

Cops, laws can't stop all drunk driving

DON'T LET THEM kid you. If you drink and drive during the holiday season, the odds are you can get away with it. And even if you're caught, the punishment is unlikely to be anywhere near as bad as they say.

The police can't stop drunk driving. They know it. There simply aren't enough police officers and squad cars to nab more than a fraction of the drunk drivers on the road. Even if the numbers of officers and squad cars were doubled, they couldn't put a dent into the amount of drunk driving that goes on in our society.

And even if a cop spots you in an inebriated condition, he won't stop you unless he has some reason to think you're the worse for wear. If your car is weaving in and out of traffic, if you drive with the window open, it's a sure tip-off. The fellow who is too smart to do that has an excellent chance of never being arrested.

LAWS CAN'T stop drunk driving — even all those tough new laws that were pushed in Lansing by

Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

The legislators admitted as much when they were debating the bill. Many tried to tell MADD that tougher laws wouldn't work, but the emotional state of the MADD people was such that they wouldn't listen. So to keep them off their necks, the lawmakers voted yes and crossed their fingers.

But you're cooler and smarter, and you know those laws won't even put a dent in our drunk driving habits.

You know prosecutors are overworked and have too many crimes of violence to prosecute to give a lot of attention to one drunk driving case. Even if you do get arrested, you can hire a sharp lawyer. When the prosecutor sees you are resisting, he will look for a fast way out — a reduced charge for a guilty plea, a charge of first-offense drunk driving when it's actually the second time you've been nabbed.

And what if the court suspends your license? How is a cop actually going to know if you continue to drive? Some people have driven for months and

years without licenses. They can't daub your car with glowing paint to identify you. Chances are, if your license is suspended, you can continue to drive and get away with it, particularly in a metropolitan area of four million people.

ONLY YOU can stop drunk driving. There are two ways you can do it.

You can get yourself killed. Each year, lots of drunk drivers wrap their cars around trees in the wee hours of the morning or collide with other drunk drivers. Dead drivers can no longer drink and drive.

Unfortunately, that method has its drawbacks. You may be only paralyzed and not killed. You may kill an innocent person, and it will be on your conscience the rest of your life. The innocent one you kill may be your spouse or child, and you'll never live down the shame.

There are easier ways, however, for you to stop drunk driving. Change your own habits.

If you are with a party of people riding together,

agree in advance that one person will abstain and stick to the non-spiked fruit punch. That is a widespread custom in Europe, and it seems to work. Surely you have one friend who doesn't enjoy getting loaded.

If you and your spouse are driving to a party, decide beforehand who will get drunk and who will remain sober. Say, the husband is the heavy drinker, then he should agree before they arrive at the party that she will drive home. There's no sense getting into an argument at midnight about whether he's fit to drive.

IF ALCOHOL is part of your lifestyle, so be it. Gauge the holiday dinner hour so that guests don't guzzle too much on empty stomachs. Offer lighter drinks, push coffee and tea, keep folks occupied with games or dancing. There are dozens of ways to hold down the heavy drinking if you and your friends brainstorm a little.

Cops and laws can't really stop drunk driving. But your holiday party habits can.



Nick Sharkey

Our suburbs get a taste of misery

AFAMILY GATHERS on Christmas Day. The youngest child puts a star on top of the decorated tree. A large dinner is prepared. Afterward, grandparents join with the children in the singing of Christmas carols.

The weatherman has cooperated, and snow is falling outside. Someone starts a fire in the fireplace, and now it's time to exchange presents. Ah, it's a "perfect" Christmas.

IF YOUR CELEBRATION of Christmas only fulfills this traditional picture this year, then something is sadly missing in your life. For this is not a traditional Christmas. People are hurting all around you.

Last week, Gov. William Milliken declared "a human emergency" in Michigan because of high unemployment. He pleaded with businesses and individuals to donate food and money to help the poor.

