

## A Special Report: UNC and Alcohol



DTH/Photo

10-year span

# Orange Co. shows rise in drunk driving deaths

By SHAWN MCINTOSH  
Staff Writer

A study of Orange County records shows that the number of fatal car accidents caused by drunken driving have increased in the last 10 years. And statistics also revealed that more of the victims were between the ages of 16 and 21.

Among people killed in Orange County traffic accidents, there has been an increase in the percentage with blood alcohol levels high enough to make a legal presumption of drunkenness. The comparisons were made between equal 42-month periods starting in January, 1972.

Records at the state Office of the Chief Medical Examiner show that in the first period, ending June 1975, the 71 traffic fatalities in Orange County included 15 — or 21 percent — who exceeded the legal level of intoxication.

During the same period, ending in 1978, there were 45 killed and 12 were legally drunk, an increase to 27 percent. The percentage of victims who were intoxicated jumped to 36 percent in the final period that ended last June. Of the total 69 victims, 25 exceeded the legal level of intoxication.

These are cases when alcohol in the bloodstream could definitely be measured. Other cases in which the alcohol content could not be measured account for still more of the victims, so the number of alcohol-related car deaths could be much higher.

"In a homicide or something like that when the body might not be discovered right away, that would have to be considered," said Diane Wold, a statistician at the office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Many victims of traffic accidents found to have alcohol in their blood actually have levels below that of intoxication. Wold explained that a delay in taking the blood sample gave the blood time to detoxify so the lower levels were not always accurate indicators of intoxication at the time of death.

While these numbers don't prove the presence of more drunken drivers in Orange County, the possibility exists. The circumstances surrounding the death of one of the victims were described in a medical examiner's report:

"Car ... left roadway on right side and decedent (the deceased) apparently over-compensated and car pulled sharply to the left and overturned. Passenger injured but survived. Quantity of non-revenue whiskey found in auto," the report said.

The report also said the victim, a 28-year-old textile worker from Roxboro, had .24 percent alcohol in his bloodstream, more than twice the legal level of intoxication, 0.1 percent.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, a section of the state Division of Health Services, keeps reports of every death in the state. It is also where toxicology reports are stored if they are made. Toxicology reports tell the blood level of alcohol in the deceased.

Wold said ethanol in the bloodstream, usually proof of drinking, can also be caused by decomposition of a dead body. But that is rarely the case in auto accidents, she said.

Master Officer Gregg Jarvis, who is in charge of the DUI Grant Program at the Chapel Hill Police Department, said he wasn't surprised at the increase in alcohol-related fatalities. He said he thought that was the trend statewide and nationally, although the local figures might be inflated slightly.

"I think our figures might be a bit higher because of the number of young people here who drink," Jarvis said. "The younger the populace, the higher the percentage of DUI-related traffic fatalities."

Since 1972 more than half of the victims of traffic accidents in Orange County found with alcohol in their systems below 0.1 percent were between 16 and 21 years old.

That age range also had a higher percentage of alcohol content above the intoxication level than did the general population for that period, although the numbers are not large enough to insure a statistically significant finding.

For the 10½ year period, 28 percent of the victims were intoxicated. In the 16 to 21 age group, the likelihood of drunkenness was 33 percent.

A breakdown of the time span shows that in the first period, 20 percent, or five of 25 victims, were legally drunk in the 16 to 21 age group. That number rose to 44 percent, or 8 of 18, during the second period. Between 1979 and June of 1982, the percentage of intoxicated young victims in Orange County dropped slightly to 42 percent, or five of 12.

One of those victims, a 19-year-old student, had more than two times the amount of alcohol which signals intoxication in her bloodstream, the medical examiner's report said.

"(Victim) had been to local bar and was driving at very rapid rate," the report said. "The car hit right shoulder of road and then pulled back onto highway and then went down into woods. The odor of alcohol was very strong — beer and whiskey bottles in car ... a seat belt would probably have been lifesaving as the car was not that badly crushed."

Of the 52 traffic accident fatalities since 1972 involving intoxicated victims, not one of the victims who was in a car (rather than a motorcycle or a pedestrian situation) was recorded as having a safety belt on.

# Alcohol use prevalent at other major universities

By JOHN CONWAY  
Staff Writer

UNC and Chapel Hill are not the only places in the region faced with alcohol consumption problems. University police officials and student government officers at four major Southern universities say alcohol usage among students is widespread and the potential for serious alcohol abuse problems exists at their respective schools.

Student government officials at Florida State, Louisiana State, Auburn and Clemson universities all said that consumption of alcohol by students ranged from moderate to excessive.

"We live in a liquid society," said Carol Flemming, volunteer for the FSU Campus Alcohol Information Center. "It (FSU) is like any other campus. When they (students) aren't studying, they like to be drinking." Flemming said the university could establish "more rigorous restrictions" to curtail excessive consumption.

Alcohol consumption at FSU, located in Tallahassee, is restricted by Florida's legal drinking age of 19 for beer, wine and liquor. In addition, sororities at FSU prohibit the drinking of alcohol in their houses, but fraternities have a conflicting alcohol policy that encourages consumption, Flemming said.

