



Former ONDCP director Gen. Barry McCaffrey with the 2006 Siebel Scholars from Sloan. The conference drew many top leaders from government.



The Montana Meth Project's "Not Even Once" campaign features gritty, provocative imagery like this TV ad where a teen "tweaking" on meth picks out all of her eyebrows, leaving behind a bloodied skin.

Siebel Scholars discuss meth epidemic at national conference

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Posted: 11/8/05

Newsweek calls it, "America's most dangerous drug" and yet an auditorium full of the brightest students at America's top graduate programs sat silent and clueless when asked about the drug's effects. Unlike cocaine or marijuana, methamphetamine (most often referred to as "crank" or "crystal meth") is a relatively new drug, and few Americans are fully aware of the drug's high addiction rate or potential for long-term neurological damage.

Tom Siebel is out to change that.

At the annual Siebel Scholars Conference, held October 28 through 30 at the University of Chicago, Siebel brought together the 45 Siebel Scholars from the Class of 2006, previous Siebel Scholars, and a panel of experts on the meth epidemic.

Each year, Siebel Scholars from past and present come together to discuss a single prominent issue. The issue varies from year to year and this year centered on meth use in the US, an issue to which Tom Siebel has committed much time and money recently in launching the Montana Meth Project.

Conference discusses possible solutions

This year's conference was attended by current Sloan scholars Peer Casillo '06, Dingli Chen '06, Steven Fransblow '06, Christy Prilutski '06, and Caroline Stark '06 as well as past scholars Vikram Sahney '05 and Manny Picciola '02. Also in attendance were business school students from Kellogg, Stanford, and University of Chicago; and computer science and engineering graduate students from Carnegie Mellon, MIT, Stanford, UC Berkeley, and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The weekend began with a viewing of a meth documentary, Crank: Made in America. On Saturday, scholars engaged in a discussion with an expert panel to learn more about the issue.

The panel represented a wide spectrum of backgrounds from government, law enforcement, and medicine, as well as

a recovering meth addict and the director of the Crank: Made in America documentary. Sam Donaldson of ABC News moderated the panel.

At the end of the day, Mr. Siebel presented the Montana Meth Project, a single-state prevention program that serves as a privately-funded learning ground for anti-meth campaigns.

The conference closed on Sunday with a brainstorming breakfast where scholars used the learning from Saturday's panel to provide new insights and suggestions for the Montana Meth Project.

Mr. Siebel's commitment to solving the epidemic at a local level was evident throughout the weekend and made a strong impression on many scholars. "[What's] personally motivating is to see someone as successful as Tom Siebel devote so much time and effort to helping educate future leaders. But, also to pick a world crisis and put effort, resources and really put his family behind it; this is really making a difference," said 2006 scholar Christy Prilutski.

The three-day conference was not all work, as scholars and panelists kicked back on Saturday night at a blues club in Chicago where they were treated to a private show by Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Famer and Chicago blues legend Buddy Guy.

The Montana Meth Project

Montana was targeted for a pilot anti-meth program because, "Methamphetamine use by young people in Montana is dramatically higher than the national average and the majority of all drug-related federal sentences in Montana are related to methamphetamine," according to the project's website (MontanaMethProject.org). Also, as discussed by Mr. Siebel at the scholars' conference, Montana is a small market, which makes it well-suited as an experimental ground for developing a program that could be replicated to other states hard-hit by meth.

The project employed top-notch advertising and media strategy firms like San Francisco-based Venables-Bell and Seattle-based DDB to make sure the anti-drug message didn't come out sounding like an egg cracking into a frying pan. Because of Montana's small size, the project was able to saturate TV, radio, and outdoor media with very gritty, provocative ads.

In addition to the project's official site, there is also a sister site, NotEvenOnce.com, directed at teens. This site supports the "Not Even Once" ad campaign, which plays on meth's high addiction rate and unsightly physical symptoms like weight loss, tooth loss, and self-mutilation.

More information on the project is available at both websites.