Milliken pointed out that for three consecutive years, this state has had double-digit unemployment, with 700,000 persons out of work. At the same time, Detroit Mayor Coleman said as much as one-third of Detroit's 1.2 million population was ill-nourished.

HUMAN MISERY is not confined to the city of Detroit. It's here in the suburbs. The statistics are revealing.

Here are unemployment rates in Oakland County communities: Rochester — 15.1 percent; Farmington — 12.4 percent; West Bloomfield — 11.3 percent; Farmington Hills — 10.2 percent; Troy — 10 percent; Southfield — 9 percent; Bloomfield Township — 8.5 percent; and Birmingham — 7.7 percent.

For many suburbanites, this is their first experience with unemployment. "We're getting calls from people who've never been in this situation," said Judy Arthur of Troy People Concerned. Her agency arranges for food baskets for the needy.

"They're not used to living on such a small amount. That's why it's so depressing," she said.

SO WHAT CAN YOU do in the few hours that remain before Christmas Day? Look around.

There's probably a family across the street or down the block that is facing a bleak Christmas because of unemployment. Is there some tactful gesture you can make to extend your love to them? Perhaps it can be as simple as inviting another couple into your home to share a Christmas drink.

Most local churches have programs to help the needy. Call a church. Besides donating food and money, maybe you can give some time by distributing food baskets on Christmas day.

Many social agencies are finishing their Christmas work. The People That Care Center on Middlebelt in Livonia is still distributing food, toys and clothing to the needy. Call 421-9142. If you can help, Dan Scutts College and Seminary in Southfield gives gift certificates to the needy. Money is always welcome. Call 357-3072 for more information.

Besides running a soup kitchen, the Capuchin Community Center also gives food baskets, clothing and toys to the needy. Call 579-1330 for more details.

Focus: HOPE is looking for persons to donate food and deliver baskets to the low-income elderly. Call 883-3300 to take part in this program.

Some local businesses are sponsoring canned food drives for the poor. Drop canned food off at Harmony House record stores or Elias Brothers restaurants.

These are only a few of the places where you can still help during this Christmas season. Look around and you'll find many others.

THE 3.5 MILLION of us who have jobs in Michigan can help families of the 700,000 without work.

Christmas is a time for giving. This year's poor economy requires that your generosity not be limited to the immediate family. Reach out to those around you.

Then you will celebrate a "perfect" Christmas.

Ghosts of Christmas Present



A final word on the Milliken years

IT'S FASHIONABLE to kick Bill Milliken while he's on the way out.

"Good," said Richard Headlee, whom Republicans nominated to be his successor, when Milliken announced earlier this year he would retire as governor.

Senate Majority Leader William Faust, D-Westland, has been stomping on Milliken and budget director Gerald Miller good and hard for leaving it to the Democratic governor and legislature of 1983 to raise taxes.

Covering local government since the days of G. Mennen Williams, I see little cause to kick Milliken. Sure, the economy is dismal, but it's like that in most industrialized states, some Sun Belt states, Canada, Mexico and three-fourths of the world. Sure, it's commonplace to call Milliken "decent" and "a gentleman," but let's stick to public policy matters.

THE MILLIKEN years actually start with George Romney's tenure as governor (1963-68) because Milliken came along as his lieutenant governor and continued much of what Romney started. (And let's not take too seriously Romney's 1982 effort to put distance between himself and his successor. Romney was a liberal governor who frightened the daylight out of the hard-nosed conservatives of his day.)



Tim Richard

Milliken was our first "environmentalist" governor, not simply because the movement started in 1969 but because he genuinely worries about the quality of the world we live in.

Besides a pile of environmental protection laws, we have Maybury State Park in our back yard, one evidence of the state's commitment to the southeastern urban area as well as the boonies.

Fittingly, one of Milliken's last acts was to sign three bills creating a Heritage Trust Fund for the state oil and gas royalties.

The resurrection of public transportation, which was dead in most cities in the mid-1960s, and our amazing system of bicycle paths are evidence of an environmental vision.

