

## Woodstock hopes to fill void left by canceled driver's ed

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Now that driver's education is not available in Cherokee County schools, the Woodstock Police Department is stepping up to teach young and soon-to-be drivers about road safety.

The Police Department is working with the Georgia Traffic Injury Prevention Institute to offer a free, two-hour seminar for parents and teens.

The seminar, called Georgia Teens Ride with P.R.I.D.E. or Parents Reducing Incidents of Driver Error, is a University of Georgia program funded by a grant from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety.

The first seminar will be held at 6 p.m. Feb. 10 at First Baptist Woodstock. A teen and at least one parent or guardian must register. The police department also has scheduled seminars for 10 a.m. April 17, 6 p.m. July 20 and 6 p.m. Sept. 21, all of which will be at the church.

Sgt. Scarlett Woods of the police department said the class is targeted toward students who will have missed the chance to take driver's education in school.

"It is the kids that are 14, 15 and 16 years old that we are concerned about," she said. "Cherokee County is a suburban area which offers unique driving situations and problems for first-time drivers."

The change in teen-driving laws that took effect in January 2002 requires anyone who applies for a permanent driver's license to have a parent, legal guardian or responsible adult sign a verification form. The form states that the applicant has completed 40 hours of supervised driving experience or 20 hours if the applicant has successfully completed an approved driver education course.

The free course offered by the department is not the same as the driver education course referred to in the state law.

"(Our course) will help parents and their new teen driver learn what they need to do during those 40 hours of driving time," Frankie Jones, head of the GTIPI's Parent-Youth program. "Our ultimate goal is to reduce the risk of youth related car crashes."

Ms. Woods said local teen driving behavior has not been affected much by the laws, which also state a new driver may not have any passengers except immediate family members for the first six months after getting their license. Teens also are not allowed to drive after midnight.

"The laws have not made much difference. We still see some of that stuff on the road," she said. "Teens are still wrecking, but I think it is just inexperience."

Cherokee County Juvenile Court Clerk Becky Hulsey said she is not seeing much of a change either.

"The laws have not really had an impact one way or the other," she said. "I would guess there have been 20 citations for having passengers other than immediate family, which is a new charge, but other than that, there has not been much of an effect."

For information about the seminar or to register, call Sgt. Woods at the police department at (770) 592-6022.