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DCH TOYOTA OF OXNARD

**PROMOTES**

**TEEN SAFETY**



## 2 Safe and Sound:

Led by Service and Parts Manager Randall Holt (left) and General Manager Steve Chapman (third from left), DCH Toyota of Oxnard's partnership with its two SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) chapters creates a 'perfect platform' to promote teen safety.

## 4 Driving Expectations

Since 2004, Toyota's driving program has educated teens and parents about driving and road safety. The goal for 2011? Reach more people.

## 5 Focus on the Future

Re-energizing the brand was a hot topic at Toyota's national dealer meeting.

## 9 Prius Experts

Owner-enthusiasts field questions about Prius on Facebook.

## 11 Prius Pilgrimage

A Prius helps drive a determined couple's 48-state trip to honor the victims of 9/11.

## 13 Dealer Doings

Commitment to communities is at the core of dealership promotions.

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## DCH TOYOTA OF OXNARD

# TUNES IN TO TEENS

By Dan Miller

Randall Holt might feed his bank account by working as a service and parts manager at DCH Toyota of Oxnard in Southern California. But he replenishes his emotional well by volunteering his time in support of the Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) chapter affiliated with nearby Rio Mesa High School.

“When I was growing up, there was always someone there for me,” says Holt. “Now that I’m an adult, it’s my turn to give back and help out. The fact DCH is involved gives me an out to do the things I really want to do. I honestly couldn’t say how many hours I spend at this. When you’re doing what you love, you don’t count the time.”

Holt’s passion to help teenagers make life-affirming rather than self-destructive choices is exactly what Susan Scarola, vice chairman of DCH Auto Group, was hoping to tap into when the company launched its teen safe driving program, “Mindless Driving. Keep It Out of Cars,” and established a partnership with the non-profit SADD (formerly known as Students Against Driving Drunk) on the national level in 2008. That step followed naturally from those that preceded it in 2007, when the dealer group launched “The DCH Way,” an internal branding program aimed

at reinvigorating the company around its core values. When their look inward shifted outward, it wasn’t long before SADD came into view.



“Rather than go with a traditional marketing campaign, we wanted to reach out in a way that reflected our values,” says Scarola. “We engaged an outside firm that presented a lot of different causes that would help us do that. But teen driving safety—which remains SADD’s primary focus—really resonated with all of us.”

“The number of car crashes involving teens is staggering and the tragic results are devastating,” says DCH Auto Group Chairman Shau-wai Lam. “We are automotive retailers, first and foremost. But working to minimize those statistics through education, action and advocacy is also part of our business.”

Though now a job requirement, DCH Auto Group initially invited the managers at its 27 dealerships to voluntarily commit to the cause. Steve Chapman, general manager at DCH Toyota of Oxnard, was one of the first to step up, empowering his employees to establish relationships with SADD chapters at two local high schools.

“I had been running this dealership for seven years at the time and had been trying to get more involved in

# SOBERING STATS



- ▼ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, accounting for more than one in three deaths for those aged 16-19.
- ▼ Nine teens die every day from motor vehicle injuries.
- ▼ Per mile driven, teen drivers are four times more likely than older drivers to crash.
- ▼ In 2008 alone, about 3,500 U.S. teens were killed and more than 350,000 were treated in emergency rooms for injuries suffered in motor-vehicle crashes.

*Continued from page 3*

the community,” says Chapman. “This one just synced up for us. We have a lot of employees with kids who are already of driving age or soon will be. Things just started to happen.”

More specifically Holt, as well as a handful of dealership colleagues, shifted into gear. The students set the agenda, with DCH Toyota of Oxnard providing leadership, support and, from time to time, use of the dealership’s facilities to further the cause.

For example, Holt helped organize a movie night for SADD members, serving a barbeque on the lot and screening a movie in the upstairs training room.

In another instance, the service department opened its doors on a Sunday to host a SADD-sponsored car wash. That inspired several technicians to come in on their day off to provide free vehicle inspections, while also lending their hand with a sponge.

Away from the dealership, SADD members and dealership personnel partnered with The Dream Fund Outreach and came out in force for Operation Peaceful Playground, donating paint as well as labor to help Rose Avenue Elementary School in Oxnard refurbish its playground. That outreach effort generated local media coverage.

In addition to helping organize events, Holt and his cohorts also brainstorm with the students on three key fronts: raising awareness of poor choices that could end in tragedy, fund raising and recruiting.

“One of the challenges is sustainability,” says Scarola. “The leaders of the chapters tend to be seniors. So when they graduate, you need other students to take their place. Succession planning is a big issue.”

To facilitate the process, DCH Auto Group picks up the tab to hire specialists trained in teen-related issues. These professionals work directly with the SADD chapters at the 27 high schools now benefiting from this partnership.

“The specialists lend quite a bit of legitimacy to what we’re doing,” says Scarola. “It’s important for us to stay on the right side of the line. We’re not advising teens. We don’t have the expertise. What we do have is concern and a lot of energy.”

Holt embodies a seemingly endless supply of both of those commodities. In addition to the ongoing activities, he’s currently working with SADD students to plan a trip to San Diego in the spring, where they’ll get to spend a night aboard the USS Midway Navy aircraft carrier.

“We can’t sell a car to everyone or service everyone’s car,” he says. “But we can be out in the community, build some rapport and, hopefully, save some lives. These kids know there is someone out there who is willing to help them and work with them.”

“Partnering a local dealer with a local SADD chapter around the issue of teen driving has proven to be a natural fit,” says Penny Wells, president and executive director of SADD. “DCH has been a fantastic sponsor. They’re not just handing over money. They’re really trying to understand what we do and how they can help, ensuring their investment of time and money pays off.”

“This really is the perfect platform for us,” says Chapman. “It’s raised our profile in the community and has done wonders for our employee morale. Our people love engaging with the kids. It makes them proud of where they work. We’re not just about selling cars.” ☺



# toyota driving expectations

**PROGRAM'S REACH POISED TO GROW IN 2011**

**D**CH Auto Group isn't the only Toyota-affiliated organization to embrace the issue of safe teen driving. For example, Toyota Motor Sales (TMS) has spread the word to more than 14,000 parents and teens since launching its Toyota Driving Expectations (TDE) program in 2004. Its impact is poised to grow significantly in 2011, following the results of a pilot program.

As originally conceived, TDE was configured as a free four-hour driving skills curriculum that engages teens as well as their parents and/or guardians in classroom and hands-on driving experiences. In an effort to expand its reach, TMS is now testing a streamlined version of the course that is held in conjunction with ride-and-drives at select Bass Pro Shop locations nationwide.

"We refer to it internally as TDE Hybrid," says Strategic Planning Consultant Karen Polan, who manages the program for TMS Community Relations. "It covers the same ground but in less time. We can accommodate six classes a day or about 600 parents and teens in a weekend."

TDE's primary objectives are twofold: 1) help teens become safer drivers; and 2) make them more aware of the dangers of distracted driving. As such, it's not surprising that TMS and DCH Auto Group's efforts have found common ground. For example, the two shared a booth at SADD's national conference held in Orlando, Fla., in June. And members of local SADD chapters have helped at TDE sessions, encouraging teens to sign up, providing volunteer manpower and distributing DCH Auto Group's "Keep It Out of Cars" educational materials.

To learn more about TDE as well as opportunities for dealer involvement, go to [www.toyotadrivingexpectations.com](http://www.toyotadrivingexpectations.com). ☎



#### **Rules of the Road**

Teen driver Kaylah Wade experiences the Toyota Driving Expectations program.