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Battling the scourge of drunken driving is ongoing

Bill Elliott For The Press

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(This spring, The Press asked community leaders for updates on their efforts as they fight for change.)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been flooded with bad news about the mounting death toll, thousands of closed businesses and millions of unemployed. Still, our collective efforts seem to be helping, as self-isolation, practicing social distancing, and wearing masks are “flattening the curve” of new infections, and slowly businesses are beginning to open.

John would have accomplished great things had he lived. He was a natural leader, with an infectious sense of humor. They called him “Jumbo” because of his big smile and even bigger heart. In his senior year he was voted the Outstanding “HERO” in his class for his service as a Human Education Resource Officer.

In October 2000, we established the John R. Elliott HERO Campaign to promote designated driving and carry on John’s positive spirit of service with the hope that we could prevent others from experiencing the pain we have endured.

In early 2001, John’s Law was enacted, requiring police throughout the state to impound the cars of those arrested for DUI for 12 hours. Each year, according to N.J. State Police statistics, approximately 30,000 cars are impounded under John’s Law.

The HERO Campaign has grown into a multistate movement. Based at Stockton University, we have partnered with schools and colleges, highway safety agencies, police departments, NFL and Major League Baseball teams and bar and tavern owners. More than 100,000 supporters have taken our online HERO Pledge not to drink and drive. A recent poll at Stockton’s Hughes Center for Public Policy found that many residents of Atlantic and Cape May counties have become designated drivers after seeing our HERO Campaign billboards and bumper stickers or participating in our annual HERO Walk.

In 2019, we partnered with the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, Uber and The Press of Atlantic City to launch the region’s first HERO Safe Ride Program, providing free rides home from Atlantic City-area bars and taverns during the holiday season. We plan to resume the program once bars and casinos reopen. A growing number of police departments have wrapped patrol cars with the HERO message, and more than 30 bars, clubs and casinos participated in last summer’s HEROtini Mocktail Challenge to create great-tasting nonalcoholic drinks for designated drivers.

This summer we will distribute 1,000 HERO masks -rt- dtlaay seckers -M

