talk about newsworthy items and do observational comedy, similar to Jerry Seinfeld.”

Gershe credits Ashland University for his start public speaking. “I used to do a magic show in the Eagles’ Nest of the old Student Center,” he recalls. “Without Ashland, nothing I do would have been possible. My involvement in higher education also began at AU. I was a ‘Cabbie’ (Campus Activities Board member) and president of Kilhefner Hall. With my major in communications, I ‘lived’ in A and H (the former Arts and Humanities Building).”

The 37-year-old resident of Cuyahoga Falls said he hopes to eventually spend even more time on stage.

“I would love to do this full time,” he said. “I really enjoy speaking to college and high school audiences, and I’m getting quite a few testimonials from people who attend my programs. When I get an email from someone who said I had a positive influence on their life, that’s when I know I’m doing what I’m supposed to do.”

Gershe’s appearance at AU is co-sponsored by the Student Activities Office and Alumni and Parent Relations Office. For further information, contact Nicole Dyer, director of student activities, at 419-289-5325.

Ashland University is a private, comprehensive institution located in north central Ohio between Cleveland and Columbus. On-campus enrollment is nearly 2,150 undergraduate students while total enrollment, including graduate and off-campus centers, is more than 6,500.