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## **Local Teens Win Big at 12th Annual Teen Safety Summit** *Student Leaders Honored as Champions of Teen Driver Safety*

For the twelfth year in a row, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute's (TTI's) Teens in the Driver Seat® (TDS) program recognized teen advocates as champions of young driver safety at the 2021 TDS Safe Driving Summit. Second only to teen suicide, car crashes kill more teens in the United States aged 15 to 18 than any other cause.

The summit kicked off May 1 with the presentation of the annual All-Star Awards, which reward schools that excel at TDS-approved activities aimed at raising safety awareness. One activity, Zero Crazy, sees students encouraging their peers to wear seat belts and drive without distractions while conducting before-and-after assessments to determine how effective their outreach is. Schools earn points for completing activities, and students earning the most points receive cash up to \$1,000 for their schools. A total of 27 different schools were recognized as outstanding or all-star award recipients this year.

Texas schools recognized for excellence included Young Women's Leadership Academy (Fort Worth), which took top honors and earned \$1,000 for their school for the sixth year in a row. Vistas High School (Houston) and Bushland High School (Bushland) earned \$500 for their schools, respectively.

"The power of TDS has always been in its reliance on peers helping peers," notes Russell Henk, founder of TDS and manager of TTI's Youth Transportation Safety Program. "This event recognizes the best of the best in that regard. These young folks are not only leaders—they're lifesavers."

The restrictions on travel and social interaction imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic required a virtual summit—the first of its kind in TDS history—titled Shifting Gears. TDS personnel took advantage of the format to offer a month-long series of activities and seminars to raise awareness of dangerous behaviors especially prevalent in teen drivers. Sessions covered topics as diverse as vaping or using a cell phone while driving to driving at night and speeding.

"Each of you are inspiring others your age to drive safer and help save the lives of everyone out there on our roadways," State Farm Agent Jenny Weidner told award winners. "State Farm is proud to add our most sincere congratulations for your efforts."

Over 450 attendees from Texas, Georgia, Nebraska and Indiana registered for the summit, which saw 11 Teen Advisory Board (TAB) members return and 12 new TAB members attend for the first time. Participants represented a mix of students, teachers and traffic safety professionals.



“Your lives, your safety and your futures are important to us in all the work you and your peers have put in over the past year to be recognized here today,” Terry Pence, director of the Texas Department of Transportation’s Traffic Safety Section of the Traffic Safety Division, told participants. “All of us at TxDOT want to congratulate the all-star winners and the incredible teachers who’ve not only excelled during the pandemic but have ensured that the safety in your schools and communities remains a top priority.”

In 2022, TDS will celebrate 20 years of success in promoting teen driving safety. The program has grown from a Texas initiative to also saving lives in 14 other states around the nation. TDS has reached more than 1.5 million students and been adopted by more than 1,800 high schools nationwide.

For more information about the 2021 TDS Safe Driving Summit: <https://www.t-driver.com/tds-summit-media-center/>

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#### **About Teens in the Driver Seat®:**

Started in 2002, [Teens in the Driver Seat](https://www.t-driver.com/) is a peer-to-peer safety program that educates teens about the top five dangers of teen driving to help teens develop safer driving habits and avoid crashes. TDS is a recognized [peer-to-peer teen traffic safety program](https://www.t-driver.com/) by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Thanks to funding from multiple sponsors, including TxDOT and State Farm, program resources and technical support are available at no cost to schools. | <https://t-driver.com>

#### **About the Texas A&M Transportation Institute**

Recognized as one of the premier higher education-affiliated transportation research agencies in the world, TTI’s research and development program has made significant breakthroughs across all facets of the transportation system. TTI research is widely known as an excellent value with a proven impact of saving lives, time and resources. In the laboratory and the classroom, TTI researchers help prepare students for transportation careers. | <https://tti.tamu.edu/><https://tti.tamu.edu/>