

FEATURED LETTER

If you're going to drink, first find a sober driver

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

As the “mayhem” insurance company commercials portray, circumstances beyond our control can sometimes wreak havoc in our lives. Fortunately, alcohol use does not have to be one of them. Tragedies associated with alcohol use are 100 percent preventable. Our “insurance” for good choices can be found in resources such as Ride Home 2Nite and the HERO Campaign and by exercising good judgment before it is impaired by alcohol.

Ride Home 2Nite involves a wonderful partnership with several local bars and restaurants that display posters to reinforce one alternative to driving home after having a few drinks: taking a taxi. The cab fare home is much more affordable than the fines and surcharges associated with a driving-under-the-influence conviction — and you will also get to keep your driver's license after you arrive home safely in a taxi. Being seen taking a taxi home is also much less embarrassing than being seen taken away in a patrol car.

Even if you have driven home “safely” in the past after having a few drinks, don't let yourself get caught in a false sense of security from past experience. It does not mean you are an exceptional driver after drinking — it simply means that you have been lucky so far.

Your judgment is one of the first things to be impaired by alcohol. The best time to plan for a safe ride home is in advance — which is exactly what the HERO Campaign encourages. The HERO Campaign for Designated Drivers was started in South Jersey in honor of John Elliott, a graduate of the U.S. Navy Academy who was struck and killed by a drunken driver in 2000. Its goal is to register one million designated drivers and make having a designated driver be as automatic as wearing a seat belt. In partnership with the Somerset County Sheriff's Office, EmPoWER Somerset will help to expand the HERO Campaign by encouraging Somerset County bars and restaurants to provide free soft drinks to HERO designated drivers.

For Ride Home 2Nite info, and other SIPS prevention resources, visit empowersomerset.com. To take the HERO campaign pledge, visit HEROCampaign.org and click on the “designated driver” link. Help is also available for those who are struggling with alcohol or drug addiction — call EmPoWER Somerset at 908-722-4900 for information and referrals.



When scanned with a smart phone, this QR code will take users directly to a page on the EmPoWER Somerset website listing local cab companies with the areas they serve, hours of operation and phone numbers.

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