

Teen sees dangers of night life



MICHAEL WYKE / Tulsa World

Amanda Parker, 18, recently rode along with Tulsa Police Cpl. Mike Fitzgerald one night after asking her parents' permission to go to a club with friends. It was an eye-opening experience for the Jenks High School senior.

By **NICOLE MARSHALL** World Staff Writer
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View behind police car windshield offers new perspective

When Amanda Parker, 18, asked her parents whether she could go to a nightclub with friends, they called the police.

To show her the dangers she might face if she were out late at night, they arranged to have her ride along with Cpl. Mike Fitzgerald, a member of the Safe City Initiative task force that started work Aug. 26.

"My parents wanted to show me what the real world was like," Parker said.

Capt. Matt Kirkland, the supervisor of the Safe City Initiative, said the unit was targeting certain clubs because at least five homicides and several shootings have taken place this year at clubs or after confrontations that started in their parking lots.

He thought it was a great idea to have Parker ride with an officer.

"A lot of times people who are her age don't get the opportunity to find out what is really going on in the city behind the scenes," Kirkland said.

"They only see fun to be had and don't realize there are some dangerous situations they could easily fall into, even if they are not going out with the intent of getting in trouble or with the intent of hanging out with bad people."

Parker, a senior at Jenks High School, said she thought she might want to go to a club because "it was just something to do -- dance, have fun."

She said she leads a sheltered life but that she saw a whole other world when she rode with Fitzgerald on a recent Saturday night.

They left the police station about 5 p.m., and the ride-along lasted until 3 a.m., she said.

Within the first few minutes, Fitzgerald had to answer a call about a first-degree burglary in progress. Parker had to stay in the car for her safety while Fitzgerald took the suspected burglar -- who fought with the officer -- into custody.

"The rest of the night we kind of followed up on calls. We went to some clubs, and he showed me the kind of people that hang out there," Parker said.

Fitzgerald took her through the parking lots of some clubs and pointed out some people who he said were gang members, she said.

"They were all dressed the same, and they were waiting outside for someone," she said.

"The officer said it is not uncommon for someone in the parking lots to have guns."

Also during the shift, Fitzgerald took her to the Tulsa Jail to show her a holding cell and the 911 call center.

"It was very interesting," she said. "I am not used to seeing that part of town."

Parker said she learned that it is not very safe to be out after about midnight.

Now she is sharing her experiences with her friends.

"I told them about the reality of the world . . . the stuff that really goes on at night," she said.