

Free program assists drunk drivers

Tow companies offer holiday service

By Janis Joseph
Emerald Reporter

For anyone planning on drinking too many hot toddies during the holidays, Oregon Life Tow, a free towing service for people too drunk to drive, may be something to keep in mind.

Oregon Life Tow, sponsored by Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Oregon Tow Truck Association, is a new state-wide program offered 24 hours a day almost anywhere Oregon, said Donna Fischer, president of Clackamas county chapter of MADD.

"With Oregon Life Tow in operation from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, we can honestly claim that there is no reason for anyone to drink and drive this holiday season," Fischer said.

Thirty members of the OTTA, will provide a free ride and tow to anyone calling the Oregon Life Tow number, 1-800-243-4450. Anyone may request the tow, whether it is the driver, a friend or a bartender. Tows will deliver people to their homes at no charge within a 25-mile radius of the pick-up point, she said.

If the person's home is farther than 25 miles, tows may charge a small fee. Vicki Means, dispatcher for F & M Towing in Springfield, said

they charge \$1.75 per mile after the 25 mile radius.

Fischer said tows will put a program flyer in the car explaining to the driver how they and their vehicle reached home safely and request a donation to MADD to fund the program next year.

No Eugene towing companies are participating in the program, and the closest tow would be from Springfield, said Al Elkins, OTTA president.

The towing companies are donating their time, fuel and other costs, Means said.

"By focusing the public's attention toward alternatives to driving after drinking, drivers who take advantage of this program could save themselves from the unpleasant consequences of drinking and driving," Fischer said.

If the program works well over the holidays, it may be extended year-round at the suggestion of OTTA, said Kay Glazer, vice-president of MADD.

"It sounds like a dream come true," said Jon LaBranch, manager of Rennie's Landing. He added that the restaurant would definitely use the service.

"Being in the towing business, we see a lot of drunk driving accidents," Means said. "Although it costs the towing company about \$40 per tow, it is worth it even if

they could save one life. It's something we feel very strongly about and believe in it."

Similar programs have been offered for years primarily by Portland towing companies although this is the first year companies from around the state are participating. The only counties that do not offer free towing are Josephine and Umatilla, Fischer said.

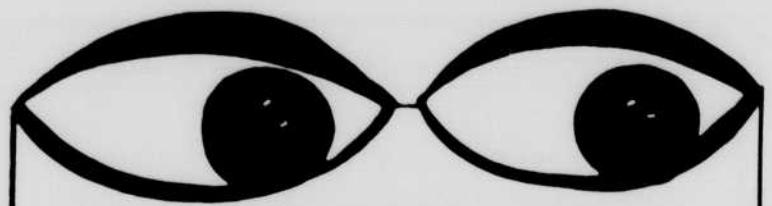
"We know of other similar programs in smaller areas or on a limited-time basis, but nothing has ever been attempted on this scale before," Fischer said. "MADD chapters all over the country have expressed interest in our program."

"The calls go into automobile association and are dispatched from there," Fischer said. "So far, they have received four calls, but are expecting more around New Year's Eve."

The money to initiate the program was raised through private donations and was originally about \$3,200. However, they have now received more than \$4,600, Fischer said.

Although the towing companies do check identification to find out where the person lives before a tow is given, the names are confidential and are not given out, Glazer said.

"We're simply trying to save some lives," she said.



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Politicians, lobbyists seek homeless aid

By Greg Hough
Emerald Contributor

A coalition of area politicians and grass-roots lobbyists are planning a major campaign to persuade the State Emergency Board to make more money available for the homeless.

State Sen. Larry Hill (D-Springfield) will request during the board's Dec. 14 meeting that the state provide about \$700,000 to help cities around Oregon provide winter housing for the homeless, said Legislative Assistant Randy MacDonald, a spokesman for Hill's office. Hill was out of town and unavailable for comment, MacDonald said.

Hill, who is a member of the board, will be aided by Steve Manela, the program services coordinator for Lane County Housing and Human Services, and by Carol Seaton, organizer of the Homeless Outreach Program, a local activist group. She said the group is one month old and consists of 14 members — 10 of them homeless.

The board tabled a similar aid proposal advocated by Hill last month, MacDonald said. The latest plan calls for matching fund requirements for cities and counties to gain access to state money.

"I think right now we're looking at two components of the plan," Manela said. "The first is the offering the matching funds; the second is to make emergency assistance available to eligible families through the Aid to Dependent

Children program."

He said that Lane County did a survey last month showing that 588 families were turned away from shelters during October.

Kevin Concannon, director of the state department of human resources, is working with Governor Neil Goldschmidt's office to formulate the agenda for next week's meeting.

"We expect that with current funds we could raise \$250,000 to \$300,000 a year for long-term problems with homelessness," Concannon said. "We are formulating a plan where we would draw out 10 percent of state housing funds to fund the program."

Concannon said he will be meeting with Goldschmidt this week or next to review the proposal, one he expects the governor to approve.

Seaton said she got involved because she thinks the state has yet to acknowledge the problem of homelessness as a state-wide emergency.

"I don't think the board understands how difficult and exhausting poverty is," Seaton said. "The homeless are people in poverty — not just people who are poor, but people who see themselves as having no way out, as having no political representation."

Seaton says her group is organizing a letter campaign to the board to advocate granting the proposal to the board.

"I think letter writing campaigns are a very helpful way to convince people that there is an emergency," Seaton said.

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