



LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD ON THE FRONT LINES: ALBANY COUNTY, NY SHERIFF CRAIG APPLE

By William Aiken Jr.

In the past ten years, I have seen Albany County Sheriff Craig Apple address the public on issues concerning crime, DWI and public safety. His articulate, calm, yet deliberate manner gives the public a sense of reassurance and no doubt who's in charge. So I was thrilled when the sheriff agreed to be interviewed for RID's Looking Down the Road column. I haven't interviewed a law man since before the pandemic. So I'm grateful to have Sheriff Apple's perspective.

1) Thank you for taking the time amid your busy schedule to do this interview. After national legislation of the 21 drinking age and reducing the BAC from .10 to .08, the nation saw a steep decline in DWI fatalities. However, since 2000, those fatality rates have remained stubbornly high around 10,000 annually. Why in your opinion has it been so difficult to make progress in curbing drunk driving?

There are a few reasons why it's a difficult challenge;

1. Education is the Key.

It seems that teenagers and persons under 30 have had a significant amount of drug and alcohol education, which is more important that people realize. Adults over the age of 30, IF they



Craig Apple became Sheriff of Albany County in 2011. He has served in the Albany County Sheriff's Office since 1987. Beginning as a Correction Officer, he became a Deputy Sheriff in 1989, an Investigator in 1991, a Sergeant in 1993 and a Lieutenant in 1995 when he supervised the Criminal Investigations Unit. In 1997, he was promoted to Patrol Commander. In 1999 he was promoted to Chief Deputy Field Commander. In 2009, he became Undersheriff, the commanding officer in charge of all Sheriff's operations with oversight of 720 employees.

had alcohol education, do they remember it from their high school years.

2. Tolerance is not the same as Blood Alcohol Content.

BAC is an equation. How much alcohol is consumed in a period of time is not just the factors. It also includes the person's gender and weight. The amount consumed is based on the STANDARD Amount, (12 oz beer at 5% alcohol, 5 oz wine, and 1.5 oz of liquor). Someone who is a regular consumer builds tolerance, but the BAC is still the same.

Interview continued on Page 3

NOTICE:

To cut our costs, RID's going to an online format starting with the Fall 2022 issue. Those who don't have access to a computer call (518) 729-8187 and we will send the newsletter via snail mail. If you want to support the work RID does, please send a donations by visiting RID's Paypal account at www.rid-usa.org.

Or write to: RID-USA, PO Box 520 Schenectady, NY 12301

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO YOUR WAY, RESILIENCY CAN SAVE THE DAY

By William Aiken Jr.



Growing up, I had a front row seat to observe one of the greatest activists: Doris Aiken. When she stepped down from RID, I took over. There was no way I could fill her gigantic shoes. There were things my mother did which I simply couldn't emulate. I had to find my own voice. One of Doris's qualities that served as a blueprint was her resiliency.

I didn't have to be a dynamic speaker, look great on TV or confront adversaries. Resilience is something I could embrace in my own way to fit my personality. The bottom line is you never give up, no matter how disappointed or demoralized you might feel. This lesson of resiliency I learned after a series of events that was quite a set back for RID.

By 1983, Doris had appeared on national TV shows such as Phil Donahue and the Today Show. Earlier that year, Doris (unwisely) joined the SMART campaign (Stop Marketing Alcohol on Radio & TV). She didn't realize the consequence of this decision. The idea of banning alcohol ads appealed to her sense of morality. So she was all in. In doing so, she had poked the bear.

As a result, the offers to appear on national media came to an end. One media outlet that didn't get the memo to blackball Doris was the iconic investigative news show 60 Minutes. They sent a TV crew to our house to film a two hour interview with Doris.

About a week after that interview, Doris had a phone call with one of her strongest critics: the CEO of the National Association of Broadcasters. NAB viewed SMART as a threat to the millions in revenue they received from alcohol ads. He attempted to persuade Doris to drop her association with the SMART campaign. He said the SMART campaign is a losing proposition. It would kill future opportunities for RID to gain media exposure.

Then in an "I'll show him" moment Doris blurted out her upcoming 60 Minutes interview. She wanted to show she was still a viable commodity. The CEO calmly asked her when the show would air. Then quickly hung up.

A couple weeks later, our family gathered around our television to watch 60 Minutes. But there was no trace of Doris. She had been completely edited out of the drunken driving segment. There was thirty seconds of video showing RID volunteers in a courtroom monitoring DWI cases, but without mentioning Doris by name.

We were devastated. Doris had bragged about the upcoming show to all of her friends. She realized her mistake alerting an adversary about the 60 Minutes show. Yet, she spent no time crying over spilt milk. She simply dusted herself off and moved on.

The influence of this CEO was astonishing. That he could with one phone call dictate to 60 Minutes that Doris be completely cut out was chilling. It sent a message to intimidate RID. However, Doris wasted no time lamenting over what happened. She continued speaking at Victims Impact Panels, lobbying in Albany and attending DWI conferences. She did whatever had to be done and did so without missing a beat.

