



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

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Former NBA Player Chris Herren Brings First-Person Story of Addiction and Sobriety to Ramapo College

MAHWAH, N.J. – Chris Herren’s message of stardom, alcohol and drug addiction and the long road to sobriety held the audience riveted when the former NBA player spoke to more than 1,200 who gathered in the Bradley Arena on the Ramapo College campus on October 3.

“Rebound, the Chris Herren Story” was funded through a grant by the Mahwah Municipal Alliance and presented at the College for staff, faculty and students as well as outside school groups and many guests.

Bergen County Prosecutor Gurbir Grewal was among the honored guests at the event.

“We want to thank Chris for bringing his personal story and highlighting and bringing awareness to those afflicted with the disease of addiction. The problem of drug use and death by overdose, even right here in our own community, is overwhelming,” said Prosecutor Grewal. In 2015, the number of overdoses from heroin and opioid drugs was 288, he said, adding that the outlook for 2016 is “equally grim.”

“This is no longer just a law enforcement issue. It is a public health crisis,” Grewal said.

Herren was a high school basketball legend from Fall River, Massachusetts, who scored more than 2,000 career points and was named to the 1994 McDonald’s All-American team. Herren realized his lifelong dream of playing in the NBA when he was drafted by the Denver Nuggets in 1999 and traded to the Boston Celtics after his rookie season, only to lose it all to the nightmare of drug addiction—first alcohol, then cocaine and OxyContin, and finally heroin.

“I used to sit in auditoriums like this, listening to guys like me and say to myself, ‘I’ll never be that guy.’ But here I am,” Herren said. “If I can get through to even one person, if I can get even one of you to really hear what I’m saying and believe that it can happen to you, well, then my visit here today will have been worth it.”

The audience was mesmerized by Herren's recounting of his path to addiction – how he drank his first beer at the age of 14, despite experiencing the pain of living with an alcoholic father; he tried cocaine at 18, then met a neighborhood friend who sold him a single OxyContin pill for \$20. That meeting, he said, was the start of a \$25,000 a month habit that eventually led to heroin use. Herren choked back tears when telling the audience about the numerous coaches and teammates who believed in him enough to give him "second chances," even sending him to rehabilitation facilities more times than he could remember.

"But the lure of the drugs was too tempting, and it cost me everything, my career, my family and almost my life," Herren said. He was arrested seven times and overdosed four times, requiring life-saving measures to "bring him back."

Alcohol and drug-free since August 1, 2008, he has refocused his life to put his sobriety and family above all else. He has shared his harrowing story of abuse and recovery in his memoir, *Basketball Junkie*, as well as in numerous interviews throughout the Emmy nominated ESPN Films documentary *Unguarded*, of which he is the subject.

Following his talk, Herren spent time answering questions from the audience and posed for photos with members of the College's athletics teams.

"This event was so important for everyone here at Ramapo, not just the athletes," said Director of Athletics Harold Crocker. "We all got to hear first-hand how a promising career can quickly take the wrong turn."

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Ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the top in the Best Regional Public Universities North category, Ramapo College of New Jersey is sometimes viewed as a private college. This is, in part, due to its unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its size of approximately 6,000 students and its pastoral setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include nursing and social work. In addition, Ramapo College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels. The College also offers eight graduate programs as well as articulated programs with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New York Chiropractic College, New York University College of Dentistry, SUNY State College of Optometry and New York College of Podiatric Medicine.