



Since the new Safe Roads Act went into effect, the number of driving-while-impaired arrests in Chapel Hill has decreased 22 percent from the same time last year, police statistics say.

DWI arrests decreased, officer says

By SUSAN OAKLEY
Staff Writer

The number of drunken driving arrests in Chapel Hill has decreased considerably since the new Safe Roads Act went into effect a month ago, said Master Officer Gregg Jarvies of the Chapel Hill Police Department.

The Safe Roads Act, passed by the General Assembly in July, is a comprehensive package of laws that includes provisions to stiffen penalties for drunken drivers and reduce plea-bargaining by eliminating lesser offenses.

For the month of October, police statistics showed the number of driving-while-impaired arrests in Chapel Hill was down 22 percent from the same time last year.

Jarvies said Chapel Hill police arrested 32 people for drunken driving in October compared to 41 during the same period in 1982.

The statistics for the first weekend in November are also promising, Jarvies said. Even with the UNC-Clemson football game last weekend only one DWI arrest was made — a substantial decrease compared to previous game weekends, he said. "Obviously, the fear of getting punished under the new law has caused people to be more cautious," Jarvies said.

Jarvies said, awareness of the new law's severity was largely a result of the police department's efforts

to educate the public. During August and September, officers conducted seminars throughout Chapel Hill describing the new law and its consequences, including a 12-month license suspension for any person convicted of a DWI offense.

The decline in DWI arrests will not necessarily continue, however, Jarvies said.

If publicity of the new law decreases as the year progresses, he said people may forget all the consequences that a DWI conviction could have.

Jarvies said any downward trend in arrests would also be dependent on what happens to the cases when they appeared in court.

"If the perceived penalty is realized, we should see a continuing decrease in the number of arrests for DWI," he said.

Despite the drop in overall arrests for drunken driving, the number of underage violations has remained fairly constant since last year, Jarvies said.

"We still get about the same number of 17- and 18-year-olds with beer and 20-year-olds with liquor," he said.

Jarvies said an assessment of the new law now would be premature. "It will be about six months before we can really say what effects the Safe Roads Act has had on Chapel Hill," Jarvies said. "But I hope we will continue to see a decrease in the number of DWI arrests."

DWI

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Mary Margaret Jones, a member of Chi Omega sorority, explained that the Panhellenic Council had taken three major steps to prevent its members from running into trouble with the new law. A written pledge form, designed to make people aware of the new law and show the police that students were aware that the law was in effect, was distributed to all sorority members for them to sign.

Jones said only about 10 members had refused to sign the actual pledge form and those had written back to say that they were aware of the law.

In addition, representatives from the Student Legal Services talked to the Sorority Presidents' Council, house advisers and sorority members and explained to them in detail how the law affected them. "We're trying to prevent someone from being used as an example to other sororities," Jones said.

Also, the sororities were given stamps and ink pads to use when carding people at their mixers. Along with these steps, Jones said they were encouraging people to have large amounts of alternative beverages next to the alcohol to make it more socially acceptable for one not to drink beer.

According to Dottie Bernholtz, an attorney for Student Legal Services, there have been more arrests for underage possession of alcoholic beverages since the law went into effect, but the increase hasn't been as large as she expected it to be. "People seem to be weary of the new law because of the amount of publicity it has received," she said.

Bernholtz said the typical pattern for arrests appeared to be that an

officer would pull a driver who was swerving along the roads or going through traffic lights. After being pulled, if alcohol was detected, then the driver would be arrested.

Bernholtz advises students who are arrested for DWI to hire an attorney or have one appointed to handle their case. "Students run a much higher risk of being jailed or having a suspended sentence without a lawyer to handle the legal aspect of their problem," she said.

Bernholtz suggested that if students could not afford an attorney they seek counsel at the UNC Law School Clinic, which is composed of law students under the supervision of licensed attorneys. "But the best thing for students to remember is not to drink and drive because they will get caught," Bernholtz said.

Provisions are being made here on campus for those students who are convicted of DWI and need a place to do their volunteer community service work.

Barbara Blanks, DWI Coordinator for Judicial District 15-B (which includes Orange and Chatham counties) is in charge of the project.

"We thought there might be a need for students who either work or have other outside commitments to do their volunteer service here on campus," she said.

As of now, she has been able to secure jobs with the traffic and security office and the outside maintenance crew.

"I expect this will serve as a continuing source of manpower for area offices. This isn't, however, designed to take jobs from those who are already employed," Blanks explained.

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