

NEWS RELEASE

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Alexandria Judge Thomas Yeager receives national award

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has presented one of its highest awards to State District Judge Thomas M. Yeager of Alexandria for his efforts to keep drunk drivers off Louisiana's roads.

Yeager and others were presented NHTSA Public Service Awards at the 28th annual Lifesavers conference in Philadelphia. Lifesavers is the premier national highway safety meeting in the United States dedicated to reducing deaths and injuries on the nation's roadways.

Lt. Col. John LeBlanc, executive director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, nominated Yeager for the award.

"Judge Yeager has taken many innovative approaches to deterring drunk driving in Louisiana, including his current efforts to reduce the number of suspects who refuse to take blood alcohol content tests," Leblanc said. "The Louisiana Highway Safety Commission and law enforcement officials across Louisiana congratulate Judge Yeager for earning this distinguished award."

Yeager implemented a policy in the 9th Judicial District of Louisiana whereby arresting officers can secure faxed search warrants for a driver's blood sample in serious injury, death and/or suspected drunken driving cases when the suspect refuses to submit to the chemical test as required by law. As a result, the BAC test refusal rate in Rapides Parish decreased from 35 percent in 2007 to nearly zero last year.

Yeager designed a standardized plea packet, complete with template forms and scripted colloquies, to ensure that all pleas were consistent and legally sound. Additionally, he acquired funding to provide fax machines for all law enforcement vehicles and has made himself available day and night to sign warrants.

Yeager started his legal career working as a law clerk for Judge Jules L. Davidson of the 9th Judicial District Court in Alexandria. He also worked as an assistant district attorney in both the misdemeanor and felony drug sections before his election as a district court judge in 1999.

NHTSA Administrator David Strickland presented the awards. According to NHTSA, the United States is currently experiencing the lowest number of total highway fatalities since 1961, the highest safety belt usage rate in history and more than a 9-percent reduction in alcohol-related fatalities.

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