

Happy New Year!

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Cops warn partiers not to drink and drive

Local, state agencies will be on alert on New Year's Eve

The New Year's holiday may be a cause for celebration, but it is not a reason to drink and drive, according to Insurance Commissioner Jim Long and local law enforcement agencies. In fact, drunk drivers killed 462 people on North Carolina highways last year.

"Let's ring in the New Years, safely," said Long. "Don't get behind the wheel if you've been drinking. If you do, you could face the tragic consequences of death or injury of an innocent person because of your irresponsible decision."

The Hertford Police, Winfall Police and Perquimans County Sheriff's departments echo Long's message. Officers with

all three departments will be on alert over the New Year's holiday for impaired drivers.

The New Year's holiday period begins at 6 p.m. on Dec. 31 and ends at midnight on Jan. 3.

"I'll probably be out (on patrol)," said Sheriff Ralph Robinson. "We (law enforcement agencies) need to make a united effort, especially on that particular night."

Robinson said the highway patrol will be called if he or his officers stop drivers suspected of driving while impaired. He recommends designated drivers for holiday partiers.

In Hertford, an extra officer will be on patrol, according to the department schedule. At least two of the officers on duty are certified on the intoxilizer, the instrument used to record alcohol levels by law enforcement agencies. And the department also reminds drivers that anyone 16 and over arrested and charged with dri-

ving while impaired, underage drinking or any other drug or alcohol-related charge will see their names printed in The Perquimans Weekly.

"I'm going to be out patrolling myself, looking for impaired drivers and speeders," said Winfall Police Chief David Shaffer.

Shaffer said while speeding is usually the most prevalent problem in his jurisdiction, sometimes those stopped for driving too fast turn out to also be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The adverse weather conditions also concern Shaffer, who said drivers must be on alert to avoid accidents on wet highways.

"I'm definitely going to try to keep their attention on the roadways," Shaffer said.

The North Carolina Highway Patrol will use high visibility and participate in several national enforcement operations, including

Operation C.A.R.E. and National Holiday Lifesaver Weekend, which began over the Christmas holidays.

"Our primary mission is to remove those people from our roadways who cause crashes — impaired drivers, speeders, and aggressive drivers," said Col. E.W. Horton, Patrol Commander, N.C. Highway Patrol.

Highway Patrol officers will also continue to display red ribbons as a part of the Mothers Against Drunk Driving Tie One On For Safety campaign. The MADD ribbon serves as a symbol of the motorist's pledge to drive safe and sober during the holiday and encourages the public to become actively involved in the fight against drunk driving.

In North Carolina, drivers lose their license for 30 days, on the spot, if arrested for impaired driving. Last year, nearly 85,000 driving while

impaired charges were filed and disposed by North Carolina courts.

"Impaired drivers pay a hefty tab for their crimes," said Long. "First-time DWI offenders pay as high as \$6,000 in legal fees, court costs and fines. Insurance premiums alone can jump a minimum of 400 percent."

According to estimates from the N.C. Department of Transportation, drunk drivers cost North Carolina taxpayers nearly \$1 billion in health care, insurance and other related costs each year. That means a cost of \$214 for each licensed driver in the state.

Alcohol is not the only worry for Long. Speeding and aggressive driving are also contributing factors in traffic crashes. Statistics show that this time of year is the most deadly on North Carolina highways. More accidents occurred during December 1997 than any other month last

year, with more than 20,200 being reported. Eighteen motorists never made it home and 1,767 returned injured. Last year during the Christmas and New Year's holiday periods, 25 people were killed and 2,648 injured in crashes in the state.

"Traffic safety is very important to your Department of Insurance," Long said. "Safe driving means fewer wrecks, fewer injuries and fewer deaths. Lower property damage and medical claims have a positive effect on insurance rates."

The National Commission Against Drunk Driving honored Long earlier this month with the 14th annual Government Leadership Award in recognition of his leadership in the fight against drunk driving. Long has been actively involved with the state's Booze It & Lose It campaign and the Governor's task Force on DWI.

R.P.'s Auto Sales opens in Hertford

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

Opportunity knocked and R.P. and Diane White answered.

The Belvidere couple assumed ownership of the former Jones Motor Company on Church Street Extended in October, and celebrated the grand opening of R.P.'s Auto Sales in mid-December.

Prior to moving to the Hertford location, the Whites sold used cars at R.P.'s Paint and Body Shop next to their Belvidere home.

"More people, more visibility, better location," R.P. said of his reasons for moving to Hertford. "We were already selling used vehicles in Belvidere. We just had a



PHOTO BY SUSAN HARRIS

The Perquimans County Chamber of Commerce welcomed R.P.'s Auto Sales to Hertford with a pre-holiday ribbon cutting. Government and business leaders were on hand to wish R.P., Diane, Matt and LeAnn White success in their new business venture.

chance to move over here so we thought we'd give it a try."

