

Is traffic safety at end of the road?

Thursday, December 6, 1979

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By TIM RICHARD

Traffic deaths have been reduced from 16 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles in 1935 to 3.3 deaths in the same amount of travel in 1978.

So how can traffic deaths be further reduced?

"Any great reductions are going to come gradually," one of the deans of the traffic safety movement told an Oakland County audience last week.

Gordon H. Sheehey, retired director of the Highway Traffic Safety Center at Michigan State University, traced the history of the movement at the annual meeting luncheon of the Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County.

Sheehey spoke at the invitation of TIA executive director Bruce Madsen, his first student at the MSU center 25 years ago.

DESPITE PROGRESS — the public no longer rates traffic safety a major concern — Sheehey said the toll in Oakland County last year was 179, with 2,000 being killed statewide and some 51,000 in the nation.

"The goal in Michigan should be to reduce deaths to 1,000 a year," said Sheehey. "A driver can normally go 100,000 miles without being involved in a traffic accident. Your job, ladies and gentlemen, will be to increase that figure to 200,000 in the next 10 years."

How? Sheehey had two essential answers.

"It all boils down to the sergeant," he said, citing selective traffic enforcement programs (STEP) across the country. Some produced results, some didn't. The only detectable difference appeared to be whether a sergeant was motivated and able to motivate his officers.

"The key is the driver," he added. While it's possible the nation may have reached a plateau in improving the traffic environment, much remains to be done in persuading drivers to be more alert.

"Safety education has gotten short shrift in federal funding," Sheehey said, adding: "I wish we could find the answer to how to get people to use safety belts."

MADSEN'S ANNUAL report said

TIA is working on four major programs:

- Evaluating the sheriff's department's secondary road patrols. Madsen said Sheriff Johannes Spreen has "done an excellent job in deploying personnel to accident areas. Oakland has the only sheriff's department in the state with a true selective enforcement program."

- Working with the road commission on highway risk management, an area the road commission has given number one priority. These include removing hazards; improving intersections for turning movements and installing better motorist information systems.

- Identifying problem areas in 28 political subdivisions which have no trained traffic engineers. This is being done with a grant from the state Office of Highway Safety Planning.

- Catching the drinking drivers, who are involved in 95 percent of fatal accidents. Sheriff's deputies will be patrolling specific corridors at pinpointed times and days. Local police are being trained in identifying drinking drivers before they are involved in accidents.

The four-year program is being funded by a \$1.2 million state grant.

OFFICERS of the TIA were elected for two-year terms without opposition.

Officers are: president, Herbert L. Misch, vice president for environmental and safety engineering, Ford Motor Co.; vice presidents, Charles Gehring of Gehring & Forsyth, and Robert Semple, general manager of Pontiac Motor Division; secretary, Charles B. Kass, retired from Ethyl Corp.; treasurer, Stanford C. Stoddard, president of Michigan National Corp.

Executive committee members-at-large are: Lowell Eklund, Oakland University; Paul A. Heber, Paul Heber Associates, Inc.; Alex C. Mair, group vice president, General Motors Research Laboratory; and Ralph T. Norvell, Huttenlochers Kerns Novell, Inc.

Among 21 persons elected to the board of directors, the only new name was John L. Grubba, managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission. The other members represent government, the auto industry and other businesses.



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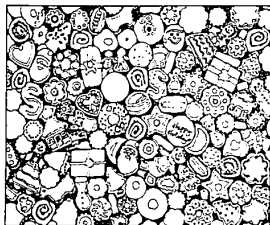
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