

Woman saved by seatbelt hopes to be an example for others

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Posted: Thursday, February 10, 2011 12:15 am | Updated: 5:19 pm, Wed Feb 9, 2011.

By HANNAH STIFF, Chronicle Staff Writer |

Michaela Driscoll was driving to Hamilton on Dec. 29 to see her parents.

As Driscoll approached Three Forks, her car hit a patch of ice and Driscoll and her passenger, Shelby Richards, were tossed around as the vehicle hit a fence, rolled multiple times and landed in a freezing pond.

A passerby who witnessed the crash managed to pull the women out of the car and into his vehicle until help arrived. Both Driscoll and Richards escaped the wreck with only bumps and bruises -- all thanks to their seatbelts.

Driscoll was honored Wednesday with Buckle Up Greater Gallatin's "Saved by the Belt" award, created to recognize crash victims who survived by wearing seatbelts.

People traveling in cars without seatbelts fastened are 23 times more likely to die in a crash than seatbelt wearers, according to Harborview Medical Research Center.

"The award is a great opportunity to show people why it's so important to wear a seat belt," said Stacy Wesen, of Child Care Connections in Bozeman, the organization leading the effort to educate Gallatin Valley residents about the importance of seatbelts and child restraints.

In particular, she said, "We're trying to target young drivers who get in a lot of wrecks," Wesen said.

CCC has hung posters around Bozeman High School encouraging teens to buckle up and made morning announcements over the intercom asking students to drive safely.

As a "Saved by the Belt" recipient, Driscoll is expected to educate the public about seatbelt safety. Driscoll says she's happy to spread the message.

"I work at Nights Delight in the mall and I tell every customer that comes in to wear their seatbelts, to be prepared for winter storms," she said.

Wesen said the honor isn't a once-a-year prize.

"Anytime someone is involved in a crash, law enforcement has the potential to recommend them for the award," she said.

Seat belts must play a role in saving a life though, Wesen stipulated.

Driscoll plans to keep telling her story with the hope of sparing another life.

"It's not how long you're in the car," she said. "If you're in the car at all you need to wear a seatbelt."

Hannah Stiff can be reached at hstiff@dailychronicle.com

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