Because Tallahassee is predominantly a college town, many taverns cater especially to students, thus increasing the availability of alcohol, Flemming said. Beer and wine also are sold in the FSU Student Union.

FSU Police Lt. Charles Hanley said most alcohol-related arrests involved driving-while-intoxicated charges. However, the majority of offenders were not FSU students but local residents, he said.

Presently, the Florida state legislature is pushing for a bill that would raise the legal drinking age from 19 to 21 years. If this law passed, "it would help curtail the drinking problem," Flemming said.

Louisiana, the home of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, has more lenient drinking restrictions than do Florida and FSU. The legal drinking age in Louisiana is 18 for all alcohol.

"The whole image of Southern Louisiana is carefree and loose," LSU Student Government Association Vice President Linda Hooks said. "It's a very happy, tolerant atmosphere." But that very "tolerant atmosphere" has promoted some alcohol abuse problems at LSU which could become much more widespread and serious, Hooks said.

In an effort to combat increasing numbers of alcohol-related accidents in the state, Louisiana Governor David Treen recently signed into law a pack of DUI legislation that made the penalties for conviction harsher. First offenders now serve a mandatory two days in jail or three days public service.

Baton Rouge has an open container ordinance, like Chapel Hill, prohibiting open containers of alcohol on city streets and

sidewalks.

This semester, LSU began a crackdown on the enforcement of several drinking ordinances. Any campus parties or functions at which alcohol is served must be registered with the dean of student life, and an alternative beverage must be provided.

Although LSU has the image of being a "party school," the Student Government Association and Residence Housing Association have attempted to increase students' awareness about their drinking habits, Hooks said. Last week the Louisiana State RHA sponsored an Alcohol Awareness Week, and the Student Affairs Office recently hired an alcohol awareness coordinator.

"They (LSU students) like to party, but not to the extent of free-flowing alcohol," LSU Assistant Police Chief Randy Watts said. Students account for only 20 percent of the DUI arrests made by university police, he said.

At Auburn University in Alabama, the Alcohol Awareness Information Center has mounted a campaign to promote responsible drinking, Robin West, the center's director, said.

"Auburn's overall reputation is conservative," she said. "But yes, we are a party school."

One local Auburn student bar sponsored an alcohol test for students after they had consumed a few beers or drinks. Several students were surprised at their condition, which was registered by the device as either pass, warning or fail, West said.

The availability and widespread use of alcohol in Auburn was reflected by alcohol-related accident and arrest statistics compiled by the Auburn City Police. Throughout 1981, a total of 830 traffic accidents were reported, resulting in one fatality. Officers made 468 DUI arrests and investigated 127 alcohol-related accidents. Of the 468 DUI arrests made by Auburn Police, 458 involved students. That is 97.8 percent, compared to about 50 percent in Chapel Hill.

West said the alcohol awareness center had been "very successful," and had consulted with at least a couple of students each day.

Clemson University has more stringent restrictions concerning alcohol use on campus. University regulations prohibit the consumption of alcohol in dormitories, except on special occasions with university approval. Fraternities are housed on university-owned property and must respect university policies.

Students found to be in violation of alcohol policies are referred to the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Committee. But Clemson SGA Senate President Keith Munson said the committee was "very inactive."

"There's a lot of (alcohol) usage," Munson said, "but I don't think there is a problem." Munson said there were few student arrests made for DUI, but there is some problem with alcohol usage at football games. In fact, violation of the drinking ordinance is so widespread that a local magistrate has a trailer behind the stadium to process public consumption fines, Munson said.

# Hunt's alcohol task force raises minimum drinking age

By LYNN EARLEY  
Assistant State and National Editor

Gov. Jim Hunt's crackdown on drinking drivers reached the written stage Tuesday as the Governor's Task Force on Drunken Drivers presented its 30 proposals for revising North Carolina's drinking laws.

The 27-member task force recommended raising the current drinking age of 18 to 19, writing a new driving-while-impaired law and eliminating plea bargaining in some cases.

In February 1982 the Governor's Crime Commission recommended raising the minimum drinking age to 21. The Governor's Deputy Press Secretary, Brent Hackney, said Tuesday that Hunt "hasn't decided which age he's going to go to."

"The rationale of the task force is that you can't really enforce it above 19, 20, 21," he said.

Quentin Anderson, public relations director for the Carolina Motor Club, agreed. On Nov. 8, the Carolina Motor Club's board of directors said it supported raising the drinking age from 18 to 19 in North Carolina and South Carolina.

"I think that they (the task force) would have gone to the higher age," Anderson said Tuesday, "but I think they thought after kids got off to college it would be harder to enforce. If the governor's task force had recommended a higher age, we would certainly have supported that."

The State Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission also will support the move, Assistant Administrator for North Carolina Bill Powell said. "We will enforce any laws that are passed by the legislative body," he said.

In February, however, Bill Hester of the ABC Commission said the Crime Commission's proposal to raise the drinking age to 21 would cause problems.

"From the state ABC Commission's point of view," he said at that time, "it is very difficult to police the problem now. And if they take away the privileges from those who are enjoying them, it will be even more difficult."