R.P.'s carries used cars and trucks, and is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Those hours may expand in the spring when more people begin to look for vehicles, R.P. said.

The owners do their best to carry good quality used vehi-

cles that the average person can afford to buy.

"The way we do it when we go to the sale, we'll get down there two or three hours early and we already know what we're looking for," R.P. said. "We'll test drive it (the vehicle) for about an hour and if it checks out, we'll buy it. (I only want to sell) something that I'm not scared to sell."

The business owner said that while there are no warranties with used cars, he wants to build a reputation as a fair, honest businessman selling vehicles that will serve people and not leave them stranded by the roadside if they maintain the vehicle properly.

"A good, used vehicle is not hard to sell," R.P. said. He

added that many people can no longer afford new vehicles and that used vehicles tend to maintain their value if they are taken care of.

Each Wednesday, R.P. heads to used car sales, where he look for quality vehicles to add to his fleet. If potential buyers are in the market for particular makes and models, R.P. said he can look for those vehicles at the sale.

While R.P. generally looks for well-maintained vehicles that are about 5-8 years old, he said there are 1997 and 1998 models available at the sales now.

Business at the Auto Sales business are traditionally slow at this time of year, but R.P. said he anticipates that activity will pick up in the spring. Many people begin looking for vehicles after they get income tax returns, he said.

For those who need financing, R.P.'s Auto Sales has a working relationship with Atlantic Discount in Elizabeth City. The application is taken in Hertford and faxed to the finance company. Approval usually takes about 24 hours. The customer then goes to Elizabeth City to sign the final papers.

R.P., Diane and Mickey Winslow staff the auto sales business.

In the meantime, the entre-

preneur is staying busy in the paint and body shop.

"We stay pretty busy in the paint and body shop," R.P. said. "The last two or three months have been real busy. That's why I had to hire a man to help."

R.P. said Aaron Gallop is now on staff in Belvidere.

The paint and body shop wasn't a business that R.P. planned to go into.

"I started doing it about 15 years ago for myself and one thing led to another," R.P. said.

Deer in the roadways are one of the biggest causes of vehicle owners needing paint and body work done, R.P. said.

In addition to the used vehicle sales and paint and body businesses, R.P.'s also has a 24-hour wrecker service. Those who need a tow can call the auto sales phone at 426-1609 or the paint and body shop number, 297-2633. The service is also available through the Perquimans County Communications Department.

Even the couple's children, Matt and LeAnn, get into the family businesses. R.P. said Matt sometimes helps out by cleaning up vehicles and LeAnn likes to help answer the telephone.

R.P. said he and his staff look forward to a new year in a new location.

NC Health Choice for Children covers 59 county youth

It's going to be a brighter New Year for 59 Perquimans County children who have enrolled in the state's new insurance program for the children of working families.

"These children are going to get the ongoing, preventative health care they need," said Tom Vitaglione, chief of the children and youth section of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. "That means kids who are healthy and ready to succeed in life."

"This is a very good start," he added. "There are 155 Perquimans County children eligible for the program, and we want to enroll every one of them. Perquimans County parents who can't afford health insurance for their children

should contact the Perquimans County Social Services department to see if they are eligible for NC Health Choice for Children."

NC Health Choice for Children was launched Oct. 1 by Governor Jim Hunt to provide health insurance to the children of the state's working families.

The program is designed for working parents like contract employees; day care and nursing home workers and providers; state employees and entrepreneurs who work hard, but who can't afford private health insurance. The amount of money families can earn and still qualify to participate in NC Health Choice for Children depends upon the

number of people in each family.

For example, a family of two can earn up to \$21,700, while a family of six can have household income up to \$44,100. Families with incomes near the maximum for their family size will pay an annual enrollment fee of \$50 for one child and \$100 for two or more children. They will also make small co-payments for services ranging from \$5 for a doctor's visit and \$6 for prescription drugs, to \$20 for a non-emergency visit to the emergency room.

The program is comprehensive, covering well and sick child doctor's visits; hospitalization; dental care including x-rays and fillings; vision care

including glasses; hearing care including hearing aids; care for children with special needs and prescriptions.

Applying for NC Health Choice for Children is simple. All parents have to do is fill in a two-page application form. Children are eligible for the program if the family meets the income test and the children have not had health insurance for six months prior to the application to the program. Children enrolled in Blue Cross/Blue Shield's Caring program, those who have graduated from the Medicaid program and children whose parents have lost their insurance coverage through no fault of their own will not have to meet the six

month waiting period to join NC Health Choice for Children.

For more information or to

get an application, contact the Perquimans County Department of Social Services at 426-7373.

Holiday weather

Thursday Dec. 31	Friday Jan. 1	Saturday Jan. 2
High 49 Low 25 Partly cloudy	High 43 Low 30 Partly cloudy	High 49 Low 48 Rain

Have a great weekend!