

Annual DUI checkpoint brings awareness to drunk driving

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SANTA FE – Over a decade after her two daughters were killed by a repeat drunk driver, Darlene Peshlakai is still reminding people of the consequences of driving under the influence.

On April 17, Law and Order Chairwoman Eugenia Charles-Newton of the 24th Navajo Nation Council was joined by the Peshlakai family of Naschitti, N.M., the Mothers Against Drunk Driving organization, and the Santa Fe Police Department for an annual DUI checkpoint to prevent patrons from driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

In 2010, Deshauna and Del Lynn Peshlakai were killed in a car crash that was caused by a repeat drunk driver. Under the leadership of Darlene, the family has dedicated their time and effort to educating the public on drunk driving prevention by sponsoring rodeos, leading motorcycle bike runs and hosting an annual basketball tournament to remember the daughters they lost.

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“No parent should have to bury their child. My visit to the site in Santa Fe, where two beautiful young lives were lost, brought me to tears. I saw the pictures and heard the story from the Peshlakai family, who were devastated because an intoxicated person got behind the wheel,” Charles-Newton stated in a press release.

Charles-Newton continued her statement by thanking Darlene and police officers who keep drunk drivers off the road.

“Darlene Peshlakai’s courage and love for her community and the Navajo people is so inspiring,” Charles-Newton said. “We appreciate the Santa Fe Police Department and our public safety officers for their dedicated service to get drunk drivers off our highways.”

In honor of the “Angels vs. Drunk Drivers” effort, New Mexico state and local police stopped drivers and administered sobriety tests at the intersection of Cerrillos and Cristo roads. It was estimated that around 200 vehicles were stopped on April 17, with one individual apprehended.

This marks the fifth year since 2015 the Peshlakai family has partnered with local law enforcement for the checkpoint.

“12 years ago, we experienced trauma in the middle of the night that no mother or father should ever experience,” Darlene said. “Healing is a word that I rarely trust because we are still hurting today. You don’t heal, especially when you lose two beautiful angels.”

Darlene also thanked law enforcement officers.

“Drinking and driving must come to an end. My family is grateful for our law enforcement officers who put their lives on the line to keep families safe,” Darlene concluded.

According to preliminary data from the New Mexico Department of Transportation, there have been 102 alcohol-related fatalities since 2020, with 24 occurring in the last three months. MADD

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also reported that statistically, Native Americans have the highest percentage of alcohol-involved driver, passenger, and pedestrian fatalities of any ethnic group in the country.

“It is nights like these when we work our hardest to get DUI offenders off the roadway,” Fernando Cruz, an officer with the Santa Fe Police DWI Unit, said. “Our officers are saving lives, and many of us are here during the Easter holiday so we can help the Peshlakai family. One life saved against a drunk driver is what matters.”

He also thanked the Navajo Nation for working with police.

“We thank the Navajo Nation for being our partners as we move forward to end DWIs,” Cruz stated.

On March 20, Charles-Newton and the Peshlakai family hosted an awareness walk to end drunk driving during the Navajo Nation Council spring session.

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