

Extra patrols help police catch 183 suspected drunken drivers

By HANK SCHALLER, Of The Oakland Press
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As many as 183 suspected drunken drivers may be off the road as a result of a series of Operation Night Cap patrols throughout Oakland County that wrapped up early Saturday.

Ten suspected drunken drivers were arrested in the last of nine nights of patrols, which resulted in a record number of arrests for the cooperative law enforcement program that has been covering the cost of additional patrol cars to arrest drunken drivers since 1999.

This program, which used state and private grants to cover the overtime costs of additional patrols, resulted in the arrests of 129 suspected drunken drivers countywide in 2000 and 90 arrests in 1999.

Among the area law enforcement agencies that had additional officers on patrol were the Rochester Hills substation of the Oakland County Sheriff's Department and the Sheriff's Department Alcohol Enforcement Team.

Troopers from the Groveland Township and Oak Park posts of the Michigan State Police also participated, as did police from Farmington Hills, Southfield, Auburn Hills, Troy, Hazel Park, Pontiac and Waterford Township.

"Right now, we anticipate that a new series of Operation Night Cap patrols will begin sometime late this fall," said Eileen Weisse, program coordinator for the Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County.

"We expect to have more funds available for the next series of patrols, and I'm counting on more nights of patrols and the fact more law enforcement agencies will participate in the future."

Funding to cover the overtime costs of the patrols just concluded included \$60,000 from the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning and \$5,000 from the Ashley Marie Easterbrook Foundation.

"We have already learned that the Ashley Marie Easterbrook Foundation will be increasing its share of our funding from \$5,000 to \$8,000," Weisse said.

The goal of the Operation Night Cap program is to cut the number of alcohol-related accidents in 27 Michigan counties where there are a high number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities.

In Michigan, a driver is considered legally drunk when the blood-alcohol level is 0.10 percent or higher. A person is considered impaired at levels of 0.08 percent. Those convicted of drunken or impaired driving face fines, penalties, court costs and jail time. In the case of repeat offenders, license plates can be confiscated.

"I want to caution people that just because Operation Night Cap is over for now, that doesn't mean there aren't police out on the roads looking for drunken drivers every night," Weisse said.

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