PERSONALLY, I can never forget how, in an era when young people were becoming alienated from

society, Milliken in 1972 promoted lowering the age of majority to 18. Many politicians pondered to the youth vote by offering benefits, but few addressed the question of more rights and more responsibilities in the same breath. It was a far-reaching and visionary act.

Romney initiated, and Milliken nurtured, systematic attention to the problems of cities. After all, cities are the creatures of the state, and it's the responsibility of the state — not Washington — to look out for their health.

The Milliken effort goes beyond help for the Detroit Art Institute and the symphony. There is revenue sharing with local units. There is a Boundary Commission to bring order to chaotic battles for annexation and defensive incorporation we used to suffer through.

Above all, there was thoughtful attention to the problem of urban sprawl — location of state offices in downtowns, a re-examination of disruptive freeway projects like M-275, an emphasis on preserving blue-up areas as well as forests.

But more than any individual I can think of in the state's 145-year history, Milliken brought to fruition a vision of state government as a major solver of domestic problems — not just a dispenser of federal aid or a place to play politics while nursing an itch for higher office.

Mom and Pop stores sweat it out

THE LESSON WE will learn from this holiday is simple: Mr. Reagan lacks an understanding of the Main Street economy, and you and I are going to suffer more than we realize in this coming year because of it.

Pessimism isn't my forte, but it's becoming easier to fall prey to that mind-set with each passing day. It doesn't take a Ph.D. in economics to read the writing on the wall.

The small merchant is desperately trying to hang on through the Christmas season in hopes that Mr. and Mrs. Consumer will help him pay his bills by going on the traditional gift-buying spree.

But on Main Street suburbs, it just isn't happening. As you read this article, many small merchants already realize that come January, they will be closing their doors, laying off employees and giving up their piece of the "American dream."

LOOK AT IT this way: Through November, 8,937 retail stores called it quits. That's a 40-percent increase from last year.

According to economic experts, the small guy is suffering the most. Those are the Mom and Pop stores where staying in business is always a delicate balance, as is.

These are the folks who are afraid, on one hand, to order too much inventory for fear of being stuck with it and, on the other, to lose trade to large retail outlets that undersell them with what appear to be



Steve Barnaby

endless "holiday" sales.

And while these sales on surface seem to be a boon to the consumer, in reality they are putting us into a deeper economic depression. To have even a chance of surviving, smaller outlets must slash prices to compete. But they are in a no-win situation. They just don't have the back-up bucks of larger retail outlets to take a loss on sale items.

Many small merchants have been feeling this kind of pressure for three and four years. Never has it been worse than today. If you doubt it, it's not time you're in a small merchant's store, ask him or her — if they're still open.

NOW I WILL resist from attributing motive or sentiment to Mr. Reagan's economic policy. But one thing is for sure, at least in Michigan: Reaganomics isn't working.

The \$100 "tax breaks" we received last year and will get this year only go to pay long overdue bills.

Just like the \$300 gift checks that General Motors gave to its laid-off employees, the money is already spent on the essentials — turning the heat back on, paying the house note — not on capital investment as the president had dreamed.

Fewer persons are running out to spend their tax windfall on new merchandise to revive the economy. They can't. They're out of work and, in many cases, out of their homes.

Burned into the minds of millions of Americans is the image of Treasury Secretary Donald Regan telling us that by the third quarter of this year the economy would be on its way to recovery. Later he revised it to the fourth quarter.

And an America that vowed to give Reaganomics a chance dutifully waited. Millions lost their jobs doing so.

THIS WAITING has become far more risky than many realize. As a result, the gap between the economic haves and have-nots has grown wider and the number of have-nots is increasing daily.

That, too, shows in our shopping habits. Retail outlets that sell expensive merchandise are actually making more money than in previous years. Stores that sell a mix of items are moving their expensive wares into the windows because merchants know they can sell them.

In short, the middle class is losing its economic power. And if that happens, this country is in danger of suffering unimaginable social upheaval.