

Area author offers great safety tips for students

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In the introduction to his new book, Monroeville-based author and safety/security consultant Thomas M. Kane offers the following “ot tip” to parents of high school seniors: “Buy your student a shredder as a high school graduation present.”

The wisdom behind that suggestion is that 18-year-olds likely have not yet developed a healthy appreciation of the need for privacy and identity protection in an increasingly MySpace-centric world.

A shredder sitting on the dorm room desk adjacent to the laptop serves as a constant reminder that sensitive data and documents must be thoroughly destroyed, rather than loosely discarded to cyber and garbage-bin thieves who make their living by preying on naive young college students.

That’s good advice, as is the case with everything Kane includes in his exhaustive campus survival manual, “Protect Yourself at College,” pub-

lished this spring by Capital Books of Sterling, Va.

But here's an even hotter tip from someone who's read it from cover to cover: "Buy your student this book as a high school graduation present."

And while you're at it, buy a copy for yourself, as well, and pass it along to all of your teen- and tween-aged children. Although "Protect Yourself" specifically is geared toward college life, most of the information here is applicable to any lifestyle, and particularly to young adults taking their first independent steps into the world at large.

Kane candidly admits that, despite the second-person usage in the title, his book really isn't marketed to students, but rather to their parents.

"I think it would be a safe bet to say that the majority of you reading this book didn't purchase it," Kane writes to students in his introduction. "I understand that. More than likely it was purchased by a parent or another relative and given to you as a gift."

He goes on to assure his readers that his purpose is not to tell them they shouldn't drink, or entertain a boyfriend or girlfriend overnight, or go on spring break, or participate in online social networks, or "be silly and embarrass yourself."

But Kane also assures students that the probability of encountering a risky, dangerous or even life-threatening situation is not as remote as many might believe. He cites statistics that show one in 20 college students each year are arrested, assaulted, raped, seriously or fatally intoxicated, murdered or otherwise victimized.

The good news is that, over the course of 185 pages, Kane lays out a proactive plan for preempting most problems, and for handling other situations — such as fires and weather-related disasters — that can't be avoided.

Kane takes his readers all the way from freshman move-in day in the fall to spring break, and makes stops at every potential pitfall in between.

And it isn't just the most obvious predicaments — alcohol abuse, date rape, theft and the many categories of online exploitation, for example — that get his attention. For Kane, the devil truly is in the details, and one strength of "Protect Yourself" is its attention to the dangers that can lurk in even the most seemingly innocuous situations.

It's all presented in a series of first-person narratives, checklists and, of course, the hot tips. A personal favorite:

"If someone takes your picture and puts it on the Internet, you will have a better chance of the Pope coming to Easter dinner than having your photo removed."

Consider yourself warned.