

## Siebel touts project's success

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By: Angela Brandt



*Eliza Wiley IR Staff Photographer - Tom Siebel, founder of the Montana Meth Project, spoke to Hometown Helena members Thursday on the future of the successful program he helped create and how the state needs to keep the campaign afloat.*

When software billionaire Tom Siebel started the Montana Meth Project two years ago he “couldn’t have imagined it could have been this successful,” he said Thursday.

The project, showcased by a campaign of hard-hitting graphic advertising charged with “unselling meth” and making it undesirable for teenagers, has exceeded all of his expectations, Siebel said.

Siebel, who made a presentation to the Hometown Helena civic group Thursday morning, said since the project launched in September 2005, the use of methamphetamine — “the most addictive agent known to man” — by Montana teens has dropped 38 percent.

“The results in the state of Montana have been nothing short of remarkable,” he told the 80 or so gathered. “If this data holds up, this is the most effective anti-drug effort in history.”

The project’s capital campaign is a hit as well. While the Siebel Foundation has footed the bills for the project so far, the concept was to create a self-sustaining model with federal, state and private dollars.

“Funding — I forgot why I’m here — that’s why I’m here,” Siebel, said enthusiastically.

More than \$500,000 in private and corporate donations has been raised so far this year. That funding will be doubled by the Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation for a total of more than \$1 million dollars. All funds received by Nov. 15 will be matched by the foundation up to \$5 million.

“I hope you make the decision to fund it,” Siebel, a part-time Montana resident, told the crowd.

Donations have come in from all over. Several incarcerated meth addicts donated their monthly income from the prison work program to the project in hopes that teens will be swayed from following in their footsteps, according to Siebel.

During this year's session, the Montana Legislature earmarked another \$1 million in tax money to aid in funding the project.

Last Friday, U.S. Rep. Denny Rehberg and U.S. Sens. Max Baucus and Jon Tester announced they had secured \$500,000 in funding for the project in the Commerce, Science and Justice Appropriations Bill.

According to Nitsa Zuppas, executive director of the Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation, the project costs the foundation about 3.3 million per year, with the bulk being spent on media placement.

Funding and statistics are not the only way the project's success can be measured.

Montana Meth Project also has won a multitude of awards including the Cannes Bronze Lion Award at the Cannes International Advertising Festival in France. The project's Paint the State competition, where teens displayed the anti-meth message on everything from buildings to cars to cows, was cited by the judges for expanding past the traditional advertising venues.

It also was the recipient of a National Silver ADDY Award, which is one of the advertising industry's largest annual competitions with more than 60,000 entrants, and two Gold Effie Awards for effectiveness of the campaign.

Montana Meth is the largest advertiser in the state, reaching about 80 percent of the state's teens at least three times a week with the "Not Even Once" messages, Siebel said.

With all the affirmations of the success of the project also came some criticism of the way the country deals with drugs as a whole which he considers "a little crazy."

"We used to put people we were scared of in jail, now we put people in jail we're mad at," Siebel said. It's easy to fund jails but not as simple to fund "soft issues" such as treatment and prevention, he said.

According to Montana Meth Project Executive Director Peg Shea, for every dollar spent on "cleaning up the mess" of meth use, 3 cents is used on treatment and a penny goes toward prevention.

Siebel said preventative measures like the project can work across the country. Montana Meth is being used as a model for similar campaigns in other states like Arizona and Idaho.

"We'll save a lot of lives if we can get this going nationally," he said.

Through it all, the more impressive accomplishment of the project is the heightened awareness of the meth problem on the national level, he said.

During the fall and winter months, the project will conduct research analyzing the views of teens in Montana on meth compared to those of other states.

Siebel said Montana Meth Project is a "very successful grassroots campaign," which came about after teenagers came forward with their frustrations with the methamphetamine problem in the state.

"The project was just a catalyst for energy already there," he said.

Montana Meth Project has been released in three phases so far; the last was unveiled in March. Phase four of the anti-meth campaign will be launched in January, Siebel said.

Helen Ballinger, who attended the Hometown Helena gathering, said she has been enthralled with the project since the beginning.

“They blew my mind. I couldn’t imagine anything so destructive,” Ballinger said after Siebel’s presentation.

Lorretta Lynde also attended. She said both Siebel and the project are engaging and inspiring.

“When I first saw the ads, I thought, these will get people’s attention and really impress them and as he said today — they did,” Lynde said.