

Local woman crusades against drunken driving

By JENNY SCHUBERT
Collegian Staff Writer

In the midst of Bellefonte's colorful "Labor Day Celebration in the Park," one woman's crusade against drunken driving — the act which took her 21-year-old daughter's life — seemed sadly ironic.

Although most people were enjoying the carnival-like atmosphere in Tallyrand Park on Saturday, Dottie Smith, president of Centre County's Mothers Against Drunk Driving chapter, was seriously publicizing the dangers of mixing alcohol with driving.

"I know we all have to die, but not the way that my daughter, Tammy, died — it's so unnecessary," she said.

In an effort to decrease drunken driving accidents during the holiday weekend — when alcohol-related crashes are at a peak — MADD and Volkswagen Inc. sponsored Drive For Life, an annual public awareness campaign designed to reduce the number of drunken-driving deaths and injuries.

Nationally, the campaign began Aug. 4 and continued across the country with petition-signing events at Volkswagen dealerships, pledge collections, national media announcements and culminated with a press conference in Washington, D.C. on Friday, Smith said.

Locally, the MADD chapter asked residents to pledge to drive sober last weekend and all year long, while encouraging others to do the same. To show support of their cause,

MADD urged the public to drive with their headlights on throughout the day, she said.

"The response gets bigger every year," said Nancy Wasson, vice-president of Centre County MADD. "They don't always join MADD and become a member, but at least the headlights are a show of support."

Smith joined MADD because she felt no family should ever have to endure her experience alone.

"Unfortunately, since Tammy died 97,000 other families have had to deal with it," she said. "We try to make the public realize it can happen to anyone."

Even four years later, Smith still thinks about her daughter every day. "It doesn't go away," she said.

One of MADD's functions is to encourage and influence drunken driving legislation on the federal and state levels, Smith said. The American justice system offers victims few rights, she said.

"The court took time to listen to the offender, but no one was there to represent Tammy — no one who knew her," she said.

In order to increase victims' protection, state Sen. Timothy Schaffer (R-Butler) introduced a bill which would give victims safety, notification and statement rights, said Hope Emerich, MADD's government liaison.

The bill, if passed, would: give victims a safe place to wait for a trial so they would not accidentally confront the alleged offender; notification of the trial date and any possible changes; and provide victims with the chance to give an

oral or written impact statement citing how the accident affected their lives.

After a drunken driver has been convicted, the victim would be notified if the offender was going to be released early. Currently, these rights do not exist, Emerich said.

Most people agree law enforcement against drunken drivers is too lax, Smith said, adding that the man who killed her daughter spent 16 months in jail.

The penalties for drunken driving convictions are occasionally more severe in foreign countries. In France, drivers lose their licenses for three years, spend one year in jail and pay a \$1,000 fine. In the Soviet Union, drivers lose their licenses permanently, and in Bulgaria, a second conviction results in execution, said Bill Rogers Sr., former president of the National Newspaper Association, in a column in the Swainsboro Georgia Blade.

MADD's government liaison is also working to strengthen existing state laws. The group is endorsing a bill that would lower the legal Blood-Alcohol Content level to .08; if found driving above this level, a person would be convicted for drunk driving.

If the state house concurs with the state senate's amended version of the bill after the next session opens Sept. 18, then the lower level could become law if signed by Gov. Robert P. Casey, Emerich said.

"I really feel MADD is making a difference. (The legal process is) just slow," Smith said. "Even if one life is saved it makes a difference."



Three-year-old Sarah Gorlow and her brother David, of Pittsburgh, enjoy magician Earl Houser's show at Tallyrand Park in Bellefonte.

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9/27	Wed	Wagner	10-4
10/11	Wed	Kern	10-4
10/12	Thu	White Lobby	12-5
11/7	Tue	Waring	1-7
11/8	Wed	Findlay	1-7
11/9	Thu	Simmons	1-7
11/14	Tue	Pollock	1-7
11/15	Wed	Warnock	1-7
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11/20	Mon	HUB	10-6
1/21	Tue	HUB	10-4

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