

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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News contacts:

Chris Bortz, 785-296-3618; cbortz@ksdot.org

or

Neal Thurman, 816-842-8111; nthurman@trozzolo.com

Drunk Driving Deaths Caused by Bad Choices *Kansas Law Enforcement Cracking Down Through Labor Day*

WICHITA, Kan. – Troopers, deputies and police officers statewide will be conducting DUI saturation patrols and check lanes through the Labor Day weekend as part of a national crackdown on drinking and driving, officials announced.

And a Wichita mother whose 18-year-old daughter died in a drinking and driving crash explained why extra patrols are important.

“My daughter is dead because of a series of bad choices,” said Kelly Rice during an Aug. 15 news conference announcing the state’s enhanced enforcement program. “Everything we do is a choice. This is an easy one: Don’t make the choice to drink and drive. It is a decision that affects so many people, not just yourself.”

Chris Bortz, manager of the Kansas Department of Transportation’s Traffic Safety Section, said the overtime enforcement is supported by a federally funded grant through KDOT. The enforcement period extends from Aug. 16 through the Labor Day weekend as part of the “You Drink. You Drive. You Lose.” campaign.

Lt. Brian White, commander of Wichita Police Department’s Patrol West Bureau, told reporters that August is the month of the year that typically has the most DUI arrests. He described how the statewide comprehensive campaign was designed to curb drunk driving during that time.

“A DUI arrest can result in the loss of your driver’s license and jail time,” White said. “It also means a hit on your pocketbook in lawyer’s fees, fines and court costs, higher insurance rates, lost time at work and maybe even a lost job.”

But in introducing Rice, White said the greatest impact occurs in the way a drunk driving crash changes others’ lives.

Amanda Rice’s 19-year-old boyfriend was traveling an estimated 100 mph when he lost control of his pickup and struck a power pole. Amanda died nine days later. The boyfriend suffered minor injuries and later served four years in prison.

Rice raised her children to avoid drinking, but “I never thought about teaching her not to ride with someone who had been drinking,” she said.

Kelly said her daughter talked about becoming a hair stylist, or maybe going to college, and she sometimes wonders what her daughter’s future would have been. Amanda died in 2008, and her mother was asked if the pain of the incident had softened in the five years since.

“Whoever said ‘it gets easier with time’ lied,” Rice said. “There’s not a day that goes by that I don’t think about her. There’s not a day when I don’t shed a tear.”

The national alcohol crackdown on drunk driving may conclude after Labor Day, but officers are on the lookout year-round, White said.

“At the least, there is the social stigma and personal embarrassment when family, friends and co-workers find out you are a drunk driver,” White said. “At the most, drunk drivers change lives forever.”

Further information about Kansas DUI enforcement can be found at www.facebook.com/DriveSafeKansas or www.twitter.com/DriveSafeKansas.

Editor’s note: If you would like to interview KDOT traffic safety officials, Kansas law enforcement officials or victims of DUI crashes anywhere statewide, contact Neal Thurman or Michael Grimaldi at Trozzolo Communications Group, 816-842-8111. We can put you in touch with a DUI enforcement news source near you.

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