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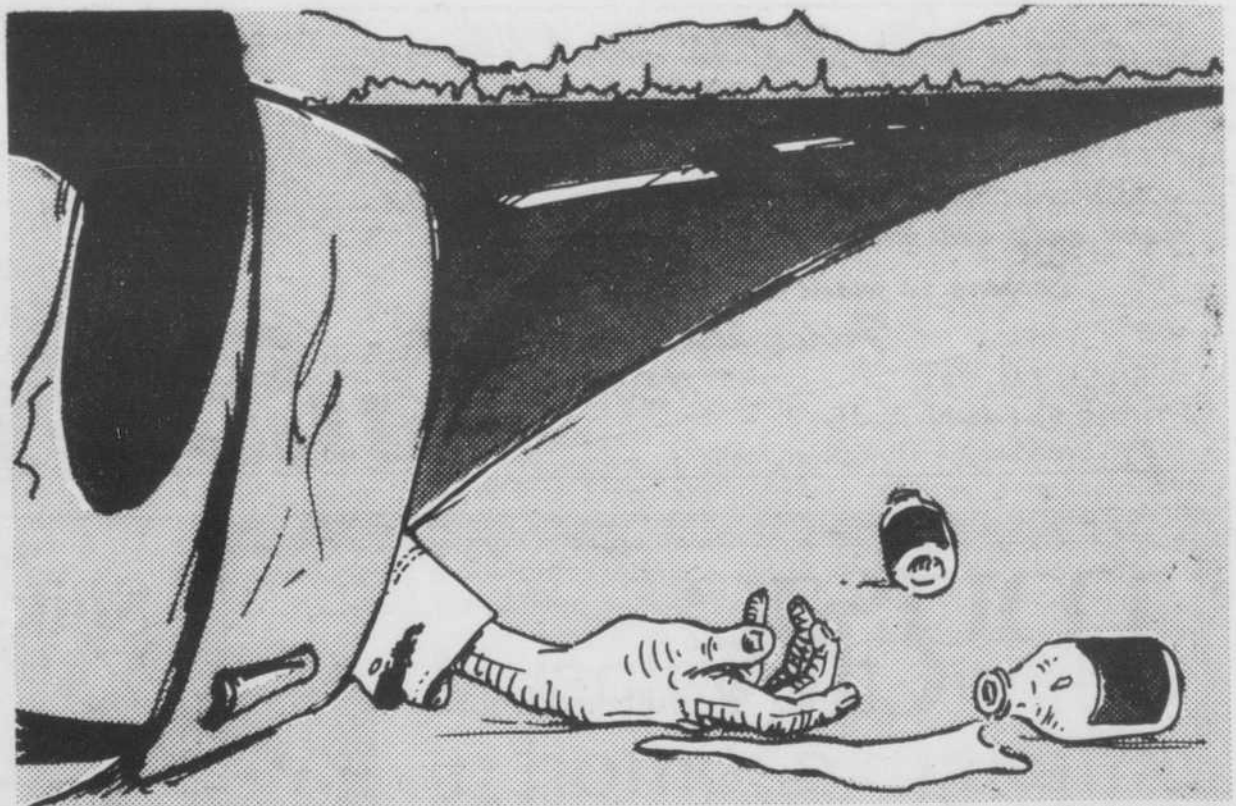
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Graphic by Betsy Charlton

Deaths force woman to act

By Sean Meyers
Of the Emerald

"This was a Sunday in August, August 12. My son and his best friend had ridden their bikes out beyond Armitage Park," Barbara Stoeffler remembers, her story well outlined and her voice betraying a trace of pain.

"On their way back, they had reached the straight stretch in the road just south of Armitage, where a Willamete High Class reunion was just breaking up.

"One of the class members argued with his wife about whether he was too drunk to drive. He took the keys, and started up the pick-up."

At this point, the Eugene woman pauses to adjust her glasses. She hesitates a moment before continuing.

"I don't know what adjectives to use. I get a little strong with this," she says, and pauses again. "He then drove at a rapid rate of speed to where my son and his friend were. He stated that he didn't see them.

"He hit my son, throwing his body 67 feet through the air over his best friend's shoulder, and he landed in a ditch and was killed instantly."

Mark Stoeffler, 15, died in 1973. For nearly eight years, Mrs. Stoeffler stoically accepted her son's death until a friend's tragedy was fully realized.

Last January, Lisa Strayer, 23, was exiting Eugene's Washington-Jefferson bridge onto a one-way ramp, where she met a drunk driver who was driving the wrong way. The resulting head-on collision killed both drivers.

After this accident, Stoeffler went into action. "It was a terrible accident... crash. Any collision involving a drunk driver is not an accident," Stoeffler says. "Every weekend there is a long list of people who have been killed. Weekends are the worst... I knew something had to be done."

In July, Stoeffler and other concerned citizens banded together to form a Lane County chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD).

In September, Stoeffler was also named to the newly-created Governor's Task Force on Driving Under the Influence of Intoxicants, which includes 13 citizens that, through tragedy or career choice, have become involved with com-

bating alcohol-related traffic offenses.

Although it may seem Oregon is just starting to get tough with drunk drivers, at least one source thinks the state has had a good record in the past decade.

A Sept. 13 cover story in Newsweek magazine said "Oregon has had the most experience — its crackdown began in 1971 — and the most success. During the '70s highway fatalities dropped 6 percent (while) Oregon's fatality rate declined 35 percent despite the presence of 46 percent more drivers and 62 percent more vehicles."

But that "crackdown", says Stoeffler, was started by the Oregon State Police and met with heavy resistance from the general public. It was only recently, she says, that the public began supporting the program.

Even with the efforts, well over 300 people died in Oregon in 1981 because of alcohol-related crashes. Stoeffler says that number can be substantially lowered.

"It is really our biggest crime problem in Oregon, although it's not identified as being a crime by most," says Stoeffler. "The general attitude across the nation in the past has been that it is socially acceptable to drive a car after leaving a party or tavern."

The new Lane County chapter of MADD wants to turn those ideas around. The self-description of MADD, a national agency with headquarters in California, is "an organization of victims, survivors and concerned citizens determined to reduce deaths and injuries resulting from driving under the influence."

The organization's objectives are to speak for victims, initiate legislative reforms, increase public awareness of the problem of drunken driving, monitor local court programs and procedures, and to coordinate seminars directed at various school and public audiences.

The group welcomes interested parties regardless of age or sex. Stoeffler is hopeful a University campus extension of SADD — Students Against Drunk Drivers — can someday be organized.

Stoeffler welcomes inquiries about MADD. She is listed in the Eugene phone book.

"If we can just save one person..." Stoeffler says, not completing the sentence. "But I know we can do more than that."

Ah, yessss....

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