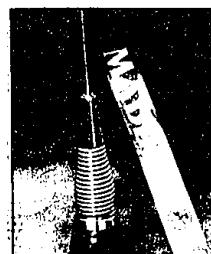


Red ribbons send message to drivers



BY PAT MURPHY

STAFF WRITER

The message was clear. Drunk driving causes death and destruction, and the Oakland County Chapter of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers) can make a difference.

MADD launched its 12th Annual "The Onus on Safety" Red Ribbon Campaign Tuesday at the Oakland County Commissioners Auditorium by urging motorists to join the campaign to end drunk driving.

"Drunk driving is a violent crime," said television personality Huell Perkins, this year's honorary campaign chair. It's a violent crime that kills and maims thousands of people and causes \$45 billion in damages annually.

he said.

But it's also a violent crime that can be prevented, or reduced, by raising public awareness, Perkins said. By displaying the MADD red ribbon, he continued, "we can make people realize that getting behind the wheel after drinking is not only wrong, but it's selfish and stupid."

MADD and the public awareness it's generated have made a difference, Perkins said. The number of alcohol related accidents has gone down by roughly 24 percent over the last nine years, he said, thanks in great part to MADD.

Oakland County Prosecutor David Goreyca, one of dozens of county officials attending the

kickoff, said MADD's influence has been "profound. Every year, people see the red ribbons, and every year more people get the message," Goreyca told reporters.

Several speakers had already felt the devastation of drunk drivers. Among them was Richard St. Cyr. His son, Jeremy, was a week away from graduating from Troy Athens High School last May when he was killed by a drunk driver near Chicago.

The driver had two previous DUIs (driving under the influence of alcohol), said St. Cyr. "But at his sentencing, he claimed this accident was his 'wake up call.'

"He had his wake-up call, and he ignored it," said St. Cyr.

Although Illinois laws are more relaxed than Michigan's, according to St. Cyr, the drunk driver who killed his son was sentenced to nine years in prison — news that was greeted with applause.

St. Cyr said MADD and its supporters must continue to pressure the courts and law enforcement agencies for high penalties. "The fear of getting caught" must be strong enough to act as a deterrent.

To curb drunk driving, said St. Cyr, motorists must have a fear of getting caught and the knowledge that once caught, the penalty will be sure and severe.

Fear of getting caught should be enough to keep people from drinking and driving in the first place, St. Cyr said.

It's therapeutic for the family to speak out against drunk drivers, said Debbie St. Cyr, the mother of Jeremy. The grief of losing a loved one will never



Listening through tears: Debbie St. Cyr of Troy deals with the loss of her son to an alcohol-related accident while listening to her husband speak at the MADD kickoff.

completely go away, she said, but she and her family can more readily cope with grief knowing they are helping to alert people about drunk driving.

People who want to help MADD can support the organization by buying tickets as part of the annual fund raiser, said Rita

Koplan, a West Bloomfield resident whose child was killed by a drunk driver.

Raffle tickets — at \$25 each — are available through the MADD office at (248) 623-6233. The first place prize is use of a Jeep Grand Cherokee for two years.

Calling attention: Red ribbons like this call attention to MADD's driving-drunk campaign.



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMASTER

Helping out: Savanna Garrett, 7, of Milford, ties on the first red ribbon to a Milford police car with the help of Milford Police Chief Wayne Walli.

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