



A 23-year-old woman is working her way through Maryland, asking restaurants and bars to display posters with a picture of her late boyfriend and the slogan, “Be a HERO—Be a Designated Driver.” Participants agree to give out blue-and-gold ribbons and provide free soft drinks or coffee to designated drivers.

The HERO campaign takes its name from the Human Education Resource Officer program at the U.S. Naval Academy, where the young woman’s late boyfriend, a 22-year-old ensign and recent academy graduate, served as a peer counselor for four years.

Why is she waging this campaign? Because a drunken driver with a BAC of 0.21 swerved across double yellow lines last year and hit her and the ensign as they were en route to a birthday party for his mother. The head-on collision killed her boyfriend and the drunken driver and left her battling severe injuries. Her brain was bleeding in two places when an ambulance took her to the hospital, and she endured months of physical, occupational and speech therapy. She has some memory loss, especially in thinking of words. If she stands too long, her coordination fails, and the right side of her body constantly feels like it’s asleep.

This young woman’s participation in the HERO campaign goes beyond personal recovery, however. As she explained, “I’ve never felt such sadness before, and I hope nobody else ever has to feel this way. I owe it to my boyfriend.” For those reasons, she didn’t hesitate to take the banner

Like the cars in this story, these two crashed head-on when one drifted across double yellow lines. The van spun around after hitting the car.

when her late boyfriend’s parents asked her if she’d be willing to head the Maryland effort.

They had begun the campaign in their New Jersey hometown as a positive way of keeping the memory of their son alive. “He was a giving person,” they said. “He would be involved in a project like this.”

Perhaps the most disturbing fact about this tragedy is that, as noted by a state-police spokesman, “Innocent individuals need not have been killed or injured.” The 37-year-old driver who hit these two young people had been arrested the night before the crash and charged with drunken driving. His BAC was more than twice the legal limit.

However, drunken driving is a motor-vehicle violation in New Jersey, where the mishap occurred, which means you can’t be jailed for the offense. Accordingly, police had to release the drunken driver a few hours after his arrest when a friend arrived and promised he would take him home. Unfortunately, he instead took the drunken driver back to his car. At 1:23 a.m., he again was behind the wheel and clipped a passing trailer, then hit the ensign’s car head-on. He and the ensign died instantly.

The friend who obtained the release of the drunken driver has been charged with allowing an intoxicated person to operate a motor vehicle and is supposed to face a criminal trial.

Meanwhile, the ensign’s parents have succeeded in getting “John’s Law” passed in New Jersey. When enacted, this law authorizes police to impound a car up to 12 hours if the driver has been charged with drunken driving.

Although they mourn the loss of their son, the ensign’s parents are not bitter or angry. “We are just so, so sad,” said his father. “This has ripped a piece of our life from us.”

If you would like to know more about the HERO campaign or participate in it, call toll-free 866-700-HERO. ❏