



COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION
MUSCATINE CITY HALL
215 SYCAMORE STREET
MUSCATINE, IA 52761
PH. (563) 264-1550

CITY OF MUSCATINE PRESS RELEASE

For more information contact:

Kevin Jenison
Communication Manager
Public Information Officer
Muscatine City Hall
(563) 264-1550
kjenison@muscatineiowa.gov

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MUSCATINE PD HONORED FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY EFFORT

Traffic Enforcement Unit receives Commissioner's Award for Occupant Protection

MUSCATINE, Iowa – The Traffic Enforcement Unit of the Muscatine Police Department was recently honored at the 32nd Annual Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau (GTSB) Conference with the presentation of the 2024 Commissioner's Award for Traffic Safety for their outstanding efforts in occupant protection.

The conference was held in the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny June 5-7. The Occupant Protection Award is given to an individual/team/organization who has continuously promoted occupant protection with innovative programming, and who planned/implemented/participated in effective





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initiatives directed at child restraint or seat belt usage.

"We have been at 95-96 percent in occupant protection (seat belt use) the past several years," Lieutenant Ryan Buss of the Traffic Enforcement Unit said. "And that says a lot about our community."

Corporal Matt Fowler added that safety is the primary objective of the unit.

"People will remember you if you are nice to them but will not remember the lesson or the reason for wearing seatbelts," Cpl. Fowler said. "A ticket, however, is a stronger reminder of the lesson of why it is important to wear seat belts."

The Traffic Enforcement Unit, created in 2022 from a GTSB grant, has dedicated a great deal of time and effort into taking traffic violations seriously and making an impact for the betterment of the entire community.

"I am pleased to announce that we were granted this distinction by the Commissioner of Public Safety and the GTSB," Lt. Buss said. To my knowledge we have never received this type of award."

Cpl. Fowler and Captain Jeff Jirak were at the GTSB conference to accept the award.

According to the Iowa Crash Analysis Tool (ICAT), Muscatine has had eight fatality accidents within city limits of Muscatine since 2014.

"If we were to have eight homicides in that same time frame, consider the amount of time and resources that would be focused on those eight individual cases," Lt. Buss said. "While we may



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not consider traffic enforcement a focal point in our department, a small amount of effort truly does bring about changes in the driving behaviors of our community and therefore makes it safer to drive on the streets of Muscatine."

Cpl. Fowler recalled a presentation during the conference that compared crime with traffic incidents. A murder occurs every 34 minutes in the United States but a traffic fatality occurs every 16 minutes, and a violent crime occurs every 24 seconds while a traffic injury occurs every 14 seconds. And while a property crime occurs every four seconds, a property damage crash occurs every six seconds.

"There is not a lot of emphasis put on traffic deaths and/or injuries by the public because of the nature of the incident," Cpl. Fowler said. "Murders and violent crime will always get more attention."

Wearing seat belts is just one part of the Occupant Protection work. The other parts include slowing down and obeying traffic control devices. Putting on the seat belt can save your life and the lives of those in your vehicle.

"You are 18 times more likely to be killed in an accident if you are not wearing a seatbelt," Cpl. Fowler said.

Since its founding in 2022, the Traffic Enforcement Unit has issued 143 citations for Occupant Protection. The top four citations are for speeding, not wearing a seat belt, operating under the influence, and, climbing quickly up the charts, is distracted driving.



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"We have had several accidents recently, both in town and in the county, where distracted driving played a part in the cause of the accidents," Lt. Buss said. "This is a growing problem and one that we hope we can help to change."

Lt. Buss added that a lot of people just think we are targeting them when they are stopped under this program, but he wants the people to know that it is all about reducing the number of accidents, injuries in the accidents, and excessive speeding.

"The one thing not often realized is the potential lives that have been saved due to changing driving behavior through issuing citations or, at the very least, providing warnings for the behavior."

Lt. Buss gave a big "thank you" to all those who have dedicated their time and effort into the area of traffic enforcement.

"Your efforts to educate the public and make Muscatine a safer place is positive recognition to the Muscatine Police Department and to our community," Lt. Buss said.

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