MADD chapter praised

During its brief existence, Mothers Against Drunk Driving has not only pushed through some tough anti-drunk driving laws, but actually changed public attitudes about alcohol consumption, a state senator said Monday.

“They did more than I ever dreamed they would be able to do,” Sen. Kenneth Osterberger, R-Baton Rouge, told the Baton Rouge MADD chapter at its annual banquet.

MADD groups in Louisiana have won more battles than they lost in the drive to enact tougher penalties on drunken drivers, said Osterberger, who has handled several pieces of legislation sponsored by the group.

“They changed attitudes among the general public and legislators,” he said.

As an example, Osterberger produced a news clipping that listed a series of events being held at LSU this week to celebrate Alcohol Awareness Week.

“A few years ago you didn’t see anything like this,” he said.

Osterberger wished the group well in its next major effort — raising the legal drinking age from 18 to 21. He said that will be a difficult legislative battle.

Louisiana is “a lenient state,” he said, and changing such a law requires changing attitudes as well. That will take more time, education and involvement by citizens, he said.

Bills to raise the drinking age were killed in House and Senate committees last summer. MADD members are planning to lobby the measures again when the Legislature convenes next April.

The Baton Rouge MADD chapter was founded in the fall of 1982, and began to make waves in the Legislature the following year. It now counts nearly 300 members.

Also Monday, the group installed officers and presented certificates of appreciation to more than 100 individuals and corporations that have contributed to the success of the organization. Local newspapers, television stations and radio stations were among the honorees.

Taking over as president for the coming year is Randie Krogel; first vice president, Jan Brown; second vice president, Larry Plonsker; secretary, Shirley Bartlett; treasurer, Jay Lacaze.

The banquet was preceded by a “mocktail party” featuring non-alcoholic drinks.