



Seasons Greetings

From Sheriff Bob Gualtieri

As we broach the pinnacle of the holiday season and count down the final days of 2017, we look forward to social celebrations and new years' resolutions with high expectations. But during a busy season of festivities and driving, plans for the future can plummet as quickly as the ball in Times Square if you don't take the proper precautions.

In 2015, 10,265 people were killed in alcohol-impaired driving crashes, which accounts for 29 percent of all traffic-related deaths in the United States, according to the Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

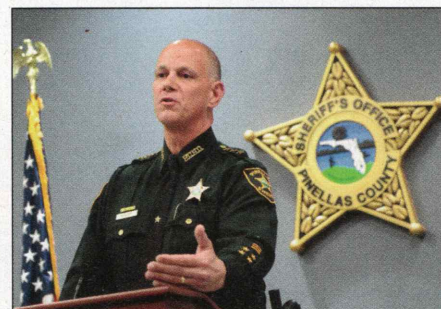
One death due to impaired driving is too many, let alone one every 51 minutes, and it is not always the irresponsibly impaired driver whose life is lost. In 2015, 181 children – occupants of vehicles with impaired drivers, occupants of other vehicles, pedestrians/

bicyclists, etc. – died in alcohol-impaired-driving crashes, according to the NHTSA. If potential lives lost aren't enough motivation to stay away from the driver's seat after drinking alcohol or taking other impairing drugs and medications, consider the tremendous financial burden that comes with a driving while impaired (DWI) charge.

According to the NHTSA, DWI costs range from \$5,000 to \$20,000, with the national average at \$10,000. If you cause a crash, injury, or death, the costs are even higher – not to mention the incalculable value of a lost life.

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office conducts several DUI Wolf Pack operations throughout the county year-round to reduce deaths, injuries, and property damage associated with traffic crashes related to impaired driving, and the holiday season is no exception.

Fortunately, drug- and alcohol-impaired driving is easily preventable.



The obvious – and only – option for people who, for whatever reason, must drive, is to abstain from consuming mind-altering substances. However, if you are of legal drinking age, there are several alternate transportation options available.

Designating a responsible driver whom you can trust to abstain from drugs and alcohol to drive you is likely the cheapest option. Taxi services and ride-share programs like Uber and Lyft are also excellent options to get you home safely at relatively low costs – especially when compared to a \$10,000 DWI.

In this busy season of parties, travel, and often drinking, holiday plans could end in tragedy if you don't take the proper safety precautions. I urge you to be responsible, plan ahead, and DON'T drive while impaired – now, or at any time of year.

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