



GREENWOOD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
Dan Wideman, Sheriff

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MEDIA INFORMATION RELEASE

TO: Media outlets (FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

FROM: Mike Frederick, Chief Deputy

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RE: Sheriff Announces New Additions to Alcohol Enforcement Efforts

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Greenwood County Sheriff Dan Wideman announced today that he's added two new, important weapons to his arsenal in the fight against underage drinking.

Wideman said that his office is now coordinating their local efforts with two powerful, statewide programs to "maximize the impact here in Greenwood and continue to save young lives."

Wideman explained that deputies now participate in two cutting edge programs designed to reduce underage alcohol use and prevent deaths and injuries caused by alcohol and vehicle collisions.

Deputy Sonny Cox, who serves as GCSO's Community Services Section supervisor, received certification by the National Safety Council today to teach the nationally renowned "Alive at 25" safety course for young drivers. The course zeroes in on drivers aged 16-24, because they are the group most likely to become involved in a fatal collision. The course is "not the standard defensive driving curriculum," Wideman said, "but focuses on changing behaviors and understanding risks."

The "Alive at 25" course is a dynamic, interactive training session to be taught by Deputy Cox several times during 2008, in locations across Greenwood County. The four-hour class is interactive, video-intensive, and features candid discussions of peer pressure, identifying risks, and decision-making. Parents interested in receiving additional information may contact Cox at 943-8057 for scheduling and enrollment details.

On the enforcement side of the equation, Wideman announced that GCSO's Vice, Illegal Drugs, & Organized Crime (VIDOC) unit joined SC's Alcohol Enforcement Team network last month. VIDOC, already tasked with investigating underage alcohol consumption and sales, received specialized training and now coordinates efforts with other counties through a grant-funded program administered locally by Cornerstone. Greenwood County has already received AET funds to reimburse for VIDOC overtime used to combat underage drinking.

Wideman's push to increase enforcement of underage alcohol use and abuse became a hallmark of his tenure as sheriff after several widely publicized arrests of both teen drinkers and the adults who provided alcohol to them. Wideman says that "GCSO's policy is clear: alcohol-related

incidents endanger and kill young people, and we'll continue to do whatever we can to stop that from happening."

Three underage persons died in Greenwood County alcohol-related incidents during 2007. One died in a single vehicle collision in Greenville County after leaving an alcohol party here, while two died in another single vehicle collision on Dixie Drive after leaving an alcohol party in Greenwood County. GCSO charged suspects in both of those cases with the provision of alcohol to underage persons.

"We continue to catch a little flak regarding our stance on underage alcohol," Wideman explained, "but the tragic numbers speak for themselves- 13 young people in this country die *every day* in alcohol-related crashes, and 33 die each day in crashes of all types¹. We have a responsibility to these young people and their families, and these two programs will help us as we try to bring those unbelievable numbers down."

Wideman likened the problem to "suffering another Virginia Tech incident every day for a year. Something must be done."

Wideman said that the two new programs demonstrate GCSO's two-pronged approach to the underage alcohol problem.

"We'll continue to do our level best to educate young folks and their families," Wideman said, "but if they choose not to heed the advice, I want them to know that our deputies and vice agents are out there working to enforce the law."

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1- Statistics cited from National Safety Council, "Alive at 25" instructor materials, © 2007 Nat'l Safety Council