

New R.I.D.E. vehicle will help take more impaired drivers off the road: Police



By Brock Weir

Katie Apreda lost her best friend, Ashton, almost eight years ago to a drunk driver.

The tragedy has had a lasting impact on the Newmarket woman, spurring her to lend her voice to a movement fighting impaired driving in all its forms.

Now President of the York Region Chapter of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), Ms. Apreda was on hand at the York Regional Police's Aurora headquarters on Monday morning for the unveiling of a new vehicle that is now the centrepiece of the YRP's R.I.D.E. program.

The launch of the new vehicle was timed to coincide with St. Patrick's Day, which is, according to police, their busiest day of the year for catching impaired drivers on the road.

Equipped with up-to-date technology to make roadside testing as efficient as possible, it replaces a now-outdated truck that has served the YRP for more than 19 years.

The vehicle includes improved functionality for officers, giving them access to their full computer network, the ability to conduct an entire alcohol impairment investigation from arrest, to breath test, to release, and will ultimately, according to Superintendent Kevin Torrie, will get officers back on the road more quickly without having to transport accused to our divisions.

"I think this is an awesome vehicle," said Apreda at the unveiling. "I am just as frustrated as the officers."

This frustration stems from grim statistics.

According to Torrie, the York Regional Police has laid 300 impaired driving charges in 2019 alone. This compares to 265 by this time in 2018, and 257 in 2017.

“The number of impaired-related charges are increasing in York Region,” he said. “An even more concerning trend is we have arrested so far this year 23 persons found passed out behind the wheel of a motor vehicle.”

But, the York Regional Police, he added, are far from giving up on getting these numbers to trend downward. They have a commitment to “frontline and road safety officers, relentless education and awareness messaging in our communities” including the naming of impaired drivers pulled over each week.

“As these impaired stats are increasing, so are the number of calls from members of the public,” he continued. “Year to date, we have received 794 calls, up from 636 in 2017. This key community partnership and the engagement of our community is integral in the enforcement surrounding impaired driving. What is clear is our community no longer wants to tolerate sharing the roads with these impaired drivers.

“York Regional Police is proud to continue to lead this fight and we won't give up. We recognize and appreciate the support of our community, our media partners, and our community partners, partners such as MADD York Region. Members of MADD have been engaged with hundreds of impaired driving tragedies and have dealt with thousands of devastated victims; not an easy job by any means. Words can never address the significance of their efforts.”

Nor can they address the drive they have to make a difference.

“I wish I knew [how to make people get the message on impaired driving],” she said. “Plan ahead. You have so many options to get home if you're impaired. Don't drive.”