

TDC Trains Our Teens to Drive Safely



One of the greatest joys of being a teenager is receiving a learner's permit and eventually becoming a licensed driver. Though this may be an exciting time for teens, it can make some parents (as well as everyone else on the road) more than a little nervous.

According to the Centers for Disease Control's Motor Vehicle Safety division, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among teenagers. Roughly 25 to 30 percent of teen drivers will be involved in a crash within the first 12 months of getting their operator's license. So how do we help prevent Florida teens from becoming a statistic?

The Florida Sheriffs Association's Teen Drivers Challenge (TDC) was created in 2007 to address the primary factors affecting teen drivers – speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, texting while driving and distracted driving. The two-day program is offered at no cost to teen drivers in 35 counties across the state and led by sheriffs' deputies licensed as commercial driving school instructors. More than 2,000 students participated in a TDC course between Oct. 1, 2014, and Sept. 30, 2015. Unfortunately, the demand for course participation often outweighs the courses' availability.

Rob Reisinger, a sergeant assigned to the School Resource Deputy Unit at the Leon County Sheriff's Office and supervisor for the county's TDC program, says that every year there is more demand for the program than the office can accommodate. In the last two years, they've increased the number of classes they offer twice, and are in the process of trying to increase it again.

The high demand for the class is a positive sign that the classes are not only effective, but thoroughly enjoyed by the students. Reisinger notes that even students who begin the course begrudgingly, often at the insistence of their parents, have thanked him and other instructors at the end of the course, saying that they found the class enjoyable and informative.

Reisinger says that one of the things he finds most rewarding about his involvement with the TDC program is receiving testimonials from parents commenting that their child is more confident and less afraid as a driver, and in some instances has avoided a crash because of the training.

In one case, a former student was driving his family's car home from a recent vacation. During the drive, an oncoming vehicle drifted out of its lane and approached the car head-on. The student was able to reflexively avoid the collision, maintain

control of the vehicle and reenter his lane without incident. He reported to Reisinger that he was so grateful for what he'd learned in the TDC, because it saved his life as well as his family's.

"I can't think of a more compelling reason to continue doing what we do than giving our students the skills necessary to not only save their life but also the lives of those they love," said Reisinger.

Susan Lindenmuth, public relations manager for Estero Fire Rescue, is another parent grateful for the training provided by the TDC program. Lindenmuth says that though her daughter, Krista, had always proven to be responsible, she wanted her to have the extra training provided by the Teen Drivers Challenge. Krista loved the class so much that she became an ambassador for the program, taking fliers back to her high school and enlisting her friends to sign up.

Recently, Krista (now 20 years old) was driving to school in the rain when a belt broke on her truck, causing her to lose her power steering as the truck began to fishtail and slide toward the steep, grassy shoulder of the interstate. Without thinking, Krista was able to act on the skills she learned as a defensive driver



Leon County Sgt. Rob Reisinger

in the TDC program and brought the truck to a safe stop. Had she not been able to get the truck under control so quickly, she could have easily slid down the steep embankment, possibly causing her truck to roll and her great injury, if not death. Lindenmuth was grateful that her daughter was able to recall the skills she'd learned four years ago, and is confident that the course saved her life.

The TDC program is sponsored by State Farm, but still relies on donations to allow sheriffs' offices across the state to offer the program at no cost to students, provide instructors with the necessary training and supply updated curriculum materials and resources necessary to have a successful program.

You can make a difference by supporting the Teen Driver Challenge through a monetary contribution. Your donation helps fund the program and makes our streets safer for drivers of all ages.

For more information about the Florida Sheriffs Association's Teen Driver Challenge, visit the TDC website (www.teendriverschallenge.org) or Facebook page, or contact program director Tanesha Williams by phone (850-877-2165) or email: twilliams@flsheriffs.org.



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