

north central news

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Court kicks off impact panel

A DUI conviction is normally associated with a series of painful losses. For the first-time offender the law requires a loss of time (court appearances); a loss of money (\$1,690 in fines, surcharges and fees, plus higher insurance rates); a loss of freedom (minimum 10 days in jail and a license suspension); and a loss of dignity (mandatory counseling and installation of an ignition interlock device).

What the law does not require is for the DUI convict to be reminded of the losses that drunken driving imposes on society. In order to drive home the consequences that bad decisions by some create for others, the Dreamy Draw Justice Court has begun hosting a Victim Impact Panel on the first Friday evening of every month.

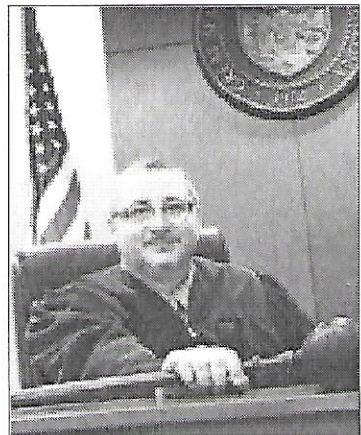
"The VIP is an emotional and moral education program conducted by the Arizona Archangel Foundation, a local nonprofit organization dedicated to a simple mission: forcing drunk drivers to examine the scars that their irresponsibility leaves behind," explained Judge Frank J. Conti, Dreamy Draw Justice of the Peace.

The Dreamy Draw Justice Court serves North Central and Northeast Phoenix as well as parts of Paradise Valley and Scottsdale.

A typical impact panel will last for two hours, and will feature one or more speakers who tell how their lives were changed forever by impaired driving. People like Heather Hurst, whose father, Gary, was killed by a drunk driver in Missouri in 1983. Or Aaron Fraser, a passenger in an alcohol-related accident who has been paralyzed and wheelchair-bound since 1985.

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COMMUNITY



Judge Frank J. Conti, the new Dreamy Draw Justice of the Peace, has adopted a policy where those convicted of DUI must listen to the stories of people victimized by drunk drivers (submitted photo).

will be required to attend a Victim Impact Panel in addition to the mandatory conditions of their sentence.

"Not because the law requires it, although perhaps it should," he pointed out. "I believe there is a chance that seeing the damage up close will prevent further losses. And along with this chance to make a difference comes the hope for a more enlightened citizenry."

Editor's note: Questions, comments or suggestions should be sent to Judge Conti at frankjconti@hotmail.com.

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"Heather and Aaron are real-life heroes; not just because they have endured a cruel twist of fate, but because they wake up every morning, take the lemons that fate handed them, and make lemonade for the rest of us," Judge Conti said.

"There is a big difference between reading about the suffering of others and seeing it with our own eyes. The VIP program awakens our conscience and reminds us of our duty toward our fellow man more directly than any other method—by forcing us to come face to face with real pain and heartache endured by real people."

As the newly elected Justice of the Peace, Conti instituted a new policy in the Dreamy Draw Justice Court where—by anyone convicted of DUI, alcohol-related reckless driving, or underage possession or consumption of alcohol

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