

Coalition Corner



Rhody Rides

In 2003, 55% of all Rhode Island traffic fatalities were alcohol related, earning Rhode Island a spot in the "fatal fifteen" list of states with the highest percentage of alcohol-related traffic deaths in the United States.

In 2004, one student at the University of Rhode Island decided it was time to turn the tide on drunk driving in South County. Judy Duhamel joined together with her friend Emily Anderson to design Rhody Rides, a safe-ride program modeled after Texas A&M's award winning CARPOOL system. Rhody Rides is not only the first safe-ride program of its kind in Rhode Island but also in all of New England.

How the program works: Rhody Rides provides safe alternative transportation to prevent URI students from driving under the influence of alcohol or riding with an intoxicated friend who refuses to turn over the keys. Each Rhody Rides car is operated by a student driver and a navigator who take a nonjudgmental stance toward the students they serve. **The patron(s) are always** brought directly from their location in the community to their home, never to another bar or party.

Led by a student executive board and staffed by 75 student volunteers, the program began operating on February 10, 2006. It runs on Friday and Saturday nights from 11 p.m. to 2:00 a.m.

Rhody Rides wants students to use but not abuse the program. They are running a media campaign on campus promoting the use of Rhody Rides as their last option when going out. Their message is as follows: Plan A – Rhody Rides wants students to plan ahead by selecting a designated driver who agrees not to drink and to provide a safe ride home. Plan B – If plan A fails, students can call Rhody Rides at (401) 874-9000 to arrange for a safe ride home with door-to-door service.

The program is primarily financially supported by the URI Student Senate. The University provides some supplemental operating funds. In addition, the program accepts donations from concerned business owners and citizens. Enterprise Car Rentals of Wakefield lends support by providing discounted rental vans to the program. This means there is no cost to the Narragansett community members who benefit from keeping drunk drivers off their streets. Rhody Rides also desires to have strong working relationships with the police forces in Narragansett and South Kingstown and appreciates the support of the Narragansett-URI Coalition.

The Town of Narragansett and the University of Rhode Island, working collaboratively through the Coalition, have taken several steps to discourage URI students from driving after drinking. Rhody Rides is designed to complement these prevention efforts as a fail-safe measure.

Judy Duhamel, current Rhody Rides President states "Rhody Rides has been an invaluable learning experience for me, and I couldn't be happier with the success we have had thus far. We have been so fortunate to have had the unbelievable support from the Common Ground Grant Committee, Student Life, the Greek System, and the Narragansett and South Kingstown communities."

Rhody Rides Coordinator, Catherine DeMaria, shares, "Rhody Rides is a unique safe-rides program, differing from other programs throughout the country through our close work with the URI Common Ground Research team to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of what we are trying to accomplish." In addition she states how impressed she has been by the students and "their unending dedication to the program and to their fellow students."

To learn more about Rhody Rides and what you can do to help support this student run program through financial contributions or services, please contact URI's Office of Student Life at (401) 874-2101 or email Rides@etal.uri.edu.

For more information about the Narragansett-URI Coalition, please e-mail or call Jim Hurton, Communications Subcommittee Chairperson at jhurton@narragansettri.com, 783-7121 or Paula Santos, Coalition Coordinator at pmsantos@uri.edu, 874-2583. Please visit our web site at www.uri.edu/alcohol/coalition.