Retired trooper offers tips for older drivers

By ED RUNYAN
runyan@vindy.com

When Matt Gurwell retired as a trooper with the Ohio State Highway Patrol, he felt there was a “void in the system” in how the community addresses “older drivers with diminished driving skills.”

Gurwell, who still lives in Ohio, told an audience at St. William Church recently, “We probably all know older drivers that shouldn’t be driving, but nobody wants to be the one to tell them.”

Gurwell founded the company Keeping Us Safe and spoke as part of an 18-month project run by Lt. Phil Robinson starting when Robinson was with the Southington Post of the Highway Patrol to provide presentations on senior-citizen driving. Robinson is now commander of the Hiram Post.

Robinson said one reason for the talks is that statistics showed that 38 percent of the fatalities in Trumbull County crashes were “mature drivers,” defined as people 55 and over.

Gurwell said not all senior citizens have diminished driving skills.

“Diminished driving skills can be either physical or cognitive,” he said.

Gurwell said what he tries to do in his work is help mature drivers “stay aware of any diminished you might be experiencing in your driving abilities [and encourage] appropriate adjustments in your driving so you can extend your safe driving career.”

A common tactic is avoid driving at night.

Statistics are mixed in terms of whether young or older drivers are more dangerous, Gurwell said, but the danger to older drivers can be greater than for young drivers due to frailty.

Drivers 85 and older are nine times more likely to be killed in a car crash than younger drivers, he said.

Gurwell gave suggestions for older drivers to reduce the potential for crashes:
- Drive on familiar roads.
- Drive shorter distances and on less-traveled roads.
- Avoid “rush hour” and avoid bad weather.
- He said intersections and left turns are among the situations that cause the most potential for crashes.

A Yale University study showed that exercise is a key factor in good driving. It showed that older drivers who had engaged in exercise made 37 percent fewer critical driving errors than those who did not exercise.

“Any physical activity you can get will go a long way toward maintaining you as a safe driver,” he said.

Ohio Living
Park Vista

We are proud to offer:
- Villa Homes
- Apartment Homes
- Short-Term Rehabilitation
- Long Term Nurses Care