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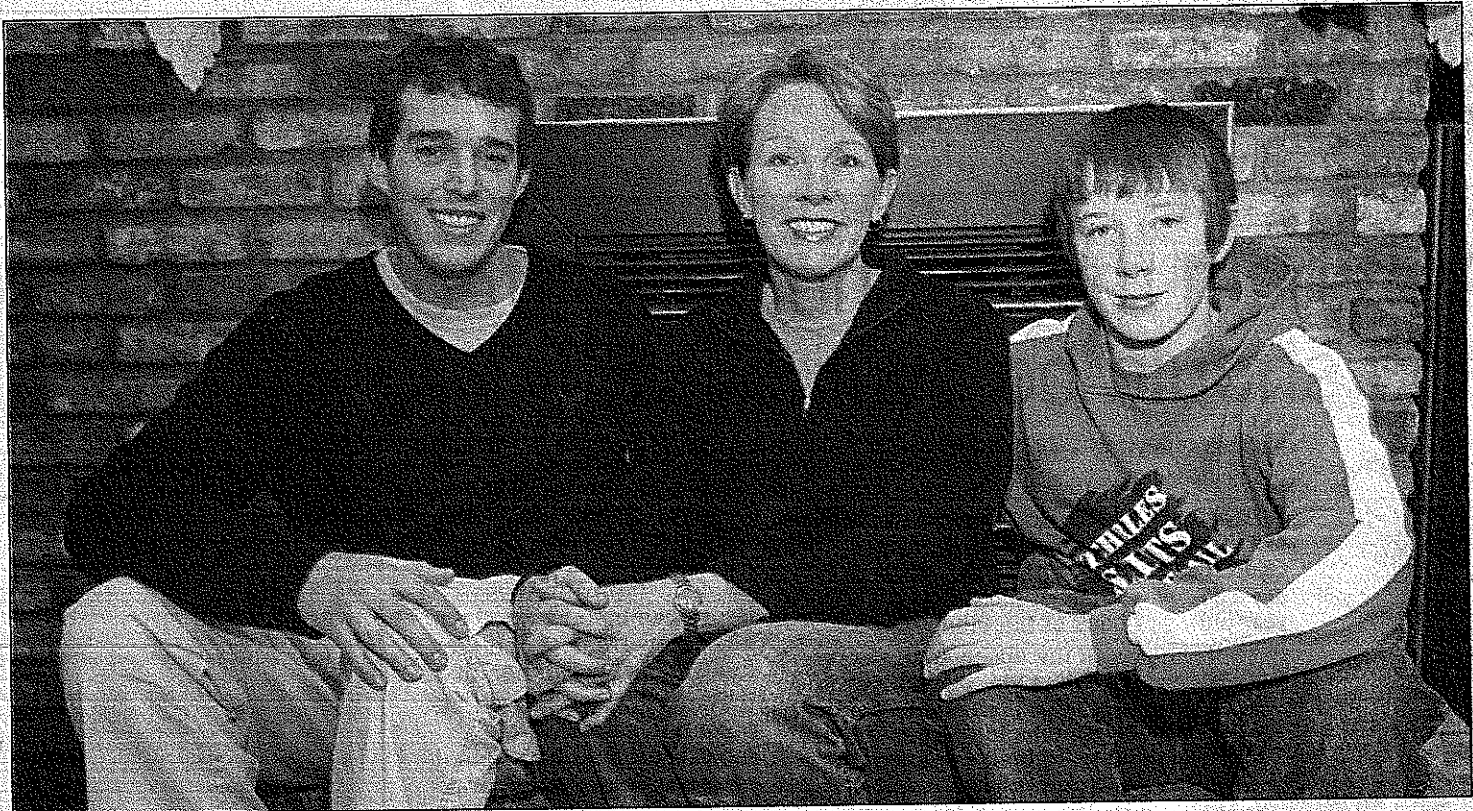
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YOUNG DRIVERS / SEATBELT CAMPAIGN

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Remember Britney and buckle up



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Tammie Becher, whose daughter, Britney Stiehl, 17, died in a automobile accident almost one year ago, stresses the importance of wearing seatbelts to young drivers. She is pictured with sons Jesse Stiehl, 23, and Jeremy Becher, 13, at her St. Charles home.

By Blair Foy

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For the past year, Tammie Becher and her family have been taking it one day at a time.

On Feb. 4, 2008, her daughter, Britney Stiehl, died in an automobile accident two miles west of Stockton. The 17-year-old was not wearing her seatbelt at the time of the accident.



Stiehl

As the one-year anniversary of Britney's death approaches, her mother said she is more determined than ever to stress the importance of wearing seatbelts to young drivers.

"Britney was not wearing her seatbelt when she had the accident. Her body was found on the passenger side of the vehicle," said Becher of St. Charles. "I can't help but think if she had been wearing her seatbelt, she would be with us today. The air bags did deploy and had she had the seatbelt on, she would have been secure in her seat."

After Britney's accident, Becher said the St. Charles school district was very supportive to her family, as well as vigilant with the student body in promoting seatbelt usage.

"The school did a fantastic job with how they handled everything during the weeks and months after Britney's accident. They have supported us as a family 100 percent," she said. "The school has been trying relentlessly to get it across to the students that wearing a seatbelt is not a freedom of choice. It's the law."

Becher said she and her family, which includes sons, Jesse Stiehl, 23, and Jeremy Becher, 13, are continuing to heal, along with Britney's father, Larry Stiehl of Stockton.

"This last year has been very hard," she said. "Everything from what would have been Britney's first day of college to every holiday that passed by — there isn't a day I don't wake up and she is the first thing on my mind."

While it is still not easy for Becher, she said she holds on to the memories she has of Britney.

"I can still feel her hugging my arm once in a while when watching TV," she said. "Even though Britney was in high school, this was something I felt she just didn't want to outgrow doing."

With all of the work done at St. Charles High School last year to promote seatbelt awareness through school functions and the sale of "Click It or Ticket" T-shirts, Becher said she thinks her daughter would be very proud of her family's efforts.

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— Tammie Becher

"I think Britney would be so amazed at all that has been done in her memory with the seatbelt campaigns, as well as remembering her as a wonderful, caring person," she said.

In marking the one-year anniversary and for the future, Becher said she wants young people to remember Britney's story and buckle up behind the wheel.

"I wish we could make such a big impact on student drivers that wearing a seatbelt would be just as important as being in sports or attending a concert, or being able to go out with their friends," she said. "If they choose not to wear a seatbelt, they could be setting themselves up to be the next student we remember in a seatbelt campaign."

Blair Foy is a St. Charles freelance writer.