

Alive at 25' aims to curb teen traffic fatalities

By Tim Hicks - Managing Editor

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Texting. Cell phone conversations. Alcohol.

Or just inexperience.

Any of these factors, or a combination, make young drivers between the ages of 15 and 24 prone to traffic wrecks.

Drivers between the ages of 16 and 24 make up only 14 percent of all South Carolina drivers, but they cause 27 percent of all state traffic accidents, said Steve Deibel, the traffic safety coordinator for the S.C. National Safety Council.

Deibel, a former police officer, was in Barnwell March 23 to give explain what the "Alive at 25" program is about during a town hall meeting sponsored by the Axis 1 Center of Barnwell.

With prom season around the corner and spring in the air, parties and teens will become more prevalent and mobile. This is the time of year that Axis 1 makes a big push to remind teens to drive safe and reject alcohol or other drugs as party favors.

Alive at 25 is an early intervention course designed to prevent young drivers from getting violations or involved in a wreck and to adopt safer driving habits. The course educates drivers about various driving situations, more common driving hazards and good driving practices.

The course is classroom-based and does not have an actual driving component to it, Deibel said.

Deibel was explaining the particulars of the program, which will be coming to Barnwell County in the near future.

The course is \$35 per person and upon successful completion of it, the driver can get a percentage discount on insurance, Deibel said.

"There is nothing else being done for this age group," he said.

Alive at 25 can greatly reduce wrecks caused by young drivers because it makes them more aware not only of road conditions, but how dangerous driving is, Deibel said.

Dutch Fork High School in Irmo for 16 years had at least two students die in traffic wrecks each year. In 2006, the total was six students dead. To stop the trend, in 2007, 724 students went through the Alive at 25 course. Since then, there has not been a traffic-related death attributed to a young driver from the school, he said.

"Did that happen because they got tired of burying their friends? It was community education," Deibel said. "Everything is affected in a small community. We all know that person. I'm from Bamberg myself."

Alive at 25 is a defensive driving course and not regular driving classes that only teach a person how to pass the S.C. Department of Motor Vehicles driving test, he said.

Brenda O'Berry, the anti-gang officer for the Barnwell County Sheriff's Office, will be trained to be the traffic safety coordinator for the county to teach the Alive at 25 course.

For more details on Alive at 25, call Axis 1 at (803) 541-1245.