

MADD honors officers going beyond the call of duty against DWI

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Gallup chapter of MADD, Mothers against Drunk Driving, held a small awards presentation for local law enforcement who have gone beyond the call of duty to do their part in ending DWI within McKinley County at Grace Bible Church Aug. 18.

Several law enforcement agencies were present for the ceremony: Gallup Police Department; McKinley County Sheriff's Office; New Mexico State Police, and several attorneys from McKinley County DWI Task Force.

A small reception was held prior to the ceremony as advocates, victims, and family members came together to share their experiences with the huge dilemma of DWI offenses that has run rampant in McKinley County.

Once the fellowshipping was done, MADD Court Monitor Jennifer Kerr, who sits through the DWI cases not only in the Gallup Magistrate Court, but in Farmington and Aztec, began the award ceremony by speaking about the fantastic job that DWI officers conduct on a daily basis and presented them with a plaque.

"When I read the arrest reports and see these officers in the court room, I see they're really diligent about enforcing and stopping DWIs," she said.

Receiving an award for his numerous DWI stops was McKinley County Sheriff's Office Lt. Eric Jim. Currently serving with the Sheriff's office for 12 years, Jim had lost a family member over

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15 years ago to a DWI. This tragic event has been the catalyst for him to end DWI.

“I feel appreciative; it is an honor to receive this being out there what I’m expected to do. I lost a family member due to a DWI, so it’s one of my inspirations to keep the road safe,” he said. “It does affect a lot of families so I’m out there doing what I can to keep the roads safe.”

Combating drunk drivers on a daily basis has nothing to do with awards, but simply just doing the job to the fullest extent as New Mexico State Police Sgt. Shawn Martin expressed.

“When I got into this career it wasn’t about the awards or nothing like that. It’s something that we do on a daily basis,” he said. “I feel honored that MADD supports us and the same route, we support them by doing our jobs to the fullest extent. It makes me proud and it’s good to have someone out there looking out for us as well. I just want to thank MADD for throwing this function on for us; recognizing law enforcement that is out on the road doing their jobs combating drunk drivers.”

MADD Lead Victim Services Specialist Dolly Otero, out of the Albuquerque office, is incidentally the only office in the whole state of New Mexico, said MADD is 100 percent behind the victims of drunk driving.

“I think it was time that we really promote police safety, and let them know that the community is standing behind them,” she said. “Again, we wanted to educate this community that MADD is still there and we still want to help victims of drug or drunk driving. “

Several members of the District Attorney’s office were on hand such as DUI Task Force Attorney Paula Pakkala, who praised the officers, and received praise herself for her efforts.

“It was a very nice job honoring the officers, victims,” Pakkala said. “They did a wonderful job,” she said. “It’s epidemic and the officers, the DA’s office are always working – working really hard. The officers make the arrests and we work hard to prosecute their cases. It’s a never ending battle, really. I really appreciate MADD being in the courtroom as court monitor. I think it really helps people understand what we are really doing.”

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Kerr knows the meaning of endless caseloads that come across her desk and how important it is to applaud these officers as well as the thankful support that was shown at the ceremony.

“I’m really happy with it and impressed with how many people came, it felt so good to honor the officers that are doing this work everyday day...day in and day out. The DA’s office...they’re so many people involved in this whole puzzle to stop DWI,” she said, “There are some frustrating parts about it – court cases that get dismissed for other reasons whatever, but that still doesn’t stop the officers from pulling people over. They keep fighting to keep others safe and that is what I mainly wanted to thank them for tonight for their work every day...long hours.”

No stranger to the on-going drunk driving problems on the Navajo Nation, and its impact on indigenous people, newly-crowned 2017 Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Queen-Zunneh-bah Martin stopped by to show her support for the officers.

“It’s not the first event I’ve attended with MADD and I really support this group and I really do want to express my appreciation to all our law enforcement who are putting their lives on the line,” she said. “They are going out there and doing work that a lot of our people don’t want to do. It’s tough and I really do want to say thank you.”

A moment of silence was taken to reflect on those families who have lost a love one to a DWI by a lighting of a candle, and a second candle was lit by those who survived or were injured by a drunk driver. And a last candle was lit to honor all the officers who help in combating DWI.

For more information about MADD contact Dolly Otero 1-877-ASK-MADD or visit website www.madd.org

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