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Drug abuse forum offers parents a dramatic look at serious problem

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CLEARWATER — More than 400 parents got turned on to the drug abuse problem in Pinellas County at a drug awareness forum in Clearwater Monday night.

Ten speakers, including politicians, police, former student drug abusers and parents of drug abusers described the problem from their different points of view.

Much of the large auditorium at Clearwater High School was filled. For many in the audience, the evening was the first time they got a whiff of the distinctive aroma of marijuana. A tray containing the burning drug was carried through the au-

dience by panel moderator Bob Marek.

THE MOST dramatic testimony at the two-hour forum came from a recent high school graduate identified only as Mike.

Mike said he started taking drugs in elementary school. He has experimented with just about all varieties of drugs and other abused substances, from alcohol to cocaine to paint thinner.

"All I wanted to do was get high," Mike said. "When I went to school, it was to get high."

On one occasion, while armed with a sword, Mike said he attempted to assault his father, "who was only trying to help me."

Mike said his goal now is to go to col-

lege and become a maritime lawyer.

SCHOOL BOARD member Jerry Castellanos said the county's high schools are "veritable drug supermarkets."

He said he had personally witnessed students "just rolling and puffing and puffing away no more than 100 feet from a school administration building and within sight of teachers."

Castellanos was criticized by other School Board members when he disguised himself as a student and tried to buy drugs at Tarpon Springs High School last year.

"We need a unified effort," Castellanos stressed. "We have no less at stake than the future of our children."

Jim Hartz, director of **Straight Inc.**, a drug rehabilitation program, told his listeners that they can do something about drugs.

"GET INVOLVED," Hartz admonished the crowd. "Find out what's going on and believe me, you can make a difference."

County Commissioner Joe Wornicki, sponsor of a recent ordinance outlawing the sale of drug paraphernalia, said he has acquired some enemies as a result.

His insurance firm's sign was broken, he said, and his tenants "have been harassed continually for a week." His 18-year-old daughter has also been harassed.

"But I can tell you, we're not through yet and we're not going to give up," Wornicki said, to applause from the audience.

Wornicki said he plans to propose a new ordinance banning the sale of a synthetic cocaine substance that has recently found its way into some Pinellas County "head shops."