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Caution urged on busiest bar night of the year

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While Michigan residents are getting ready to spend time with family and eat turkey tomorrow, what's the most common activity tonight?

Going out to the bar.

The night before Thanksgiving is known as the biggest bar night of the year for a reason, which means it's also the biggest night of the year for drunken driving.

According to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Michigan has the 13th highest number of deaths in the nation due to drunk driving, and on the night before Thanksgiving, the rate of drunken driving is even higher.

"It's usually one of the busiest nights of year. Hopefully that won't be the case this year," said Troy police Lt. Bob Redmond. "Typically we have extra people working from the traffic safety unit because the number (of accidents) is higher."

A deputy from the Rochester Hills substation said the span between midnight and 4 a.m. is the most dangerous time to be on the road that night. "If you don't have to be on the roads at that time, I recommend not being on the road," he said. "Be extremely conscious and drive in a defensive manner. Expect the unexpected."

South Lyon resident Krystine Stanny said she will be spending the night at a friend's house, which she advises others to do to prevent drunken driving.

"I would recommend drinking at home, finding a designated driver or walking home if it's close enough," Stanny said.

Steven Gursten, an auto accident attorney at Michigan Auto Law in Farmington Hills, said every year the firm receives about 20 phone calls about accidents caused by drunken driving during the Thanksgiving weekend.

"The number of phone calls we get is astounding. They almost always include alcohol as a factor and almost always are younger drivers," Gursten said. "There's always a sense of immortality with younger

drivers. They see friends, which is wonderful, but then they drink too much, which is not wonderful, and then they get behind a wheel. You can go into any bar on Wednesday and you'll see a lot of alcohol being consumed. Simple precautions, like having a designated driver, (are) not happening.”

Gursten advises people to think about driving arrangements before they begin drinking because alcohol not only impairs driving ability, but also judgment, so people think they are fine to drive when they aren't.

“Try to eat something, stay hydrated, alternate your drinks with water, and most importantly, know your limits and adhere to them,” Gursten said. “You could be the safest driver in the world, but there are a lot of drunks out there who will run a red light and won't stop when they're behind you. Try to stay off the road when drunk drivers are most likely out and, if you have to be on the road, drive defensively. Wear a seat belt, don't be on the phone and for God's sake, don't text. You really have to be a defensive driver on the weekend.”

Motorists should check to see if they have uninsured and underinsured motorist coverage because, Gursten said, most insurance policies cover motorists when they cause an accident but not when the accident is caused by someone who is uninsured or underinsured.

“Now you can protect yourself from a drunk driver who has no insurance or very minimum insurance,” he said.

Red Ox Tavern, located at 3773 East Walton Boulevard in Auburn Hills, is particularly busy on the night before Thanksgiving because it is located across the street from Oakland University. Diane Snyder, bartender at Red Ox Tavern, said that it is possible to go out to the bar and stay safe.

"Watch what you drink. One drink per hour. Watch the amount of shots you are consuming. Be aware. If you're drinking tall beers, you're going to get drunk a lot faster," she said.

Snyder said that there are designated driving services to prevent people from driving while they are drunk, and Snyder encourages people to set up services such as these before going out.

“This is also a great time to remind our licensees that is their responsibility to make sure that they do not over-serve their patrons,” said Nida Samona, Chairperson of the Michigan Liquor Control Commission and Bloomfield Township resident. “Owning a liquor license is a privilege, not a right, and part of that responsibility is helping to keep our citizens safe this holiday season and every other day of the year.”

For more information on safety tips on the biggest bar night of the year, visit Michigan Auto Lawyers Blog at www.michiganautolaw.com/auto-lawyers-blog/

FYI

If you don't have a designated driver on the biggest bar night of the year, don't let that be your excuse for drinking and driving.

The Designate, a Troy-based company with a fleet of professional drivers, provides transportation to get people and their cars home safely after a night of drinking.

"We are excited about the increase in business because it tells us people are making smarter choices at the end of the evening," said Tom Proctor, the owner of the Designate. "We are offering the first reservation with The Designate for just \$20 so people can see how great the service is and make it part of their regular routine when enjoying a night on the town."

The Designate operates seven days a week from 5:30 p.m. to 2:30 a.m.

For more information, call 1-888-929-8282 or visit www.thedesignate.com.