

Drunk driving victims sought to speak at monthly panel

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Victims of drunk driving incidents are needed to speak on an ongoing panel that helps intoxicated driving offenders realize the pain they've inflicted. The talks are coordinated by the Deschutes County District Attorney's Office and held the last Wednesday evening of each month. Attendees are required \$25 to attend.

The Victim Assistance Program in the DA's Office facilitates a monthly Victim Impact Panel. The victim panel shares their experiences in front of people who have received Driving Under the Influence of Intoxicants (DUI) charges and are ordered to attend the panel. The panel consists of victims, law enforcement officers, and prosecutors who speak about their experiences with drinking and driving and how it has affected their lives.

"We had 776 attendees at Victim Impact Panel meetings in 2006, that is an average of 64 a month," said Deschutes County Victims Assistance Program Director Anna Lemmon.

Speaking on the panel is a great way to make an impact on the beliefs and misconceptions of those who have made the choice to drink and drive. By conducting the panels, the DA's Office is trying to demonstrate the real-life consequences of impaired driving for those who survive the crash, family members, friends, emergency responders and the community.

"Victims who tell their stories on panels say that it helps them because they believe they make a difference in someone's future choices about drinking and driving," says Janice Harris Lord, an advocate of Mothers Against Drunk Driving-or MADD (<http://www.madd.com/>).

In Deschutes County, there were 1,300 arrests for DUI in 2006. Drunk driving is one of America's deadliest crimes. Drunk driving is one of the most frequently committed violence crimes in the U.S. During 2005, more than 16,000 people were killed in highway crashes involving alcohol. Nearly 13,000 of those crashes involved an impaired driver or motorcycle operator with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08

or higher. Driving with a BAC of .08 or higher is illegal in every state.

“Drunk driving is simply not worth the risk. Not only do you risk killing yourself or someone else, but the trauma and financial costs of a crash or an arrest for impaired driving can be significant,” said Mike Dugan, Deschutes County District Attorney. “Violators often face jail time, the loss of their driver’s license, higher insurance rates, attorney fees, time away from work, and dozens of other expenses.”

For more information about speaking on a Victim Impact Panel or to learn more about the program, please contact Anna Lemmon, Program Director for Deschutes County Victim Assistance at 317-3186.

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