As RID's President, I often encounter disappointment. Not on the scale of the 60 Minutes debacle. However, it does happen, comes with the job. When things don't go my way, I focus on other areas, not dwell on past mistakes. Throughout her career, Doris never had a mentor. She relied on instinct. She never gave up. Resiliency was her trademark. I follow her example.

The legacy she left behind is what drives my desire to succeed.

William Aiken

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Looking Down The Road...

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3. Dependency

Mental illness, depression, and peer pressure are just a few reasons why a person might become dependent on using substances. Those who have become alcohol dependent believe they are "fine" and make the choice to drive impaired.

4. Years of Bad Choices

Everyone knows that driving impaired has life changing consequences, but people still make the choice to do it every day. The first time they made that choice, most likely nothing happened- they didn't get arrested and they didn't crash. That's positive reinforcement for a poor choice. So they do it again, and again - with the same positive reinforcement result. It is believed that on a low average, someone has driven impaired a MINIMUM of 80 times before they are arrested for their first DWI.

2) After DWI laws were toughened in the 80's, checkpoints and roving patrols were the centerpiece of every state's comprehensive DWI program. These high visibility enforcement strategies are an effective deterrent. They serve as a reminder to the driving public that if you drive drunk, you will be caught and subject to swift, sure punishment. Today, high visibility enforcement has decreased. What is needed to revive it?

MANPOWER. The funding is there and the high visibility campaigns are still in effect both in NY and across the US. For example, in 2021 Albany County received almost \$60,000 in funding from the NYS STOP DWI FOUNDATION to participate in State Wide High Visibility Engagement Campaigns scheduled 8 times through the year. This money is divided among all the police agencies in the County. Especially with the smaller agencies, manpower is a challenge just to cover regular patrol shifts, let alone special details specifically targeting dates around holidays.

3) Since you began your law enforcement career, what changes have you noticed in the public's attitude toward drunken driving? Has the wide spread availability of ride sharing apps such as Lyft and Uber made road travelers safer?

Ride share has definitely made an additional option for people to get a sober ride home, if people actually make that choice and already have it as a plan BEFORE they consume alcohol. In my

career, I have seen that alcohol has continued to be more and more socially acceptable at almost every venue - weddings, baby showers, parties, even funerals. When someone gets arrested, the charge is plead down to a misdemeanor. There is no jail time; there is just a fine which can now be paid in increments. Maybe their license is suspended, but some may choose to take the risk and drive anyway. There are little repercussions. Driving while impaired is a senseless, selfish act.

4) Since 2013, RID has been active in trying to pass a bill that would lower the legal BAC from .08 to .05. The opinions of law enforcement carry a lot of clout. What do you think is a persuasive approach to get law makers to lowering the BAC?

Remove Intoxicated Drivers Awareness and education for law makers would be a great start in persuading law makers. Since no one knows what their BAC is until they are either arrested or they crash, let lawmakers actually consume alcohol in a controlled setting and test their BAC. Let them actually FEEL what the impairment level is. Let them SEE how it's different for everyone. Then have those same law makers listen to stories of victims and loved ones whose lives have been affected by those who made the decision to drive impaired.

5) You are on the front lines of the carnage caused by drunken driving. So you have a uniquely informed perspective on the severity of DWI. What changes in the law would you like to see as it relates to making safer roads and highways?

I have seen some horrific impaired driving crashes in my career, both when I was on the road and while I been Sheriff. It's devastating for my officers (the ones who first arrive, those who investigate the crash and have to take up close photos of the crash scene/victim injuries and those who must attend the autopsies) it's devastating for the families and friends of those whose lives have been affected. By lowering the BAC will send a message to the public that driving impaired is a serious offense.

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RIDE SHARING. IS IT ENOUGH?

By Betty Martin



Historically, efforts to combat driving while intoxicated has focused on increasing legal sanctions and law enforcement, Deciding on a safe level of alcohol consumption has been left to the state legislators across the country.

We've seen the nation lower the allowable BAC from .10 to .08. RID lobbies for pending .05 bills in NYS. We've targeted sobriety checkpoints, safe rides programs, increased penalties following arrests and mandatory sentences for offenses dependent upon the "level" of intoxication. Yet, the DWI fatality rate has remained stagnant since 2000.

Charges range from misdemeanors to felony offenses. The courts can revoke or suspend a driver's license, allow driving only to work or school. A judge can require an ignition interlock and mandate prevention programs. Yet, forty percent of traffic deaths can be attributed to impaired

driving. NHTSA reports that every day 32 people in the United States die in drunken driving crashes, that's one person every 45 minutes.

