

Remembering

250 people attend annual vigil

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF REPORTER

Normally Dec. 11 was a happy occasion for Troy resident John Stindt. His son Andrew was born on that day, and on Thursday Andrew would have turned 20.

But this time John Stindt was hurting. His son and two other Troy teenagers — Ashley Easterbrook and Michael Jamieson — were killed in a car crash on June 3.

The 1996 Pontiac Grand Am in which they were riding was struck broadside at Long Lake and Crooks by a car police said ran a stop light. The driver — who police said had been drinking — was also killed.

Instead of celebrating Andrew's birthday, John Stindt spent much of the day remembering his son . . . and trying to get over the hurt inside.

Later that night, he was one of about 250 people to attend the annual Candlelight Vigil sponsored by the Oakland County Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

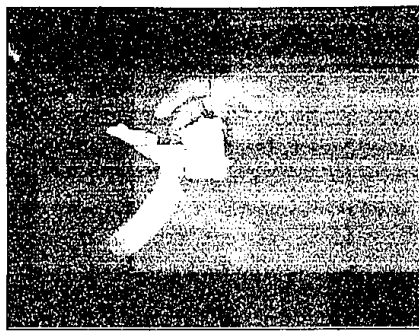
"I was very emotional," said Robert Willett, state coordinator of MADD. "If the people who drink and drive could go through this, it might make a difference."

Willett's son Kenneth and his two cousins — Kelley and Dale Ess — were killed as they were riding in Pontiac on Oct. 20, 1988. The driver of the other car, Reggie Rogers of the Detroit Lions, police said had been drinking.

With its stained glass windows and warm interior, the First Congregational Church in Royal Oak was an appropriate setting as friends and relatives celebrated their lives of victims killed in alcohol-related crashes and mourned their untimely deaths.

A Christmas tree in the lobby was festooned with the traditional MADD red ribbons — one for each of the 565 people MADD said were killed in alcohol-related crashes in 1996.

"Nothing ever prepares you for



STAFF PHOTO BY LAWRENCE R. MCKEE

Reaching out: The 250 persons at the annual vigil sponsored by Mothers Against Drunk Driving lighted candles to remember and urge others not to drive drunk.

the death of a child," said Randy Mapes, whose stepson was Michael Jamieson. "And the hurt never fully goes away. But this (the vigil) helps."

In remembrance of the killed and injured, candles were lit, poems were read and songs were sung.

A bell choir, "The Singing Bells," performed a copyright version of "Candle in the Wind," written by Elton John in memory of the late Princess Diana — also a victim of an alcohol-related car crash.

Another song, "To Whom It May Concern," was written by Deborah Homeister who sang it with her daughter, Nicole Spahn. Spahn went to Athens High School with two of the teens killed in June and Jeremy St. Cyr, killed in late May in a Chicago area crash involving a drinking driver.

"They (all the victims) were more than statistics," said Michele Compton, administrator

of Oakland MADD. "They are people we cared about and we'll never forget."

The vigil also has a therapeutic function, said Compton. "Sometime people need a good cry," she said. "Some make the vigil part of their new family tradition replacing the ones that were destroyed."

It's also a reminder of the dangers inherent in the holiday season, she said. "It's a dangerous time of the year, and we urge people against drinking and driving."

MADD sponsors Project LifeRide that provides transportation on New Year's Eve for anyone who feels he or she is unable to drive home safely.

Radio station WOMC-FM — pays for taxi rides involved in Project LifeRide, said Compton, and MADD provides the volunteers.

Anyone interested in helping MADD over the holidays can call (248) 623-6233 in Oakland.



Remembering mom: Savanna Garrette, 7, of Milford looks upward as her grandmother, Paulette Gibson, talks about Savanna and what it means to their family now that she is gone. Also attending the vigil was Janet Higginbotham (below), who brought a picture of her son who was killed after graduating from high school.

Troy resident hopes song will keep drivers sober

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF REPORTER

Troy resident Deborah Homeister is hoping that music — which can reportedly soothe the savage beast — will have a sobering affect on motorists this holiday season.

A song Homeister wrote is being recorded on a compact disc for possible play during the yule season.

The song, "To Whom It May Concern," was sung by Homeister and her daughter Nicole Spahn Thursday at the Candlelight Vigil sponsored by the Oakland County Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

It was dedicated to four Troy teenagers killed earlier this year in two separate crashes involving drivers who had been drinking. Killed were Jeremy St. Cyr, killed in a May 24 crash in the Chicago area, and Ashley Easterbrook, Michael D. Jamieson and Andrew R. Stindt who were killed June 3 in Troy.

"The spoken word will keep some people from drinking and driving," said Homeister, who lives in the general neighborhood as the families of St. Cyr, Jamieson and Stindt. "But a song will be more effective."

The Troy High School Orchestra will accompany Homeister and her daughter, who sang together in the Troy Baptist Church choir. Another choir member, Mark Hamlin, helped with the arrangement.

"I can't read or sing from sheet music," said Homeister, who said she felt compelled to write the song because of the grief caused by the untimely deaths of the teenagers.

The main refrain is a warning to anyone tempted to drink and drive. It goes, "We want to live, we don't want to die young. Watch us as we grieve over our fallen ones. Our lives have just begun, we don't want to die young."

Homeister and her daughter realize the difficulty of getting a song recorded and on the air.

But after they sang Thursday, a disc jockey approached and expressed interest, said Homeister. Her song may get air time as a public service, she said.

Another radio station, WOMC-



FM, is a sponsor with MADD for its Project LifeRide, that provides free transportation for New Year's Eve celebrants who feel they are unable to drive home safely.

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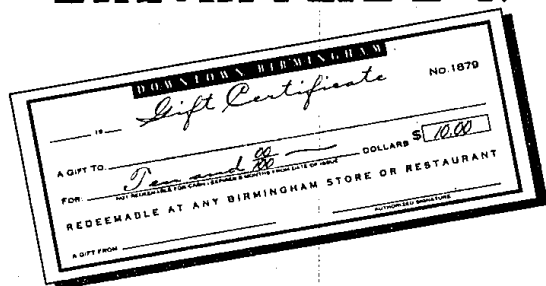
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