On Tuesday, Powell said, "You've got a mass amount of people — college students in particular — that you're going to ban from drinking."

Locke Clifford, Chairman of the Criminal Justice Section of the North

Carolina Bar Association and member of the task force, said the proposals would affect people other than students because of the enforcement and punishment sections.

"There are plenty of people out there that this act is going to hurt," he said, adding that a bill containing the proposals would hurt "anyone who drives drunk — and there are a lot of them out there."

Some of the punishment recommendations included immediate 10-day loss of license for driving with a blood alcohol content of 0.1 percent or higher, mandatory jail sentences of one to two weeks in extreme cases and restrictions on plea bargaining.

Hackney said a person charged with driving under the influence would no longer be able to plead guilty to a lesser offense, such as reckless driving. Instead, the person would be tried under the original charge if the recommendations were written into the statutes.

Clifford said, "Sympathy for the defense is not a factor anymore and it has always been a factor before."

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# Reformed alcoholic discusses her past

By DEBBI SYKES  
Staff Writer

Editor's note: The name of the interviewee has been changed at her request.

Tricia hopes to be a writer. She is articulate and witty.

But Tricia's humor is wry. It is sometimes cynical, evoking harsh memories.

Tricia is an alcoholic. Her problem has taken her along difficult paths, but she has learned to smile. She is eager to talk about her past; her words spill over one another. As she talks about alcohol, words such as "unreal," "devastation" and "hell" recur.

Tricia is 30 years old. Her first encounter with alcohol was at 14. She grew up in Chapel Hill, where she said the presence of alcohol was strong. She remembers watching fraternity brothers pop tops off beer cans from the playground of her elementary school.

Tricia discovered that she could be a different person when she drank. Instead of being awkward and a shy outsider, she was talkative and funny. People noticed her.

Alcohol totally altered her personality. She changed from an obedient child to a rebellious teenager.

"It (alcohol) is a drug," she said. "It alters your consciousness. You're not going to be yourself."

Tricia left home at 16. She spent the years between high school graduation and college with alcohol. She was initially refused by colleges because she appeared too immature and impulsive.

In the meantime, her life revolved around drugs and alcohol, she said. When Tricia did go to college, she applied herself with almost superhuman ferocity. She tried to overcome a deeply ingrained feeling of inadequacy by earning good grades.

She attended four colleges over the years and

maintained a 3.7 grade point average.

At first she majored in voice, a fiercely competitive field. "I was through before I started," she said. She was afraid to test herself and relied on alcohol as a crutch.

She turned to many sources for help in trying to cope with her problem. She talked to preachers and psychologists, studied religions and tried hypnotherapy. But she found help through Alcoholics Anonymous.

Tricia laughed at the way her words sounded when she praised the organization. "I called AA and my life changed," she mimicked laughingly. Attending AA was a big step for Tricia. She rebelled against recognizing that she had a problem.

"You don't want to admit that you're powerless, that you can't control your destiny," Tricia said.

But it was through AA that Tricia began to lead a normal life. "I was sure I had found the solution to loneliness and isolation," she said. "I could have dreams. Life was worth living."

Then Tricia began to drift away from the AA program. "I can get high once in a while," she would say. "I thought I wasn't an alcoholic."

During this period she acted erratically. She dropped out of school and then re-enrolled. Tricia again pushed herself into living life at a furious pace. She made As in school, held down a part-time job, led two choirs — and she stayed bombed.

At this stage Tricia felt like she was living in hell. Her activities began to take their toll on her. She spent many mornings lying in bed with cotton in her ears and an icepack on her head. She thought demons were after her. "You want to take a gun and blow your brains away because you feel so bad," Tricia said.

She didn't care about anything, and she found the apathy so intolerable in herself that she drank more and more.

Tricia realized that she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She knew that she would end up dead, in jail or hospitalized in a mental ward.

One morning she woke up and said, "Who are you kidding? You can't do this." Her second recovery was easier than her first because she knew where to find help.

She credited a man in the AA group with helping her through her years of struggling.

When Tricia stopped attending AA meetings, he disregarded the break and let her know that he would remain her friend.

No professional she talked to had the insights he had, she said. "He gave me enough rope to hang myself, but not enough to kill me."

Tricia said much of AA's success stemmed from the fact that its members have a common bond. "They have come down the same kind of road — the road to insanity and destruction," she said.

Now Tricia is discovering the joys of life that many people take for granted, she said.

"I feel like I'm 16 sometimes," she said. "But I don't care anymore. I never got to a comfortable 16." She is taking time off from school now and plans to work until she decides about a major. She is certain, however, that she will complete her bachelor's degree someday.

In the meantime, she hopes to help others through sharing her story. Her voice warmed and her eyes widened when she talked about using her writing talents to help others.

Tricia is delighted that her life has steadied to a normal pace. Now she envisions bringing something creative out of the muddle of her past.

She drew a parallel between her life and a bumper sticker she recently saw. It read: "Do you want your life to be a mess or a message?"

Tricia has answered that question for herself.



Art by Robin Williams

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