

FEATURED LETTER

Options available to avoid hard consequences of DWI

The penal consequences that result directly from a conviction for driving while intoxicated (DWI) are vast and enduring. The possible jail sentence, suspension of driving privilege, fines, assessments, surcharges, court costs, and expense of an ignition interlock device are, indeed, staggering. Those penalties only get worse for subsequent DWI offenses.

Beyond all of that, the collateral consequences of a DWI event can be absolutely debilitating. The resultant impact on one's career, the stigma that attaches with conviction, and the negative effect on relationships can surely rip life's normality to shreds.

Add to the DWI mix a vehicular collision of some sort, and the coordinate harm can grow exponentially. Whether it be damage to property or harm or death to person, the punitive effect can be insurmountable. In addition to the aforementioned penalties, the imposition of an extensive prison sentence is likely. On top of the criminal process, associated civil litigation is, indeed, likely.

Despite all of this and in the face of all of the financial penalties, incarceration, and loss of driving privileges, people continue to get pulled over for DWI in alarming numbers.

This past summer, the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety once again spearheaded our state's participation in the national "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over" DWI crackdown. This was a highly visible and focused enforcement campaign aimed at impaired drivers. Between Aug. 17 and Sept. 3, law enforcement officers made 1,459 DWI arrests statewide — 22 more arrests than the 2011 effort.

During that approximate two-week period of time, there were 43 DWI arrests in Somerset County. Progress has been made in raising awareness of the perils of drinking and driving, but violators abound.

In Somerset County, we are very fortunate to have organizations like EmPoWER Somerset and the Hunterdon/Somerset Safe Communities Coalition, which work tirelessly to educate our younger population about the harmful consequences of, among other things, underage drinking and the dangers of drinking and driving.

EmPoWER Somerset has promoted its Ride Home 2Nite initiative which encourages the use of taxi services. With a simple bookmark on your smart phone, you can pull up a list of local taxis in Somerset County so as to facilitate a safe passage home.

Somerset County Sheriff Frank Provenzano and a team from his office have shepherded the HERO Campaign to Somerset and Hunterdon counties. Promoting the use of safe and sober designated drivers, this campaign was started in honor of John R. Elliott, who was killed in a collision with a drunken driver shortly after his graduation from the United States Naval Academy in May 2000.

The Hero Campaign has been highly visible in the southern part of our state for the last decade, and the coalition put together by Sheriff Provenzano will surely put a spotlight on the benefits of designated drivers and encourage the use of same.

This holiday season and beyond, use Ride Home 2Nite or serve as a HERO and, by doing so, avoid the consequences of a DWI conviction.



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

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SOMERSET COUNTY