

FEATURED LETTER

# Good choices can help prevent disaster on road

EmPoWER Somerset assists individuals and families in making positive lifestyle choices and fosters healthy, drug-free communities through education, collaboration and linkages to resources. Through Somerset's Initiative for Partying Safely, or SIPS, communitywide efforts are specifically focused on preventing the potentially devastating consequences associated with underage drinking, drunk driving and excessive alcohol use.

When it comes to holidays, statistics show that there is a spike in underage drinking and driving under the influence. I was surprised to learn that the holiday associated with the highest rates is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving — Thanksgiving Eve, not New Year's Eve, as I would have guessed. In many ways, it does make sense. Many college students are returning home for the first long break of the semester. Parents are distracted with holiday preparations and out-of-town guests.

But as we approach New Year's, we should be reminded once again of the dangers. People are looking for a diversion from their day-to-day stresses, especially this year considering the devastation that we have endured from superstorm Sandy. We should celebrate the arrival of a new and, we hope, better year. But we should celebrate mindfully.

Tragedies associated with alcohol use are 100 percent preventable when we make proactive choices. There are many opportunities to prepare and plan ahead using community resources such as Ride Home 2Nite and the HERO Campaign. Ride Home 2Nite involves a partnership with several local bars and restaurants that display posters and other promotional items to reinforce one alternative to driving home after having a few drinks: taking a taxi. The HERO Campaign is about friends helping one another by pledging to be the designated driver — not drinking any alcohol for the evening.

Both campaigns emphasize exercising good judgment before it is impaired by alcohol. This is so important because, in addition to balance and coordination, your judgment is one of the very first things to be impaired by alcohol. Aside from fatal accidents, there are many other negative outcomes that can be avoided by choosing not to drink and drive.

Getting a DUI can involve fines and surcharges, loss of driver's license, classes (that you will have to pay for) and the embarrassment over having your name in print. How would you handle the unexpected costs, inconvenience of not driving and disappointment of family and friends? Think about these things now ... they can be avoided.

For Ride Home 2Nite information and other SIPS prevention resources, visit [empowersomerset.com](http://empowersomerset.com). To take the HERO Campaign pledge, visit [HEROCampaign.org](http://HEROCampaign.org) and click on the "designated driver" link.

Help is also available for those who are struggling with alcohol or other drug addiction — call EmPoWER Somerset at 908-722-4900 for information and referrals.



Scan this QR code with your smartphone for a list of taxi services in Somerset County.

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