In 2020 NHTSA reports 11,654 people died in alcohol related crashes - a 14% increase from 2019. It's well known that you can't drive safely when you are affected by any substance that interferes with your judgment, visual perception, motor coordination, etc. Whether its alcohol, marijuana, opioids, methamphetamines, or prescription and over the counter drugs, driving under the influence is a crime.

What further measures will be able to decrease the incidence of impaired driving? Enter the phase of the designated driver and Uber, Lyft and other ride share programs. Designated drivers have had an excellent public awareness impact especially in young and middle aged people.

Overall ride share services seem to have a positive effect on reducing impaired driving especially in geographic areas where there are many bars and establishments serving alcohol. Certain populations show a greater need for such services. To date there is not enough information or statistics to indicate the positive or negative effects of ride sharing services. Most studies have been with small, select groups.

Nowhere do I find substantial efforts to curb the use of alcohol or other drugs. Nowhere do I find easily available information on the effects of drug use. Where are the highly visible warnings about the consumption of alcohol, marijuana or other drugs?

We see billboards shouting "Don't drive drunk" but nothing that explains WHY. The public needs to know. We need billboards with the warning signs of alcohol use not only on pregnant women but on everyone.

I question how many people really know "their limits" or how much alcohol in a beer, wine, or liquor. Maybe today's billboards could display how the drunk driver's vision is impaired or coordination and reaction time is delayed. We have the technology to do so. Knowledge is power! When will we begin to apply it that makes the road we share safer for all of us?

Note: Betty Martin lost her daughter, Michele, who was 20 at the time to a drunken driver in 1982. Betty is a regular contributor.

3 Ways RID Saves Lives:

1.) LEGISLATION: RID educates Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle on life saving bills.

2.) PUBLIC AWARENESS: RID uses its platforms (newsletter, website (rid-usa.org) & media interviews) to inform the public on the importance of driving sober.

3.) RESEARCH: RID utilizes the latest DWI data and studies to highlight the necessity to take a proactive approach to drunken driving that is saving lives.

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PERCEPTION IS REALITY: CANNABIS AND IMPAIRED DRIVING

By Renee Barchitta



Cannabis legalization/commercialization and increasing availability normalizes behavior. Normalization changes our perception, influencing our beliefs and decisions, including decisions about cannabis use and driving.

Local cannabis stores normalize cannabis-THC (main psychoactive compound in cannabis). This removes the cultural, moral, and legal stigma of any question as to whether smoking marijuana, consuming edibles, or using concentrates with 99% THC (2% THC 1960's), is a normal accepted and healthy standard of behavior. The unspoken message: If our government and community okays cannabis use, it must be safe! Once established, over time, you believe "Everyone Is Doing It." Our youth receive mixed messages about drug use and driving.

"Marijuana affects psycho-motor skills and cognitive functions critical to driving including vigilance, drowsiness, time and distance perception, reaction time, divided attention, lane tracking, coordination, and balance." (Capler et al., 2017; Compton, 2017; Strand et al., 2016). GHSA Jennifer's Messengers

Perception:

A study with 11 focus groups of young adults from Montana, examined perceptions of the risks and acceptability of driving after using marijuana compared with alcohol. Participants believed consuming marijuana before driving was much safer than consuming alcohol. Some participants stated that marijuana could improve driving ability based on individual behavior, type and strength of the drug. However, they thought that it was more difficult to determine the strength of marijuana compared to counting the number of alcoholic drinks. Participants believed detecting alcohol impairment was simple and provable, but testing marijuana impairment was difficult or impossible, and had a low risk for consequences. NIH

"A recent survey from the AAA Foundation found 69% of respondents thought it was dangerous to drive after consuming cannabis, compared to 95% of respondents thinking it was dangerous to drive after consuming alcohol."

"Nearly 70% of respondents think a driver is unlikely to be caught by the police when driving within an hour after using marijuana." AAA annual Traffic Safety Culture Index survey

Consequences:

→Nationally, an estimated 14.8 million drivers report getting behind the wheel within one hour after using marijuana in the past 30 days. AAA Index Survey

→"Cannabis is the most prevalent illicit drug identified in impaired drivers." (IASIC) International Academy on the Science and Impact of Cannabis

→"The risk of motor vehicle collisions increases by 2-fold after cannabis smoking. IASIC

→"In a study cannabis users had significantly greater odds(22%) of an emergency room visit or hospital admission from acute trauma serious injury(15%) and the second most common cause was respiratory health(14%)."BMJ Medical Let

→"The study of seriously or fatally injured road users at five participating trauma centers (Thomas et al., 2020) found that, between mid-March and mid-July,...marijuana prevalence increased by about 50%."NHTSA

It's vital that our children, our legislators and policy makers have accurate information about the risks of high potency cannabis and our health, safety and economic choices. Let them know the truth.

Renee' Barchitta, MPA Former Delaware County STOP-DWI Coordinator, NYS Governor's Traffic Safety Representative, and RID member. Renee is a regular contributor.



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