Display shows danger of drinking, driving

By Robyn Flans
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At Moorpark's annual Third of July Fireworks Extravaganza on Tuesday, a new tool was unveiled to help the community at large understand the dangers of drinking and driving.

The Ventura County Behavioral Health Unit and the Ventura Police Department used grant money to purchase a trailer to display a mangled car that was involved in a local DUI accident. It will be used by police departments throughout the area at various civic events.

"Obviously, its purpose is to send a message and impact the citizens of the consequences of drinking and driving," said Bernadette Compean, alcohol enforcement officer for the Ventura Police Department.

The walls of the trailer were replaced with glass windows for a view of the car. Videos play inside, telling the story of the vehicle and its situation.

The car on display was from a November accident in Ventura that involved two lifelong 24-year-old friends who had been out celebrating the driver's birthday.

"They had been drinking throughout the afternoon and evening," said Capt. Ron Nelson of the Moorpark Police Department. "The passenger was over a 0.30 blood alcohol concentration and the driver was a 0.16, I believe. While he was driving, he received a text message, so he was manipulating his phone and drifted over to the right and crashed into a truck that was parked alongside the road, killing the passenger instantly. The passenger was not wearing a seat belt."

The driver was arrested on an accusation of gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated with an enhancement for serious felony and he pleaded guilty, according to Compean.

The display seemed to make the desired impression at the Moorpark event.

A couple of girls were looking at it and remarking to one another how scary it looked. After hearing the details of the story, Marisa Ybarra said: "A lot of the kids in my school do that."

Krista Polla, of Moorpark, said: "It's scary and brings you down to earth. You don't realize sometimes and you just think, 'I'll just have a drink,' so this makes you think and it makes very real. I think all teenagers should have to see this before they go through driver's education."

John Boucher, of Simi Valley, agreed that the display was educational for
younger drivers.

"This is what drinking and driving can do," he said. "This is a great display for young people."

His wife, Elizabeth, said: "Not just young people. This is great at an event, especially where alcohol goes with the holiday. It sends a message to people to be safe when they're out with friends."

Compean believes the success of the program lies in the reality-based element.

"They've been utilizing these crash cars for a number of years, and the impact is very far-reaching," Compean said. "This is not just a car that is crunched up that we're trying to put off as something that could happen. It's an actual story of someone who was in that vehicle. The visual is impacting, but when they hear the story ... people don't want to hear what-ifs; they want to hear what really happened."

Nelson said: "The goal will be to change out the car with recent stories, so people can connect and it will have an impact."