Group hopes to publicize effects of drunken driving

By ALPHIE HYORTH
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In the midst of the holiday party season, several groups are working together to make motorists think about what they are doing when they drink and get behind the wheel of a car.

The organizations have joined with Mayor Screen to proclaim and observe Dec. 12-18 as National Drunk and Drugged Driving Awareness Week. Sponsors include the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Program in parish schools, Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Safety Council of Greater Baton Rouge.

The goal of the sponsoring organizations is to make drivers more aware of how alcohol and other drugs affect a person's driving ability, said Nancy Camel of the Safety Council.

More than half the 1,220 people who died on Louisiana's highways last year were killed in accidents caused by a drunken driver, according to the Safety Council.

"There's so much ignorance out there about how alcohol affects you," Ms. Camel said.

Another goal of the awareness week is to impress drivers with the toughness of the state's new laws against drunken driving, laws that go into effect Jan. 1, 1983, she said.

The new law requires that a first offender be sent to jail for from 10 days to six months and fined from $125-$500. Even if the sentence is suspended, the offender will be detained for 48 hours and be required to serve additional time in community service. After the individual's (See DRIVING, Page 3-B)
Drinking and drug use habits are screened, he may be required to attend a substance abuse or driver education program, Ms. Camel said.

“This forces intervention on a person who has alcohol problems. Maybe the family can’t get him to treatment, but the law will get him there,” she said.

City-parish officials are working to open a special center for those picked up for driving while intoxicated. The plan calls for the center to book, detain and treat DWI offenders and has gotten good response from such groups as MADD and the safety council.

Organizations sponsoring the awareness week plan several activities.

In cooperation with the Safety Council, Kean’s Laundry will be sponsoring radio public service announcements and distributing “Know Your Limits” cards through its outlets.

The cards show drivers how their body weight and the length of time they have been drinking affect their blood alcohol level. In Louisiana a driver is considered drunk when he has a blood alcohol level of 0.10 percent, Ms. Camel said.