



Fact Sheet

“Friends of Natalie” Springfield Area Bilingual Seat Belt Campaign

Overview: Teaming up with the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, Beatriz Fuentes has launched a bilingual seat belt campaign, geared to teens and young adults in the Springfield area. The goal of phase I of this grassroots effort is to raise awareness and increase seat belt usage by prom time (May 2007). In addition to billboards, media coverage, and events, Fuentes is working with the school officials, legislators, and state and federal public safety officials to change behavior. And, she’s succeeding!

Background: On July 2, 2006, 21-year-old Natalie DeLeon and her boyfriend were on their way to visit friends when the car she was riding in rolled over. DeLeon, who was not wearing a seat belt, was ejected from the car and died. The fatal accident spurred Beatriz Fuentes, mother of Natalie, and her two remaining daughters to form a group – “Friends of Natalie” – to promote seat belt use. “We’re going to start putting faces to the tragedies,” said Fuentes.

Goals of Bilingual Campaign:

- Billboards (English and Spanish)
- Programs in public schools
- Primary legislation (bill submitted by local legislator and named after Natalie)
- A documented/measured increase in seat belt usage in Springfield area

Chronology of Events:

- July 2006 – “Friends of Natalie” formed; board developed
- August 2006 – First board meeting
- September/October 2006 – Commitment of local businesses to support campaign
- September/October 2006 – Local businesses promote campaign and contribute to raffle; buttons created; media coverage
- October 26, 2006 – Dinner/fundraiser, attended by more than 300 people and raised \$5000; media coverage
- October 26, 2006 – BIA-MA announces that the association will pay for the first billboard
- November 2006 – Donation of billboard design by local ad agency.
- November 21 – Press release re “Friends of Natalie” campaign; media coverage
- December 2006 – Rep. Cheryl Coakley-Rivera (Representative from Springfield) offers support. Encourages business and community support.

- December 2006 – Outreach to National Highway Traffic Safety Association (NHTSA) and other U.S. Department of Transportation officials.
- December 2006 – Commitment of Principal Stoddard of Springfield Central High School in Springfield (school of Natalie) to conduct Think A-Head, a prevention program of BIA-MA, in high school (date set for May 21 -- prior to prom)
- December 2006 – Mario Damiata, Regional Program Manager of NHTSA-NER, offers his support.
- January 2007 – two more Springfield high schools sign on for prevention program – Commerce High School (5/14) and Putnam Vocational High School (TBD)
- January 25, 2007 – Media training for FoN with NHTSA Medical fellows
- February 2 – Meeting scheduled with Gabriel Cano (Office of Communications and Outreach, NHTSA)
- February 2007 – more than 30 people volunteer to help FoN, most under 25 years
- Survey planned for spring
- Summer 2007 - Keystone Woods Independent Living Community Garden in honor of Natalie
- FoN attends Latin Chamber of Commerce networking events (2)
- June 2007 - Springfield Lincoln Elementary invites FoN to participate in carnival (info. Distributed to children and parents)
- June 2007 – FoN testify in Boston for Seat belt Law passage in Massachusetts

Media Coverage

- Springfield Republican: three articles
- The Reminder
- Mount Holyoke
- BIA-MA Fall/Winter newsletter
- Ch. 40 in Springfield, ABC affiliate – three stories
- Ch. 22 in Springfield, NBC affiliate
- Ch. 3 in Springfield, ABC affiliate – two stories
- Telemundo Television
- WTTC-FM 90.7, Springfield, MA, (ethnic radio station) Interview Betty Fuentes
- WACM-AM, 1490, Springfield, MA (Hispanic) “Friends of Natalie” Interview
- Springfield Republican, Letter-to-the-Editor, Seat Belts.
- STCC-FM, 90.7, Springfield, MA. (“Friends of Natalie”/Seat Belt Interview

Seat Belt Facts:

- Massachusetts ranks 47th (out of 48 states that participated in a survey on seat belt usage); only NH ranked lower.
- 67 percent of Massachusetts residents use seat belts; usage in the Springfield area is even lower.

- More than six people each day are ejected from their cars in Massachusetts motor vehicle crashes.
- A 15 percent increase in seat belt use would prevent 3-4000 injuries and save Massachusetts an estimated \$80 million in healthcare, taxes, and insurance costs.

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