

FEATURED LETTER

Underage drinking, driving can have deadly results

This is the second in a series of letters from Somerset County officials on the dangers of underage drinking, and county initiatives to help combat the problem.

The holiday season is a very joyous time. Family and friends, both distant and close, reunite to celebrate together. We are all reminded of how important our loved ones are to us. It is a time to celebrate and regroup.

With all celebrations comes a great responsibility, especially when alcohol is involved. Alcohol consumption usually rises during the holiday season. It is a commonplace factor in most celebrations. Even when alcohol is enjoyed responsibly and legally, the potential for tragedy is always present.

I urge all parents and guardians to speak to your teen drivers about the risks of underage drinking. Underage alcohol consumption is against the law, and law enforcement is out more than ever during the holiday season. Go over the consequences as a result of even one poor decision to break the law — ending up in jail, or injuring or killing yourself or others.

Also, brain development continues into one's early 20s, and alcohol can cause severe damage. Taking into consideration all of the risks, it truly is a "no-brainer" to refrain from underage drinking.

I remain committed to assisting law enforcement efforts to thwart underage drinking and drunk driving. In 2012 the Somerset County Sheriff's Office launched a countywide designated-driver program known as the HERO campaign, and we also partnered with EmPoWER Somerset in Ride Home 2Nite.

These designated-driver programs are collaborations between local drinking establishments, community-based programs and law enforcement to encourage the use of a designated driver.

In some instances, local drinking establishments will provide incentives to individuals who pledge to drive home a friend who has been drinking alcohol. The HERO program is the result of a grass-roots effort started by the parents of a young Naval Academy ensign who was tragically killed by a drunk driver at the age of 22.

The consequences of drinking and driving are real. Every effort must be taken to prevent tragedy. Please be mindful of how precious life is as we celebrate the upcoming holidays, and be responsible.

Enjoy the holidays.

Frank Provenzano
SHERIFF, SOMERSET COUNTY

The Safe Communities Coalition of Somerset County works to foster a safe and healthy community by reducing drug use, underage drinking and prescription drug abuse. For more information, visit www.safecoalition.org.