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Infant son killed by drunk driver inspires mom to fight back

Wanda Stewart thought she was doing everything right, when she pulled twenty yards off the side of the road to feed her three-month-old son in 1981.

A drunk driver slammed into Stewart's car ejecting the baby from the car, causing his death and putting Stewart in the hospital for more than a week.

"The impact on our families was devastating, an indescribable pain," Stewart said during a press conference Wednesday in Wichita. "It was nearly 10 years before I was able to watch the video of the funeral."

Stewart spoke at a news conference announcing "*YOU DRINK. YOU DRIVE. YOU LOSE.*," the Kansas Department of Transportation's annual campaign to keep impaired drivers off the road during the upcoming Labor Day weekend and year around.

Wichita Police Capt. Doug Nolte spoke on behalf of law enforcement officers statewide. Nolte said federal traffic safety funds would be used to pay overtime specifically used to patrol for impaired drivers from Aug. 15-Sept. 1.

"It isn't just about writing tickets or making arrests," Nolte said. "Nationally, nearly 100 of the nearly 400 people who died in traffic crashes over Labor Day weekend in 2012 did so because a driver or motorcycle operator had a blood-alcohol concentration nearly twice the legal limit in all states.

“We need to get those drivers off the road before they maim or kill themselves, their families or innocent victims like Wanda Stewart’s infant son,” Nolte said.

Stewart said the teenager who rammed into her car was drunk. The driver received what now would be seen as a light sentence, a \$100 fine and license restrictions that limited her driving privileges. Today’s penalties are more stringent, thanks in part to group efforts of including Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Stewart was involved in forming Kansas MADD following the death of her son.

“If you’ve been drinking, take a taxi, call a sober friend or family member, or use public transportation,” Stewart said. “If you see a drunk driver on the road, call the police. You’re not turning someone in. You are saving someone’s life.”

Nolte said that nearly half of the 18- to 34-year-old drivers who died in crashes on Labor Day weekend in 2012 were drunk. In that same year, 76 percent of all drunk-driving fatalities occurred at night.

Stewart urged younger drivers to call their parents, who would rather get a call for a ride than a call telling them their child has been taken to a hospital or, worse, to a morgue.

“Police and sheriff’s departments statewide along with the Kansas Highway Patrol will be conducting overtime saturation patrols and sobriety check lanes during nighttime hours,” Nolte said. “We are going to be especially watchful for younger drivers who appear to be driving while impaired.”

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