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Local Leader Participates in National Conference on Traffic Safety, Develops Strategies to Reduce Underage Drinking and Impaired Driving

With nearly one-third of alcohol-related driver crashes in Denton County involving a driver under age 25, the call for action is critical

(Denton, TX | March 15, 2022) Denton's Roxanne Del Rio participated this week in the nation's leading and largest conference on traffic safety, specifically to focus on reducing the region's underage drinking and impaired driving. Lifesavers – the National Conference on Highway Safety Priorities – is the world's largest gathering of leaders and advocates in traffic safety and was held in Chicago this week.

Del Rio currently serves as Dean of Students and Community Outreach at North Central Texas College and as a partner member of Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth, the state's leading voice on youth prevention. In her role at NCTC Del Rio leads a number of initiatives that help empower students and builds collaboration and partnerships throughout the community.

“Nothing could be more important than helping protect youth from the dangers of underage drinking, especially impaired driving injuries and death, said Del Rio. “With each of these needless incidents prevented, we're helping ensure our young adults have the chance to realize the strong futures and every dream they can imagine. The Lifesavers Conference provides invaluable insight – and truly can help us save lives.”

In her roles at NCTC, Del Rio spearheads work with TxSDY's Screening and Brief Intervention Program. Unique in its evidence-based approach, the program tackles the issue of underage and young adult drinking with preventative, rather than reactionary, tactics. SBI has proven to be a key resource for prevention of underage and dangerous drinking on college campuses, teaching educators, counselors and other professionals how to engage with students in new, proactive ways and provide them with tactics for accessing drinking behaviors and making informed decisions about drinking.

At the conference, Del Rio focused on developing best strategies for tackling the critical challenges of underage drinking and impaired driving. This work is of particular importance for Denton given the impact these challenges currently have on the community. In 2019, 28% of alcohol-related driver crashes in Denton County involved a driver under age 25, and the county is placed at one of the state's highest rankings for impaired driving crashes.

In Texas, the average age young people have their first drink is 13 years old, and nearly one-third of 7-12th grade students reported using alcohol in the past month, according to the most recent data available from the Texas School Survey. More than half (51%) of Texas college students reported using alcohol in the past month (Texas College Survey, 2021). According to this same survey, within the past month, 12% of college students report driving after drinking at least once, and 19% of students reported riding in a car with a peer that was high or drunk at least once in an average month.

With nearly 40 percent of all traffic fatalities in the state – more than 1,000 deaths per year – attributed to alcohol, Texas regularly ranks as the state with the highest number of alcohol-impaired driving fatalities in the country.

Panels throughout the two-day event included sessions on countermeasures to reduce impaired driving, how to address high-risk impaired drivers, leveraging data for effective strategies and how to best address underage drinking and younger drivers. More information about this year's and future conferences can be found at <https://lifesaversconference.org/>.

About Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth

Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth is the state's leading organization working to end underage alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. Founded in 1997 with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation administered by the American Medical Association, the statewide coalition builds on the strengths and successes of its longtime identity, Texans Standing Tall, while bringing new focus and energy to its mission of creating healthier and safer communities.

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