

Hatch honored by Madd

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Scott Hatch Honored by MADD for Solid Arrest Record

By Sally Applegate/Correspondent

Georgetown - Master Patrolman Scott Hatch knows how many drunk drivers there are out there. Sometimes they come after him. One of them nearly nailed him on Route 495 last year when he was off duty and driving his personal vehicle.

A man with four prior Operating Under the Influence (OUI) offenses came swerving up on Hatch from behind, narrowly missing him before hitting the guardrail. Hatch followed the drunk driver in his own vehicle, phoning the state police as the man nearly caused a string of accidents.

“He was running people off the road all over the place as I followed him,” says Hatch. “It went to the Grand Jury, and he’s now in jail awaiting trial.”

Hatch has been with the Georgetown Police since 1989, and full-time since 2000. He has made more than 100 OUI arrests since 2000 as he works the overnight shift.

This winter Hatch was one of 47 police officers from around the state honored at the MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) Drive for Life Awards as an Honor Officer and Everyday Hero of Law Enforcement. His award is “For excellence and leadership in drunk driving enforcement.”

“Keeping our roads safe is dangerous and thankless work. MADD considers the men and women of law enforcement charged with the job to be everyday heroes,” says Barbara Harrington, MADD Massachusetts’ executive director. “Drive for Life is MADD’s way of saying thank you to Officer Hatch for his commitment to enforcing our impaired driving laws. Our communities are safer because of dedicated officers like him.”

Hatch says even when he’s in his cruiser; he’s sometimes a target. This winter he was in his cruiser at an accident scene on I-95 when a woman driving drunk came through all the traffic cones and hit his cruiser, totaling her car and causing thousands of dollars in damage to the cruiser.

“She pushed my cruiser about six feet,” says Hatch. “Just two weeks later on I-95 I saw a pickup truck coming up in my review mirror and I swerved to avoid being hit. He hit a state trooper cruiser and damaged the rear end of it. Fortunately the trooper wasn’t in his cruiser.”

Just this past winter a drunk driver hit a Newbury police cruiser head-on along Route 1, resulting in serious injuries to both the police officer and the driver, says Hatch.

The reason he works so hard to corral these drunk drivers, says Hatch, is the danger they pose to all of us.

“These people are just so dangerous that at any moment one of them could be killing your child or a member of your family,” says Hatch. “They could harm a family coming home from an event — people that are doing the right thing behind the wheel. When you get behind the wheel and you’re drunk, that’s a lethal weapon you’ve got there. One person can have a tremendous impact on the lives of so many other people. There is always more than one victim.”

As for teens who drive drunk and get arrested, they are also victimizing themselves and their families, according to Hatch.

“There can be \$4,000 in fines to your parents, and you lose your license, your insurance rate goes up, and you now have a record,” says Hatch.

Working as an EMT and a paramedic since 1990, Hatch says he has seen the many casualties caused by drunk drivers.

Two years ago, a motorcycle being driven in Georgetown by a drunken driver crashed into a house on Andover Street, injuring the driver, says Hatch. Last year an impaired driver hit a telephone pole on Baldpate Road and was seriously injured, and this year a drunk driver hit a stone wall on Nelson Street and was injured in the resulting rollover.

In addition to awards for the municipal officers, Drive For Life also recognized 14 Massachusetts State Troopers, and six local police departments for their efforts. As part of its recently launched Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving, MADD supports more frequent, high-visibility enforcement efforts, especially sobriety checkpoints.

MADD also acknowledged the Massachusetts State Police success in conducting a record number of sobriety checkpoints in 2006 with a Leadership Award. Six local police departments (Abington, Burlington, Newburyport, Raynham, Sturbridge and Watertown) received Drive For Life awards for participating in a checkpoint in 2006. Research has shown that highly publicized, highly visible and frequent sobriety checkpoints reduce alcohol-involved crashes and fatalities by an average of 20 percent.

“While we’ve made significant progress, drunk driving remains a very serious problem in Massachusetts,” said Barbara Harrington. “MADD will continue to support initiatives to save even more lives, including supporting the passage of a standard enforcement seat belt law in Massachusetts, because a seat belt worn on every trip is the best defense against a drunk driver.”

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Association, seatbelts save 13,000 lives each year, yet seatbelt usage in Massachusetts is among the lowest in the nation at 64 percent, well below the national use rate of 82 percent. Currently 25 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico have a standard enforcement seatbelt law.

Georgetown Police Chief James Mulligan says he is proud of Hatch’s work.

“Every person who drives under the influence of alcohol or drugs is a potential fatality,” says Chief Mulligan. “The work that Master Patrolman Scott Hatch does to find and stop drunk drivers is protecting the lives of each resident of Georgetown. He made 26 DUI arrests in 2005 and 28 DUI arrests in 2006.” (Hatch has made seven DUI arrests so far in 2007.)

“He’s also stopping domestic abuse and other criminal acts,” said the chief. “A lot of things happen when people get drunk.”