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S.T.O.P.P.E.D.

Sheriffs Telling Our Parents & Promoting Educated Drivers

With their first ride home from the hospital, children become intrigued with the automobile. Automobiles seem to provide a calm sense for toddlers who are usually sound asleep within minutes of traveling down the road. As they grow older, the family car takes on several different roles. Providing taxi services to Little League games and soccer practices, automobiles even facilitate what parents view as a battlefield for sibling rivalry. The automobile, as if by design, ultimately becomes an extension of the American family.

As our children grow closer to becoming adults, operating an automobile is the most visible symbol of maturity. Ironically, that same automobile, which has been a vehicle of growth for today's youth, is the leading cause of death for young adults between 15 and 20 years of age. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that in 2004, over 7998 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed and an additional 303,000 were injured, in motor vehicle crashes. Young drivers represent 13.6% of all drivers involved in fatal crashes and 18% of all drivers involved in police-reported crashes. These alarming statistics clearly indicate that additional intervention is needed in securing the safety of all motor vehicle operators as well as securing our children's future.

Numerous studies have identified *inexperience, risk-taking behavior, and great risk of exposure* as the three contribution factors. Since the 1970's, several programs have been developed in an effort to reduce such tragic statistics. Focusing on inexperience, *Drivers' Education Programs* provide driving skill instructions; yet have limited success in producing safer drivers. Recently established *Graduated Licensing Programs* have been credited with statistical reduction in several states. Graduated licensing programs extend the learner permit stage and help reduce the risk of exposure. Only by addressing one's risk-taking behavior, can we have a substantial impact in saving lives of motorists.

Risk taking behavior, when under adult supervision, is also an important component of the learning cycle. As parental arms reduced the risk of learning how to walk, the same arms are needed to reduce the risks in learning how to drive. Obtaining a driver's license makes this task very difficult.

The St Johns County Sheriff's Office **will be implementing** a program specifically designed to help parents keep a hand in their children's learning process. The "S.T.O.P.P.E.D." program is a voluntary parental notification system that allows parents to be notified of any problems or potential problems. Parents will be able to register their motor vehicles with the St Johns County Sheriff's Office. After being issued an identification sticker, which is to be displayed on the vehicle's windshield, parents will receive notification if the vehicle is stopped by police and is operated by someone under the age of 21. The program provides young drivers with a visible reminder of parental supervision, and provides parents with the means of correcting behavior before it is too late.

