

Sheriff attends conference

*Editor's note: the following was submitted by Brown County Sheriff John Merchant.*

**(MSC News) I recently returned from the Lifesavers Conference, held in Louisville, Kentucky. This national conference is the largest gathering of highway safety professionals across the country. Many important and informative workshops and training are provided – pedestrians, driving, teen safety, communications, criminal justice, and impairment, to name a few. I would like to thank KDOT for funding my attendance at this highly acclaimed training event.**

**While there were many noteworthy events and workshops that stand out in my mind, the one which really struck home was an older white school bus parked in the exhibit hall. As I walked around the outside of the bus, I noticed the date "MAY 14, 1988" written in bold letters on its sides. A fellow by the name of Quinton Higgins, Jr. approached me and explained that this was his bus and he wanted me to know why it was so important to him.**

**On May 14, 1988, Quinton was 15 years-old and part of a church youth group riding on the bus. Not far from Cincinnati, a drunk driver, Larry Mahoney, was driving the wrong way in his pickup and collided with the bus. His blood alcohol concentration was .24% (over 3 times the current legal limit and 2.5 times the legal limit in 1988) and he had been arrested for DUI once before. The impact punctured the gas tank which resulted in a fire. Since the gas tank was located near the front of the bus, all exiting had to be done through the rear door. In the end, 27 youth and sponsors were unable to get out and died, making this the deadliest drunk driving crash in American history.**

**Quinton invited me to enter the bus, and as I did so I immediately noticed large pictures taped to the seats. These were of those who were unable to escape on that fateful day. It was humbling to stand there and imagine the carnage that had occurred around me. Quinton told me he felt compelled to help spread the word about the dangers of drunk driving in the hope of saving lives. Even after all the years that have passed, he is still emotional as he remembers those who were lost. He has made it his life's mission to make as many people as he can aware of what can happen when drivers decide to drive drunk.**

**I was honored to meet and speak with Quinton. Larry Mahoney, the driver of the pickup, was found guilty of 27 counts of 2nd-degree manslaughter, 16**

**counts of 2nd-degree assault and 27 counts of wanton endangerment, for which he received a sentence of 16 years. Owing to good behavior, he served just under 11 of those years. Since the crash, the state of Kentucky has instituted school bus safety regulations which have greatly decreased the chances of such a tragedy happening again. And the incident also played a role in the passage of stricter drunk driving laws in 1991.**

Many Signals Communications