

Douglas County rolls out DUI task force

Written by Katherine Garcia

OMAHA, Neb. — Toby Antonson said he misses his mom, Terry, every single day.

"We'll never find peace," Antonson said. "In fact, we just celebrated another Mother's Day without my mom."

Antonson said the driver who hit her that afternoon was drunk.

"This impaired driver, this was his fourth D.U.I. in three different states," Antonson said.

Project Extra Mile is a nonprofit that focuses on policies related to drinking and driving and supports increases in alcohol prices and harsher penalties for D.U.I. offenses.

"It's a huge problem," said Project Extra Mile executive director Chris Wagner.

Wagner said D.U.I. rates are especially concerning in Douglas County.

"Looking at the last five years of Douglas County crash data, [there were] over 500 alcohol-related crashes each year," Wagner said.

Back in 2019, the organization reached out to local law enforcement agencies including Douglas County to find a way to tamp down those numbers.

"We got together and thought, 'We could probably make a greater impact if we pull our resources together,'" said Douglas County sheriff Tom Wheeler.

Wheeler said through this task force, specialized officers across Douglas County including his office, Omaha Police Department, Nebraska State Patrol and Ralston Police Department will be paid overtime to look for drivers under the influence as a unit. Wheeler said the unit will be privately funded by Project Extra Mile.

"Agencies getting together in a roll call beforehand, getting the game plan, what part of town are we going to this time around and then we'll sort of fan out and find out what areas we need to hit," Wheeler said.

Wheeler said the key is drivers won't know when or where these officers will be.

"We're just asking folks to drink responsibly," Wheeler said. "Don't drive after you drink. If you do, you'll be arrested."