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News

New police initiative targets young drivers

By Erin Fawcett - Red Deer Express

Published: April 16, 2014 8:13 AM



MAKING A DIFFERENCE – From left, Corey Adams, YIELD member and RCMP Const. Lee Watt, who is also vice president of operations for the YIELD car initiative, stand in front of the '79 Pontiac LeMans used in the program.

by Jenna Swan/Red Deer Express

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As the weather warms up and the snow continues to melt, members of the RCMP YIELD car initiative are looking forward to hitting the pavement all the while educating youth at the same time.

YIELD stands for Youth Initiatives & Education in Lifestyles & Driving and Red Deer RCMP Const. Lee Watt, who is also vice president of operations for the YIELD car initiative brought the program to the City late last year. The program began in 2003 and the RCMP partnered with the initiative in 2009. Today, it is mostly run by volunteer police officers.

“The program is about helping youth make positive decisions not only when driving but in life,” he said. “We know that collisions are responsible for many fatalities among youth aged 14 to 24. The YIELD program is designed to address the interests of that age group while channeling them into safe outlets with educational components.”

The RCMP unveiled their tricked out new YIELD car earlier this year in Red Deer. The '79 Pontiac LeMans has been painted in 1979 era RCMP blue and white and fitted with a 350 cubic inch engine producing 425 horsepower. The car is used in the YIELD program, a legal racing program designed to encourage youth to make smart decisions, both on and off the road.

“About one person a week in Canada dies from street racing. There has been glorification of street racing through movies like Fast & Furious and all the video games out there like Need for Speed.

“So the idea is to stop people from racing on the street and to come to the track and find out what legal racing is about,” said Watt. “Once they get a taste of legal racing often they are hooked.”

Watt said the YIELD car will be at Castrol Raceway near Nisku starting April 25. The program will run every night until and including Oct. 11.

“On Friday nights all summer, the YIELD team is there ready to take on anyone who wants to legally race the police,” said Watt. “Challengers get a t-shirt that says either ‘I raced the law and the law won’ or ‘I raced the law and

I won.' Whether we win or lose the race, it's a lot of fun connecting with youth in this way."

The YIELD team will also be on hand at community events as well as Cruise Nights in Red Deer on Thursdays and other Central Alberta raceways throughout the season as well. YIELD will also attend various drag shootouts and other events throughout the summer months.

The YIELD car has been at a few community events so far this year including the sportsman show in February and this past weekend's Let's Talk event.

"The feedback we've gotten from the public has been amazing. The reason why the program was expanded to Red Deer was because there was a demand from the young car community here," said Watt. "Everyone has been extremely welcoming of the program. It gives young kids a chance to hop in a real racecar and not only that, it is a police car, so it's always fun for kids.

"It's also allowed me to get to know the car community in Red Deer as a whole as well."

Watt said as part of the program, it is important to educate about the penalties a person can face if they do street race illegally.

A driver can be charged provincially or criminally. Provincially a driver could face a \$402 ticket and six demerits.

"If a driver is racing and endangers someone's life, they can be charged criminally with dangerous driving and if someone gets hurt, a driver can be charged with dangerous driving causing bodily harm."

The penalties for those charges if found guilty are steep.

If convicted of dangerous driving, a driver could face up to five years in prison and if convicted of dangerous driving causing bodily harm, a driver could face up to 15 years in prison.

In addition, police volunteers with the YIELD program also travel to schools and community events to promote education and healthy lifestyle choices for youth.

“The program allows the public an opportunity to interact with police outside of a police setting. We’re losing that face-to-face interaction and oftentimes police interact with individuals at their worst moments or when they’ve been caught making a mistake,” said Watt. “It’s important to get that positive interaction back with the public.”

Watt added he hopes he can continue to form relationships with the public and continue to educate them as well via the YIELD car initiative.

“Our goal is to just help people make good decisions not only in driving, but in life. So educating them about the consequences of drinking and driving and becoming productive members of society,” he said. “We hope to do more community events and more school events in the future.”

To keep up to date regarding where the YIELD team will be, check out their facebook page under YIELD Association or follow them on Twitter at @yieldracing.

efawcett@reddeerexpress.com

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