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## NEWS

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### ***FORD'S TEEN SAFE DRIVING EFFORTS LAUDED AS ILLINOIS TEEN FATALITIES REDUCED*** *Chicago schools win opportunity to participate in safety program at U.S. Cellular Field*

- State of Illinois partners with Ford Motor Company Fund's *Driving Skills for Life* program to help save teen lives
- Program provides web-based materials, comprehensive curriculum, and hands-on vehicle safety instruction for teenagers, parents and educators
- Ride and drive events being held in Chicago, Peoria and Belleville for winners of a state-wide competition for Illinois high schools
- Selected high schools in the Chicago area include: Curie Metro, Maria, Dunbar Vocational, and De La Salle Institute
- Driving Skills for Life helped dramatically reduce teen fatalities in Tazewell County, Ill.

Chicago, Ill., May 5, 2008 – Illinois state officials are crediting Ford Motor Company Fund's *Driving Skills for Life (DSFL)* teen safe driving program for helping reduce teen auto fatalities. Following a dramatic 61 percent reduction in teen auto fatalities thus far in 2008, the State of Illinois launches one of the nation's toughest teen safety campaigns – *Operation Teen Safe Driving* – modeled after *DSFL*. The goal is to continue the dramatic safety improvements that resulted in a drop in teen auto fatalities in the state from 57 in Jan. 1 – April 15, 2007 to 22 during the same period this year.

State officials attribute this dramatic reduction to a comprehensive approach, including driving instruction. As part of this strong commitment to driver education, Ford Motor Company Fund, the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) will provide several Illinois schools across the state the opportunity to participate in intensive DSFL ride and drive events that teach hands-on vehicle safety. The students will hone their skills in specially equipped vehicles on challenging driving courses under the supervision of professional instructors, including former Formula One and Indianapolis 500 drivers.

"The *Driving Skills for Life* program exemplifies a commitment to safety, not only by Ford Motor Company, but by an entire community," said Jim Graham, community relations manager of Ford Motor Company Fund. "We applaud the Illinois officials and teens around the state for making teen safe driving a top priority – we hope other states follow their lead."

Teen vehicle safety is a serious issue. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for persons ages 15 to 20. Teen drivers, mile to mile, are in three times as many fatal crashes as all other drivers. Nearly 7,000 teens die annually in traffic crashes, including 155 teen fatalities in Illinois during 2006.

Central Illinois was the site of one of the very first Illinois *DSFL* programs, launched in Tazewell County in early 2007. Between March 2005 and July 2006, 15 teens lost their lives in auto accidents in the county. In response, *Operation Teen Safe Driving*, a *DSFL* program, was launched at the Tazewell County Youth Conference on March 13, 2007.

Starting on Monday, May 12 at U.S. Cellular Field in Chicago, *DSFL* will be holding three ride and drive events across the state. The events go well beyond typical driver education courses as students will improve their driving skills in hazard recognition, vehicle handling, speed management and space management – the four areas Ford research shows lead to more than 60 percent of teen traffic crashes.

The two-month contest challenged all seven county high schools to develop the best and most comprehensive safe driving community campaign. Each school was given a \$3,000 budget to conduct their program, with additional prizes going to the first, second and third place schools. Teen fatalities dropped dramatically after the comprehensive program.

The State of Illinois, Ford Motor Company Fund and GHSA expanded *Operation Teen Safe Driving* by inviting all 778 public and private high schools to apply for \$1,000 grants to participate and compete for a chance to attend the *DSFL* ride and drive event. The winning schools were announced in Springfield on May 1, 2008. More than 1,000 students will participate in *DSFL* at driving courses in Chicago on May 12 -13, Peoria on May 15 -16, and Mascoutah, on May 19-20.

“We are pleased to see that *Driving Skills for Life* is continuing to play a major role in improving teen driving skills across Illinois,” said Milton R. Sees, Secretary of the Illinois Department of Transportation. “Safe driving is everyone’s responsibility. The collaboration between students, parents, law enforcement, advocacy organizations, and corporate partners has produced a positive outcome, starting in Tazewell County and now statewide with *Operation Teen Safe Driving*. We’re proud to be a part of this innovative program that prepares young drivers in Illinois and results in safer roadways.”

“The State of Illinois is committed to programs that provide young drivers with the practical training they need,” said Illinois Secretary of State, Jesse White. “We’re grateful to Ford Motor Company for looking out for teenage drivers, and for all the community partners involved in this initiative.”

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