

Vigil

County MADD aids those who grieve

By Noreen Flack
staff writer

In the midst of the holiday spirit, candles burn for those who have died in alcohol-related traffic accidents.

More than 100 people gathered Monday at Nardin Park United Methodist Church in Farmington Hills for the eighth annual candlelight vigil sponsored by Mothers Against Drunk Drivers Oakland County chapter.

"Christmas lights become a little less bright," said Greg Bien, chapter president. "People need help coping with the holidays. From now on, everything is bittersweet for them."

Donna Brokenshire of Troy said the holidays are especially difficult because her daughter, Kathie, who died in 1986 at 17, decorated their home for the holidays each year.

"We shand so much during the holidays," she said. "We miss her but the warmth is still there. We know she is right there with us."

During the 90-minute service, "Candlelight Vigil of Remembrance and Hope," 51 red ribbons were tied to a Christmas tree in memory of the 51 people, ages 15 to 39, who died in alcohol-related accidents in Oakland County this year.

MADD came to Michigan in 1982 to offer courage and strength to families and friends coping with the loss of a loved one to a drunk driver. More than 21 vigils now are held annually around the state.

ACCIDENT VICTIMS whose names were read during the vigil

included 29 people, ages 13 to 58, from Macomb County. "These are the names of people who would be alive today if someone hadn't decided to drink and drive," said Bien, who lost his 4-year-old daughter, Nicole, in a 1981 alcohol-related accident. (See related story).

For some, the search for "inner peace" has become a daily struggle, he said.

In poems read by parents, children, and brothers and sisters of victims, family members said the untimely death of their loved one has left them in "a fog of grief."

"A lot of people who have lost someone after a lengthy illness say, 'I know just how you feel,'" Bien said. "But they really don't. We didn't have the opportunity to say goodbye."

Theresa McNeil of Royal Oak lost her mother, Duchene Tuski, 50, father, Edward Tuski, 52, brother, Michael Tuski, 21, grandmother, Theresa Nowak, 74, and her grandmother's friend, Harry Majewski, 84, on Christmas Day 1988.

"There is a misconception. (Suffering) is not just during the holidays. It's everyday. Everyday is difficult," McNeil said. In 1981, 60 percent of all traffic fatalities in Oakland County were alcohol-related, Bien said. This year, the number has dropped to 43 percent.

ROBERT WILLETT of Drayton Plains said he's still bitter about the death of his son Ken, 19, and nephews Kelli Ess, 18, and Dale Ess, 17. The men were killed Oct. 20, 1988 in a traffic accident involving Reggie Rogers, an ex-De-



Eleanor Rader (left) of West Bloomfield holds a candle in memory of her son, Philip, 19, who was killed in October 1988. Mary Jane Kelly, 15, has not lost a family member. She joined MADD

because: "I don't want to be a victim and I don't want a member of my family to be a victim."

troit Lion. Rogers faces up to two years in prison following a negligent homicide conviction, a high misdemeanor.

Willet said he supports Senate Bill 96, introduced by Sen. Rudy Nichols, R-Waterford, to increase the penalty for drunk driving. If the bill is passed, a drunk driving

conviction where a fatality is involved would be considered a felony with a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison.

"Groups like MADD can't be effective if legislators make laws that only half address the problem," Willett said. "We're more bitter now because this man (Rog-

ers) comes in and gets a misdemeanor for killing three people.

"We can't do anything about my son. That's over. But if we can help someone else, we will. The real problem is that drunk drivers kill people and that politics let's them get away with it," Willett added. Jerry Lynch of Orchard Lake

said he can't rest until Jan. 23 when the man charged with drunk driving that caused the death of his son, Michael, 20, goes to trial. The December 1988 accident also claimed the life of Michael's friend, Joe Allsteadt, 20, of Beverly Hills. Lynch said the trial has been postponed five times.

Ribbon campaign gives child's death meaning

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

When Greg Bien sees a red ribbon

bon tied to a car, he feels a twinge inside. "We're making an impact," said the seventh grade teacher from

Avondale Middle School in Rochester Hills.

He was referring to the public awareness campaign launched last week by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). Before the holiday campaign ends, more than 200,000 motorists are expected to fly the ribbons as a reminder to "Tie One On For Safety."

The feeling inside, however, goes deeper than any sense of satisfaction that comes with success — something Bien might be expected to feel as director of the Oakland County Chapter of MADD.

"When I see red ribbons waving all over the place, I feel my daughter's death has meaning," Bien said. "Nicky isn't gone if I remember her this way."

HIS DAUGHTER, Nicole, was killed by a drunk driver in September, 1981, as she was walking near the family home in Brandon Township.

Bien said he and his wife, Penny, were walking with Nicole and

Christophir, their 1-year-old son, about 7 p.m. when a truck driven by a neighbor veered across the road and struck them from behind.

Nicole, 4, was dead at the scene. His wife was hospitalized after being hit and flipped, Bien said.

The driver's blood-alcohol content was measured at .17, Bien said, almost twice the .10 at which drivers in Michigan are legally drunk.

The driver eventually went to jail — "for about nine months," Bien said. He doesn't feel that was adequate punishment considering the needless grief he and his family subsequently endured.

"No amount of punishment will make up for the loss of my daughter," Bien said. "But the punishment is supposed to fit the crime, and nine months doesn't come close."

Nicole's death devastated him and his wife, Bien said. For years, the grief was constant, compounded by feelings of helplessness and anger.



Greg Bien

drunk driver who killed his daughter.

"I DON'T HATE him," Bien said. "But if I could push a button... and he would no longer exist, I'd do it, providing I wouldn't suffer any ramifications."

The grief is always there, he said. "Even now, I sometimes find my wife crying by herself."

"But that's OK. Those are 'good' tears, part of healing. I still cry too."

Bien and his wife got involved in MADD shortly after Nicole's death as a way of channeling their feelings toward something they feel is constructive.

They helped organize the Oakland chapter in 1982, and have seen its membership grow to nearly 18,000.

Penny Bien, a graduate of Pontiac Central High School, was elected president of the chapter in 1985 and 1986. Her husband was elected to the post in 1987, 1988 and 1989.

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