

Thibodaux DWI arrests increase sixfold

Xerxes A. Wilson
Staff Writer

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A more scientific approach to policing has increased the number of drunken driving arrests in Thibodaux by about 600 percent in the past two years, the Police Department said.

Thibodaux Police are on pace this year to arrest more people on impaired driving charges than any previous year, according to its records. As of Thursday, police have arrested 161 motorists on DWI charges.

“We want the safest city possible,” Police Chief Scott Silverii said, “This is something we've had to prioritize.”

In 2011, more people were arrested on DWI charges than the previous five years combined, according to statistics provided by Detective Jacob Thibodeaux, an intelligence analyst for the department.

Last year there were 183 arrests of suspected impaired drivers , with 70 having been arrested midway through August. The previous five years averaged 29 DWI charges, according to Police Department statistics.

Silverii said the increase isn't because of a new epidemic of drunken drivers taking to the streets but because of a prioritization of stopping suspected drunken drivers using a “data driven” approach.

Silverii's said his department relies on statistics mapping where certain crimes have historically occurred to better plan its patrols. This approach also considers factors outside of crime such as which establishments hold alcohol sales permits.

“We are taking some of the guess work out of (patrolling),” said Silverii, whose department conducts regular sobriety checkpoints in the city.

Where to place officers is a significant factor in the number of DUIs, Silverii said. Using a data-driven approach allows officers something more concrete than intuition to map out where drunken drivers typically drive and thus better place their patrols.

“If people are crashing on North Canal (Boulevard), does it do any good for us to be stopping people on South Canal?” Silverii used as an example.

He also noted the data helps predict the hours drunken drivers are prevalent on the road. People typically think of impaired drivers being out late at night or very early in the morning, but Silverii said drunken drivers are a significant risk to others during early evening hours because of “happy hour” and end-of-the-workday traffic.

“We want to stress it isn't socioeconomic factors. (With this approach) you do away with the profiling,” Silverii said.

First offense DUI comes with penalties of up to six months in jail, a \$1,000 fine and a 90-day driver's license suspension for motorists older than 21.

Silverii said his office sees no financial gain from the increase in DWI arrests and has prioritized stopping drunken drivers because of the danger they present.

“I tell officers a DWI is one of the most serious in-progress crimes you can stop,” Silverii said.