

MADD to honour victims with roadside memorials

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Special to The IFP

Families who have lost their loved ones at the hands of a drunk driver, will soon be able to honour that person's memory in the form of a roadside memorial sign that will act as a symbol of respect and hopefully prevent future needless tragedies.

"These memorial signs will remind people of the high cost of impaired driving. The cost of someone's life," said Transportation Minister Donna Cansfield.

The implementation of a roadside memorial program was announced a joint press conference by MADD Canada and the Ministry of Transportation recently at MADD's national office in Oakville.

The memorial signs will only be installed after a conviction for drinking and driving has occurred and the victim's families have given their consent.

The signs will have the victim's name and MADD Canada's logo on it.

"We are very appreciative of the Ontario government for introducing this program, which will allow victims to honor their loved ones in such a meaningful manner," said MADD Canada's National President Karen Dunham.

"The memorial will also serve the public as a sober reminder that it is dangerous and can be potentially fatal to drive while impaired by alcohol or drugs," Dunham said.

"I say this sadly, because you would think that motorists again would not need such roadside messages," added Dunham.

She pointed to the almost daily headlines of drunk driving incidents as evidence some motorists still aren't getting the message.

"This crime is the number one criminal cause of death in our country," said Dunham.

In her speech, Cansfield said about 16,000 people are convicted of drinking and driving every year in Ontario, adding that was a rate of about two an hour.

"However there is some encouraging news," said the transportation minister. "The number of fatal drinking and driving crashes is falling. It's down 35 per cent in the last 10 years."

According to the Cansfield, Ontario does have the safest roads in North America, but in about one quarter of all fatal collisions in Ontario drunk driving is still a factor.

"We need to get the anti-drunk driving message out in every way we can. And that's why we have a very tough drunk driving law," Dunham said.

She added the provincial government is prepared to work with MADD Canada, community groups and law enforcement agencies to raise public awareness.

North York MPP Julia Munro initiated the roadside memorial signs.

"It's sad that it is necessary, and I truly believe that this kind of an initiative is one more opportunity to make and enforce that very important message that it's an unnecessary accident. It's not an accident, it's an unnecessary event. It's something that we need to constantly reinforce so that people understand the importance of not drinking and driving," said Munro.

Cansfield said the roadside memorial signs serve two purposes.

"One obviously is to commemorate a memorial of the person who died at that crash, and the second is to remind people that was a result of drinking and driving."



Transportation Minister Donna Cansfield and Andrew Murie, CEO of MADD Canada, signed a memorandum of understanding recently at a media conference where it was announced that roadside memorial signs will be placed on provincial highways as a way of preserving the memory of those who have lost their lives due to impaired drivers and also as a means of preventing further loss of lives.

Photo by Sabrina Byrnes

Cansfield believes that these signs will aid in the decline in drunk driving.

"I've driven down a highway, when I see the flowers on the side of the road it gets me," said Cansfield commenting on the affects of the memorials.

"It gets you, right here," she said putting her hand on her heart. "And so I would like to think that I'm not sort of atypical, and I'm sort of a normal person and other people will feel the same way when they see one of those signs."

Cansfield said the signs could serve an educational purpose.

"It's also a teachable moment. 'Hey

mom, what is that sign? What does it mean?' And you can say that someone has died there, because someone who was drunk killed someone and it could have been prevented so don't drink and drive."

Dunham stated there is too much loss and needless suffering.

"Drinking and driving is a selfish and unacceptable act that hurts everyone," she said.

The roadside memorial program is currently used in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The goal is for the program to be established in every province across Canada within the next three years.



Kiwanis helps with hospital makeover

The waiting room of the emergency department of Georgetown Hospital has a fresh look with new furniture and flooring, as well as a new video game and activity centre for kids, after a \$30,000 donation from the Kiwanis Club of Georgetown. The flooring was done while the hospital was under the William Osler administration, and the rest of the upgrades were done in conjunction with Halton Healthcare. The furniture was chosen by a committee made up of staff from the hospital. On hand to make the presentation at the hospital were (from left) Georgetown Hospital Patient Care Manager Shirley Andrechek, Kiwanians Sandra Banyard, Angela Meyer and Marilyn Serjeantson, and Georgetown Hospital Chief Operating Officer Cindy McDonnell and Georgetown Hospital Foundation chair Paul Armstrong. Photo by Ted Brown

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