

## NEWS RELEASE

### Contacts:

Michaela Pratt, Mentor Foundation USA

Ph: (202) 536-1593; Email: [michaela@mentorfoundation.org](mailto:michaela@mentorfoundation.org)

Julia Brandi, Rip Van Winkle Foundation

Ph: (413) 441-6969; Email: [jkb7@me.com](mailto:jkb7@me.com)

### **Mentor Foundation USA Pioneers new Peer-to-Peer Drug Prevention Program for Youth in Columbia County, NY**

Washington DC, Nov. 2, 2015 — More than 1,500 high school students in three Columbia County, NY, schools will be engaged in the *Shattering the Myths* program—a new peer-to-peer interactive drug prevention program. Organized by the [Mentor Foundation USA](http://www.mentorfoundation.org) in partnership with [The National Institute on Drug Abuse](http://www.nidk.nih.gov) and with support from the [Rip Van Winkle Foundation](http://www.rvwf.org), the program is designed to dispel the myths surrounding drug abuse and provide youth a platform to speak up and out against drugs.

“By focusing on the innate talents and strengths that young people already have, they become their biggest advocates for staying drug-free,” explains Gunilla Girardo, President & CEO of Mentor Foundation USA. Adding that: “We applaud the Columbia County School leadership for accepting our stewardship in addressing the national drug epidemic challenge among youth. Our expanded version of the *Shattering the Myths* will allow us to measure the program’s impact over an entire academic year in one particular county, which in turn will help us prepare for a continued national expansion.”

Some of the objectives that will be measured include:

- Participants’ levels of perceived dangers surrounding drug and alcohol use pre- and post program.
- The participation level of teens in peer-led school-wide prevention activities.
- The impact of the program’s counter-marketing social media campaign.

“The Rip Van Winkle Foundation is proud to support Mentor Foundation USA’s efforts addressing the substance abuse of Columbia County’s youth,” remarked Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr., M.D., Chairman and CEO of the Board of Directors of the Rip Van Winkle Foundation. “By aligning with the Mentor Foundation now, we are making this important mission a priority by giving our youth the deep and real individual power of being drug-free.”

Kick-off dates for the three schools are:

- Nov 3–5, Germantown HS, Germantown, NY
- Nov 17–19, Taconic Hills HS, Craryville, NY
- Nov 30–Dec 2, Ichabod Crane HS, Valatie, NY

In addition to the youth rallies that kick off the program at each school, The *Shattering the Myth* includes tools and training for youth ambassadors at each school to continue the spreading the facts about drugs and alcohol to their peers and show and share how they are '[Living the Example](#)' on social media and through various activities at their schools.

“One of the Foundation’s core beliefs is that good health is ultimately in the hands of the individual, who can prevent serious chronic illness by taking personal responsibility for their health. Mentor’s *Shattering the Myths* program offers youth-savvy, powerful wake-up calls about the dangers of drug abuse and provides real and contemporary tools to help youth recognize and avoid these challenges in their own lives,” said John Esselstyn Howell, Member of the Board of Directors for the Rip Van Winkle Foundation. Adding that: “Prevention clearly holds the best promise for the future of our youth. We believe that Mentor and their internationally recognized drug prevention and peer-to-peer programs offer our community’s families and children new and sophisticated programs and tools to help them succeed.”

# # #

**About Mentor Foundation USA:** Our mission is to prevent drug abuse among youth while helping them identify and pursue their goals. We view drug prevention and the success of our youth as a collective civil responsibility. Therefore, we partner with the business community, government agencies, schools, and parents to create healthy and productive pathways for youth. Since 2010 Mentor Foundation USA has reached more than 140,000 youth across the United States. Mentor Foundation USA is an affiliate of Mentor International, founded in 1994 by Her Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden and the World Health Organization. [www.mentorfoundationusa.org](http://www.mentorfoundationusa.org)

**About the Rip Van Winkle Foundation:** For well over half a century, The Rip Van Winkle Foundation has pioneered efforts across the U.S. to support innovative public health efforts that create new and impactful opportunities for improvements in public health and wellness for communities nationwide. The Foundation’s Founder, Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, was a descendant of early Dutch settlers in Claverack, NY, and was a pioneer of early efforts at delivering comprehensive, preventive health care. In 1946, he launched The Rip Van Winkle Clinic, the first rural group medical practice, with medical clinics in a half-dozen towns in Columbia County. Later, in concert with a number of prominent friends and medical colleagues, these efforts would lead to the eventual passage of national legislation of health care for the aged, known popularly as Medicare. [www.rvwfoundation.org](http://www.rvwfoundation.org)