

Driver-safety campaign rolls into Gallup

Written by By Rachelle Nones Sun Correspondent
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The New Mexico Department of Transportation has launched an ENDWI Fall /Winter “My Story” driver-safety campaign to focus on the consequences of drunk and distracted driving.

Richard Kuhn, owner, and executive director of Albuquerque-based RK Venture, created the media campaign, which runs across the state of New Mexico, and will be seen in Gallup.

The current campaign uses the acronym DWI exclusively,

“Out here we call it DWI, not DUI,” Kuhn said. “The drive here is to end DWI.”

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With recreational marijuana use legal in the state as of June 29, Gallup Police Department Capt. Erin Toadlena-Pablo said DWI has a broader definition.

“When you talk about driving while intoxicated, it’s impairment from any type of substance, as far as any medication that you shouldn’t be driving with,” she said. “They all fall within that realm. It’s not only when you are drinking alcohol.”

The ENDWI media campaign launched in Gallup before Thanksgiving and will last through Jan. 1.

“The major campaigns are geared around the holidays,” Kuhn said.

There are currently seven radio stations running commercials and three billboards featuring ENDWI campaign ads in the Gallup area. Kuhn said the campaign also runs extensively on broadcast television. But, since there aren’t any broadcast stations in Gallup they pick up the feed from Albuquerque.

Additionally, special versions of televised spots on drunk driving, distracted driving, and underage drinking targeted to specific geographic locations are featured on YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms.

“Anywhere where we are seeing high numbers of unfortunate drunk driving fatalities—we are focusing our energy,” Kuhn said.

Before the pandemic was declared, RK Venture produced a drunk driving virtual reality project for presentation at schools and organizations. Those events stalled during the COVID-19 lockdown, but will launch again when it is safe to make presentations to public gatherings.

NMDOT uses different strategies to improve driver safety in Gallup during the year. According to RK Venture, there are three or four times a year when NMDOT escalates DWI enforcement

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in Gallup with Super Blitz stops. During these periods, LED message boards encourage drivers to quickly report suspected impaired operators by calling 911. Year-round, "Report Drunk Drivers Call #911" road signage is visible on roads in key areas throughout the Gallup area.

"The people who are out on the streets driving are seeing these vehicles weaving in and out of lanes driving too fast," Toadlena-Pablo said. "Those calls come into dispatch and when we get that, we are able to go and check those areas.

"It's like having extra eyes out there," she said. "I think it's helpful,"

Kuhn and Toadlena-Pablo believe that educating the public via social media, newspapers, billboards, and other media outlets is an important component, along with visible enforcement and strong policies, in the ongoing effort to decrease crashes and driving fatalities in Gallup.

"The biggest thing is getting information out to the public as far as 'What are the consequences for me getting stopped for DWI? What are the penalties? How long am I going to be in jail?'"Toadlena-Pablo said. "I would hope that when people do see that, that it makes them think, 'Is it really worth going out and taking that chance of driving while intoxicated?'"

When RK Venture first started working with NMDOT on campaigns, New Mexico tracked approximately 220 DWI-related fatalities per year. From Jan. 1 to Dec. 1 of 2021, the state tracked approximately 101-alcohol-related DWI fatalities.

"While I'm not happy that there's any death, we have really had an impact, along with enforcement and policies, in terms of reducing that danger," Kuhn said. "We are no longer the worst state by far.

"We're somewhere in the middle of the pack," he said.

During the holiday season Gallup PD will be posting sobriety checkpoint information on

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its Facebook page.

Quickly report suspected DWI drivers by calling a toll-free hotline number. For more information visit the Drunk Busters page at <https://www.endwi.com/drunb-busters>

To view a representation of RK Venture's drunk driving virtual reality presentation, visit:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUCQ0_wSmTI

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Sun Correspondent