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# A Unique Way to Confront Drunk Driving

By K Richard Douglas



Brandon Thomas and his wife, Jackie

Not many people can lay claim to the work title "Alcohol Compliance Trainer," and even fewer have the title and the motivation that comes from pursuing a mission.

Brandon Thomas, 23, lives in the East Valley and works for the National Hospitality Training Institute. For Thomas, working as an Alcohol Compliance Trainer isn't just a means to a paycheck, it's a calling.

Thomas teaches those who serve alcohol what to watch for and when to cut off drinks to a

patron. He has traveled to 20 states and the territory of Puerto Rico to teach thousands of employees in English and Spanish the safe service of alcohol.

In 2002, Thomas (in his car) was hit by a drunk driver who had just left a bar. His car was a complete loss, and he and his passenger endured months of therapy. Then, in 2006, Thomas witnessed an alcohol-related accident that sent 12 people to the hospital, four with critical injuries.

The writing was on the wall; Thomas had to play some part in the prevention of such tragedy. Training others how to intervene and prevent a customer from becoming another drunk driver is his contribution to public safety.

According to MADD, in 2006 there were 13,470 fatalities in crashes involving an alcohol-impaired driver with a blood alcohol level of .08 or higher. That accounted for 32 percent of the total traffic fatalities for the year.

As Thomas states, "every time I give a training class, I hear heart-wrenching stories of parents, brothers and sisters who have lost their loved ones in alcohol related accidents." Alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes kill someone every 31 minutes in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Thomas relives his experience nearly every time he teaches a class. He regularly hears stories of pain and suffering from family members and friends of those whose lives have been affected by drunk drivers. He recently heard one such story from a mother who lost her daughter to a drunk driver only weeks before. Thomas recalled that a hush fell over the room as other students empathized with her anguish.

With a very busy work schedule, Thomas' job takes him all over the country three to eight times a month. His audience can be as few as 30 people or as many as 800. Teaching an alcohol server how to cut off an intoxicated patron is an art. He explains to students that "to an intoxicated person, who can no longer reason, they feel you are actually stealing a personal item, as if the beverage has a sentimental value."

Thomas still has memories of the intoxicated driver's headlights coming towards him and still suffers from lasting neck pain. While he lives with these discomforts, he gets some consolation from knowing that he is doing something to help reduce a much worse burden on someone else.



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