



## Campaign seeks to 'unsell' meth in rural Illinois

BY KAY SHIPMAN

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Parts of rural Illinois have been devastated by the illegal use of methamphetamine, but a sophisticated marketing campaign seeks to reverse that trend.

The Illinois Meth Project is a prevention program employing a successful campaign first launched by Illinois native Thomas Siebel in Montana. The Meth Project initially is focusing on teens in the Champaign, Springfield, and Decatur areas, said Steven Mange, the Illinois project's executive director.

The main tool is graphic television and radio commercials and billboards that accurately depict the physical destruction of meth addiction.

Siebel, a University of Illinois graduate and software developer, tapped his marketing skills to treat meth like a consumer product, but "instead of selling a product, he wanted to try to unsell a product (meth)," Mange explained.

The campaign is focusing on Central Illinois teens because most meth addicts first try the illegal drug as teenagers. Of the Central Illinois teens interviewed, about 25 percent saw little risk in trying meth, according to Mange. As many as 21 percent said weight loss would be a benefit from using meth.

Montana, where Siebel owned a ranch and vacationed, has suffered from meth manufacturing and use. The Meth Project started in 2005 and is credited with reducing adult meth use by 70 percent, teen meth use by 45 percent, and meth-related crimes by 53 percent.

In Illinois, Meth Project ads are expected to be seen by 70 to 90 percent of teens in the three Central Illinois communities at least three times a week. Ads also may be viewed online at {[www.illinoismethproject.org](http://www.illinoismethproject.org)}.

The message is "Not Even Once" because individuals may become addicted after using meth only once, Mange explained.

The project is being led by statewide leaders in business, government, law enforcement, and substance abuse treatment. U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, a Springfield Democrat, helped obtain federal funding for the project.

The Project Meth website offers information, tips, and materials. Project officials are willing to work with rural community and school leaders on the problem, according to Mange.

“We don’t have to lose another generation to this terrible drug,” Mange concluded.