Quadriplegic’s Video Moves Attendees of THNK Event in Ventura
By Anne Kallas

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When Tony Pedeferri played a DVD of his life before and after Dec. 18, 2007, when the California Highway Patrol motorcycle officer was hit by an impaired driver on Highway 101 and became a quadriplegic, the standing-room-only audience Wednesday at Ventura College was visibly moved.

Coordinator Lucy Cupuano Brewer was so overcome she had to leave the room momentarily to collect herself.

As images of Pedeferri riding bicycles and participating in marathons changed to images from the horrific accident that almost claimed his life, Ventura College student Brandi Miranda found herself in tears. “It’s sad. It’s a miracle he’s alive,” she said.

“It’s wrong. Those people didn’t just hurt him. They hurt his family, his career and his life. They took his life away.”

Pedeferri spoke as part of the Ventura College Psychology Club’s THNK event, designed to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking and drug use as spring break season arrives.

“They took the ‘I’ out of think, which is what happens when you drink and drive,” said Ted Prell, a retired Ventura police sergeant who teaches criminal justice classes at the college.

Prell set up several demonstrations Wednesday, including a field sobriety test and a golf cart that students drove while wearing goggles designed to make them feel impaired. “If by doing this we can reach just a few or a couple of students who are watching, it’s worth it. It’s one step at a time,” Prell said.

For Aimee Fair, the message of THNK was personal. “I’ve been an addict and my boyfriend is ... trying to deal with addiction to heroin and alcohol,” she said. “I feel more at peace and understand myself. Now I’m 19 and I’m sober.”
Fair said she is considering a career in psychology to help others who struggle with substance abuse.

In addition to informational booths, demonstrations and lectures, students were asked to write messages about how substance abuse has affected them or people they love.

“If this can help one person be safe during spring break, what we did here is accomplished,” Psychology Club Vice President Eric Burton said.

Cupuano Brewer said she was delighted with the turnout and response. “It’s unbelievable. It’s beyond what we expected.”