

Bellace to Lawrence Co.

LAWRENCEVILLE — When it comes to supporting youngsters as they deal with modern-day issues, Matt Bellace doesn't have a specialty.

Resilience, substance abuse prevention, vaping, social media issues, stress reduction and adolescent brain development, among other things, will all be on the agenda Thursday evening, when Bellace, a Ph.D. from the Princeton, New Jersey, area, will make a free appearance from 6:30 until 7:30 p.m. in the Lawrenceville High School auditorium.

In addition to being a clinical psychologist, Bellace is a well-known stand-up comedian who combines the two to get his point across.

"I try to make the topic I'm presenting funny and engaging," said Bellace. "I'll try to make them laugh, but I also want to present some science. I'll be going back and forth between the two in an entertaining format."

Bellace's performance is courtesy of the Lawrence County Drug Coalition, through a grant from the Illinois Critical Access Hospital Network. Of the grant for \$3,000, \$2,500 was earmarked for bringing in a public speaker.

Young people are encouraged to listen to Bellace's message, but Gene Allen, a Lawrence County Drug Coalition official, stresses that it's important for parents to be on hand, as well.

"It's always a great thing when you can get someone who's nationally known to come and speak to the parents in the community," Allen said. "Matt has a positive message. He doesn't use scare tactics. He uses comedy and scientific data to get his point across."

Bellace, who has performed in 46 states, is the author of a 2012 book, "A better high." A catalyst to his career was attending a New Jersey high school prevention and leadership conference called the Teen Institute of the Garden State, where he watched some of the best motivational speakers in the country and was inspired to get involved in prevention.

While a student at Bucknell University in the 1990s he was instrumental in starting a prevention group for students, run by students. The student group is still active, a quarter-century later.

Bellace says "a great audience" is what he enjoys most about his job, and that's what he's hoping for on Thursday.

"When you're in front of a receptive crowd, there are few natural highs better than that," he said. "When that happens, it's worth all of the travel hassles and delays and being away from home. That's what makes it worth it for me."

For more information in regard to the program, Allen can be reached at 943-7273.