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Kansas transportation safety award winners honored

TOPEKA - The Kansas Department of Transportation honored five Kansans with Transportation Safety Recognition Awards for their efforts to improve traffic safety. The awards were presented today at the 25th Annual Transportation Safety Conference that took place April 2-3 in Wichita.

Recipients are honored in two categories - People Saving People Award and the Hero Award.

The People Saving People Award recognizes an individual or organization that has made outstanding contributions to the improvement of transportation safety behavior in Kansas. The 2019 recipients are:

Rita Lesser, Perry – Lesser teaches at Perry-Lecompton High School and also serves as the sponsor for SAFE (Seatbelts Are For Everyone). As the SAFE sponsor, she teaches students about seat belt usage and distracted and impaired driving by creatively utilizing sidewalk messages, PSAs on YouTube, pledge cards, posters, window painting, health fair booths, drunk goggles and the Convincer (a crash simulator).

Amber Rollins, Olathe – Rollins is the Director of KidsAndCars.org, an organization that focuses attention on children left unattended in or around vehicles. She was instrumental in the passing of a Good Samaritan law (HB 2516) in Kansas to protect citizens from liability if they break into a vehicle to rescue a trapped child, vulnerable adult or animal.

Overland Park Police Department – The Overland Park Police Department utilized the Data-Driven Approach to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS) to significantly reduce the number of crashes at Oak Park Mall and two major intersections adjacent to the mall. Officers focused on hazardous traffic violations and made every effort to monitor seat

belt violations, distracted driving, teen drivers and motorists driving while impaired. As a result, overall crashes were reduced by 17 percent - from 214 crashes in 2017 to 177 in 2018.

The Hero Award recognizes the individual who risked his or her own life for someone else when they happened upon a crash or while trying to prevent the likelihood of a crash in a one-time traffic safety-related incident. The 2019 recipients are:

Deputy Robert K. Kunze, III, Sedgwick County – Kunze demonstrated extreme bravery and courage during a traffic stop in which he was mortally wounded but still managed to pursue and capture his assailant. He very likely saved the lives of two citizens onsite at the traffic stop and all the responding law enforcement officers who followed.

Sergeant Mitchell Talley, Miami County – Talley responded to a medical call in which a man was bleeding from a self-inflicted four-inch laceration on the left side of his neck. Talley believed the victim had severed an artery, and he continuously applied pressure to the area until EMS arrived and took over. The man survived because of Talley's meritorious actions.

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