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New Teen Driver Program Targets Parents

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When the nightly newscast begins, "Yet another deadly crash takes the lives of area teens..." it strikes fear in the heart of parents.

The Georgia Extension Service is working to make the roads and our own cars safer through the Georgia Traffic Injury Prevention Institute.

GTIPI recently received a \$1-million grant from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety. The grant will be used to expand its education and training program in the use of safety belts and child safety seats. The \$1-million grant, the largest in the 18-year history of the partnership between UGA and GOHS, was established to help reduce traffic-related injuries and fatalities statewide.

It will allow the institute to enhance its educational impact in three areas: passenger safety, young driver education, and community traffic safety programming. Onsite education will be conducted at the institute's facilities in Conyers. Programs will include the 32-hour Child Passenger Safety Training advanced class and youth programming in bike helmet and pedestrian safety.

Outreach education will also be delivered by regional coordinators across Georgia through such community events as Injury Prevention Caravans and Traffic Enforcement Networks. GTIPI's Resource Center will be the primary source statewide for print and electronic educational injury prevention resources for consumers, educators and other professionals.

"This program is the primary resource in the state for public information and professional training on the use of safety belts and child safety seats," said Don Bower, a UGA Extension Service human development specialist. Bower serves as project director and liaison between the institute and the extension service.

The program reaches virtually every Georgian with media information encouraging the correct and consistent use of these safety devices. In 2001, educators in the program conducted 280 child safety seat checks and provided more than 18,000 hours

of training, helping to increase child safety seat use by Georgians to 85 percent.

Car crashes are the leading killer of children and young adults. And vehicle crashes cost society more than \$150 billion annually, according to GOHS.

The January 1, 2002, change in Georgia's teen driving laws puts parents squarely in the passenger's seat. It requires that anyone younger than 18 who applies for a permanent driver's license must have a parent, legal guardian or responsible adult sign a verification form affirming that the applicant has completed either 40 hours of supervised driving experience or 20 hours if the applicant has successfully completed an approved driver education course.

"No parents surveyed reported that they felt adequately prepared to teach their teenager to drive," Jones said. "This course is designed to help fill this void. It will help parents and their new teen driver learn what they need to do during those 40 hours of driving time. Our ultimate goal is to reduce the risks of youth-related car crashes."

A pilot program in Rockdale County will address beginning teen drivers and their parents. Frankie Jones, GTIPI teen driving specialist, has announced a two-hour seminar for parents and teens called Georgia Teens Ride with P.R.I.D.E. (Parents Reducing Incidents of Driver Error).

The Georgia Teens Ride with P.R.I.D.E. classes will complement the Rockdale County driver's education program. The program will help parents and guardians become more aware of their own driving behaviors, teach parents and guardians how to help their teens become safer drivers, help parents, guardians and teens learn what they need to do during the supervised practice driving time and alter attitudes and driving behaviors of novice teen drivers.

Jones said the Conyers area was chosen to pilot the program for several reasons. The GTIPI state office has just moved to the Conyers location so the seminar will build awareness of all their programs.

"Rockdale County is a suburban area, which offers unique driving situ-

ations and problems for first-time drivers," Jones said. "We are also pleased to be collaborating with the schools on this project. They have been very interested and helpful."

After the pilot is completed and some fine-tuning is made, the group hopes to offer the PRIDE program statewide. "We will use the train-the-trainer mode," said Bower, "so it may take several months to get trainers prepared in many counties."

GTIPI staff and some selected extension service agents may serve as presenters, as well as local collaborators such as public safety personnel and educators.

There are eight GTIPI regional coordinators around the state in local extension service offices. They work in cluster areas of six counties each. In addition to PRIDE, the coordinators will provide 32-hour Standardized Child Passenger Safety Technician certification training courses about 25 times this year across Georgia. GTIPI will also maintain a database of names of those who are certified in Georgia and help parents find a qualified person close by to help them learn to install their child safety seat correctly. GTIPI staff will also offer child passenger safety training for childcare providers.

More information on traffic safety and the GTIPI will be available online at these web sites:

<http://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/ose/index.html>, but it will be changing soon to www.ridesafegeorgia.org.

A list of all regional coordinators and the counties they serve: <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/ose/staff.html>

The Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), a national public/private partnership, brings together large and small employers to learn how to minimize their losses from traffic crashes. The Georgia NETS (<http://www.trafficsafety.org/>) is coordinated through GTIPI.

(Article by Janet Rodekohr and Faith Peppers, news editors with the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.)

