District Attorney’s DUI Prosecution Team Renews Efforts

The District Attorney’s Office is continuing the successful work of a specialized Vertical Prosecution Unit focused on Driving under the Influence (DUI) offenses, particularly repeat offenders and those involved in fatal or injury crashes. Late last year, the DA’s Office announced that a $421,000 grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety has been renewed to fund the efforts of this special team.

What training do team members go through and how do they work towards reducing and preventing impaired driving?

The prosecution team, which includes Prosecutors Traci Lee, Matt L’Heureux and a veteran District Attorney Investigator, is unique in that it stays with cases throughout the criminal process. In fatal and major injury DUI vehicle collisions, members of the team may even start by going to the crash scene to be part of the investigation. In 2010 there were 245 deaths and injuries as a result of DUI crashes in Monterey County.

“Driving under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or a combination of both is a very serious problem in Monterey County” says District Attorney Dean Flippo. “This grant funding will permit us to focus direct attention on the problem and bring those responsible to justice in a more efficient and effective manner.”
Ed Hazel, Managing Deputy District Attorney, says during the last grant year, the team had many accomplishments, focusing its efforts on securing increased penalties for DUI offenders, particularly repeat offenders, as well as taking part in training and community prevention events.

- The unit holds quarterly roundtable meetings with local law enforcement agencies. Participants have included agencies such as California Highway Patrol, Salinas, Monterey and Carmel Police Departments as well as south Monterey County law enforcement agencies. Topics discussed include trends in DUI investigations and new court decisions such as the McNeely decision from the US Supreme Court which changed the way law enforcement can secure blood samples from DUI suspects.

> “It was important for our lawyers to convey the new standard to as many officers as possible so that new procedures could be established,” explains Hazel.
> “Prosecutors developed a sample search warrant format that could be used by officers in the field. Evidence of alcohol consumption and a person’s blood alcohol concentration dissipates over time, so if a search warrant is to be obtained it is critical that this be done as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

- Prosecutors provided blocks of training to various county law enforcement agencies, sessions ranging from 30 minutes to 3 hours, covering such areas as drugged DUI investigations, vehicular manslaughter involving a DUI investigations and report writing. Approximately 200 local officers have received this training so far.

- Team members took part in prevention programs such as the local CHP Smart Start Program, a driver safety education class targeting new and future drivers ages 15-19 and their parents/guardians. Staff also participated at the “Every 15 Minutes” program at Marina and North County High Schools, a program that puts students through a real life experience of the aftermath of a drinking and texting while driving accident.

- Prosecutors receive specialized training to better understand the intricacies of DUI investigations and the signs of impairment related to drugs, alcohol, or a combination of both in order to explain these issues to juries.

Two team members last year, Kellin Dunne and Ashley Hendon, received the Outstanding Prosecutors Award from the California Office of Traffic Safety, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Monterey-San Benito and Santa Cruz Counties AVOID Campaigns in April 2013.
County Staffers Share Experiences with AgKnowledge Program

Over the last seven years, Monterey County employees from a variety of departments have participated in AgKnowledge, an educational and leadership program which gives participants opportunity to “walk in the shoes of a farmer” and experience Monterey County through the eyes of those directly involved in the many facets of agriculture in our community.

AgKnowledge is a project of the Growers-Shippers Association Foundation and co-sponsored by the County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office.

The program is a 10-month curriculum delving into a broad range of agricultural issues such as:

- Historical, cultural context of Monterey County agriculture
- Agricultural economics, global markets, world competition, trade issues and trends in the market place
- Innovation, production technology, research, intellectual property rights
- Food Safety and Security
- Water
- Land use
- Workforce and Labor
- Diverse and complex political landscape

The AgKnowledge class of 2013 graduated in November of last year and county employees taking part were:

Jayanti Addleman, County Librarian
Ric Encarnacion, Health Department
Christina McGinnis, Agriculture Commissioner’s Office
David Spaur, Economic Development Department Director
Nicole Fowler, Health Department
Maria De La Fuente, County Director, University of California Cooperative Extension
Comments from participants indicate they came away from the program with a better understanding of the county’s #1 economic industry.

“AgKnoweldge has reassured me that the Agricultural Industry is committed to food safety. I found common ground between the food safety practices managed on the farm with the rules and regulations I am familiar with in my occupation as an Environmental Health Specialist with the County of Monterey.”

-Ric Encarnacion, Health Department

“I gained new perspectives on the breadth and depth of private industry, especially one that has so many ties to the food we eat and our environment. I enjoyed being able to share my perspectives about groundwater quality, food safety, etc. that sometimes corroborated with the presenter and other times dovetailed on their ideas. I left every session feeling energized and aligned with the topic ‘du jour.’”

-Nicole Fowler, Health Department

Credit Union Serving County Employees Receives High Rating

The allU.S. Credit Union (formerly Monterey County Employee Credit Union) has some good news to share with members, which include hundreds of Monterey County employees. Weiss Ratings, a leading independent provider of ratings and analyses of financial service companies, mutual funds and stocks, has given the credit union a financial strength rating of “A” or “Excellent.”

The credit union was formed in 1950 to provide services to the employees of Monterey County and their families. Since then it has expanded its field of membership to include a select number of employer groups.

For more information about allU.S. Credit Union go to [www.alluscu.com](http://www.alluscu.com).