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Localnews

## Parents can hear from police about teen drivers with new program

Monday, September 17, 2007 3:00 AM EDT

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Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard wants parents to hear from deputies and police officers about their children's driving habits.

Oakland County is slated to join a statewide program called STOPPED, or Sheriffs Telling Our Parents and Promoting Educated Drivers, within a month. It is organized statewide by the Michigan Sheriffs' Association and the Michigan Secretary of State's Office.

So far, 70 of 83 counties in Michigan have signed on to the plan, which is sponsored by AAA Michigan grants, and the idea is simple.

Parents sign up to receive a STOPPED sticker to place on the windshield of vehicles their young drivers will use. If the teenager is pulled over for any reason, then the parents are notified of the incident.

"I'm excited about it," Bouchard said. "It formalizes what I've done informally for years. A number of times, I've stopped a car and I've called their parents from the roadside. If I feel the parents are going to handle the situation substantially, then I won't write a ticket. Why punish the parents?"

Sometimes, parents never learn about their children's traffic tickets, he said.

The sheriff, a former fatal accident investigator with the Bloomfield Township police, said he wants Oakland County residents to be able to sign up on the sheriff's office Web site and to enlist every police department in Oakland County, where more than 40 agencies operate.

"We are one of the largest jurisdictions to jump into this," Bouchard said. "Not all sheriffs have engaged with this program."

Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel told the Capital News Service that police should not target a particular age group, saying treating people differently because of age is inappropriate. He said the program sounds good but is not practical and will take away from police officers' daily duties.

Bouchard said he wants his deputies to take the extra step.

"I can't imagine there is something better for us to be doing," Bouchard said. "I think the minute or two that a deputy is on the phone with a parent is time well spent."

As of June, 1,600 parents had signed up, and by August, it was up to 2,000, said Jack Peet, manager of Community Safety Services for AAA Michigan, in a release.

Peet said the sticker serves as a strong reminder to drive safely. By June, he said, only three letters had been sent and there were no accidents or injuries reported.

"That tells me the teen drivers are seeing the sticker and thinking twice about taking unsafe chances they might otherwise take when it comes to driving," Peet said in the statement.

As a fatal accident investigator, Bouchard said he sometimes had to knock on the door to deliver bad news.

"That's as bad as it gets, to have to knock on a door and tell them they have lost a loved one," Bouchard said.

Bouchard called the parents of two teenagers he stopped within the past month. One was on Telegraph Road in Bloomfield Township and had almost stopped in middle lanes to move over to a left-turn lane. Another turned too quickly, tipping his car, during the Dream Cruise weekend on Woodward Avenue.

Both teenagers' parents were receptive to learning about the dangerous driving, and tickets -- and the subsequent insurance costs and fines -- were not given out by the sheriff.

However, as with normal stops, officers and deputies will maintain their discretion on how to handle a traffic stop.

"At the end of day, parents want to know," Bouchard said. "Money issues aside, the thing they care about most are their kids."

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