

Course to stress defensive driving

Cherokee County students to take part in new 'Alive at 25' program

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GAFFNEY-- Drivers' education students returning to Cherokee County public schools will receive a new assignment.

A four-hour mandatory program emphasizing defensive driving, "Alive at 25," is being introduced by the school district in cooperation with the National Safety Council and the state Highway Patrol.

The goal is to help student drivers achieve behavior modification and save lives, said Cpl. Bobby Joe Albert, a trooper who will be the instructor.

Drivers who are 15 to 24 years old are eligible for the one-day classroom session.

"We want to help young drivers avoid making bad decisions, resulting from texting on cell phones, being distracted by passengers, speeding, substance abuse and other reasons," Albert said.

He said national statistics show vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for the 16 to 24 age group. Forty-nine percent of the deaths are alcohol related, and every day 33 deaths occur in the same age category.

Albert, a 15-year veteran trooper, said his interest in being an instructor for "Alive at 25" grew while he served last year in Afghanistan with the South Carolina National Guard.

"I realized many of our young people do not take advantage of the opportunities they have. I wanted to do something to help them," he said.

Albert underwent the training to become an instructor and taught his first class last Saturday in a Spartanburg County school district.

"I'm ready to teach Gaffney and Blacksburg students now," he said.

"Alive at 25" employs testimonials and memorials, discussions and a workbook.

In South Carolina, Dutch Fork High School in Irmo first implemented the program because deaths of young drivers had averaged two per year for 16 years. No deaths have occurred there since implementation of "Alive at 25" in 2007, according to information provided to the Cherokee County school board.

School Superintendent Bill James asked for and gained the board's approval Monday night to begin the mandatory defensive driving course necessary for completing the drivers' education program with credits.

"Many schools tie 'Alive at 25' to issuing student parking passes, but that's too late for us this time. The passes have been given out for the new school year. Beginning next year, every person new to getting a parking permit will take the class until all students have completed it," James said.

Parents may realize a slight savings in their insurance premiums when students enroll in the district's drivers' education program, including "Alive at 25," which has two major insurance companies as sponsors.

An enrollment fee of \$35 must be paid before the end of the semester for the new program, and some financial assistance may be available for students determined by school administrators to be unable to pay.

Mike Ellis, a school board member, said the fee should not be an obstacle for any student to complete the course.

"It's not much to pay, if it saves a life," Ellis said.