



GARLAND

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Garland Teens Leading New Driver Safety Program

Garland, Texas – March 7, 2007 -- Across America, car crashes kill more teenagers than any other cause. The Garland Youth Council and teams from Garland ISD high schools are stepping forward to fight this national epidemic at the local level.

More than 16 young people die every day in crashes across the U.S. Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) researchers attribute the crashes to inexperience, combined with one or more of the five main risks that plague young drivers: driving at night, distractions (cell phones and other teen passengers), speeding, low seat belt use, and alcohol.

Statewide surveys have shown that young drivers and their parents are largely unaware of those risks and their consequences, and a recent survey of Garland area students reflected the same lack of awareness. Less than one percent of students recognize that driving at night is risky, the survey revealed. The survey revealed that local teenage drivers routinely engage in risky driving behaviors:

- Nearly half of the Garland students who responded to the survey said they have frequently talked on a cell phone or exchanged text message while driving.
- Almost a third say they have frequently driven with other teen passengers in the car.

“Most young drivers don’t know that they’re 10 times more likely to die in a crash than people in other age groups,” says Robert Wunderlich, the City of Garland’s Managing Director for Transportation and Engineering. “But they need to hear the message from a source they trust; they need to hear it from each other. That’s what Teens in the Driver Seat is all about.”

Teens in the Driver Seat (TDS), offered to area schools at no cost through support from the Texas Department of Transportation, is the first peer-to-peer driving safety program in the nation. Garland is among the first cities in North Texas to adopt the program. Unlike any other safety initiative targeting young people behind the wheel, TDS involves teens directly to help develop and deliver the right message.

TTI provides the science, program materials and background support for the TDS program, while each student group determines on its own how the program will work in their school. At each of Garland ISD’s high schools, student groups are designing their own programs, which will be showcased on the TDS web site, www.t-driver.com. The high school teams are planning a wide range of activities to spread this important safety message including poster contests, special presentations and assemblies, creating their own video and much more.

More than 6,000 teens die every year in traffic crashes in the United States – the number one cause of death, by far, for this age group.

“That’s the equivalent of a commercial jet loaded with teenagers crashing to the ground every week for an entire year,” says Russell Henk, a TTI Research Engineer and the Program Director for TDS. “But that’s not how these tragedies happen; they happen one or two at a time, which is why this problem isn’t getting the attention we believe it deserves. Teens in the Driver Seat intends to change that.”

The Garland Youth Council is an advisory board appointed by the Garland City Council to provide a forum which educates Garland’s youth to the various

workings of City business, and allows youth to be a voice to address their particular ideas and concerns. For more information about the Garland Youth Council, log onto www.garlandyouthcouncil.org.

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