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## **A safe ride home in your own car Area designated-driver service catches on**

**By Margarita Bauza  
Free Press Business Writer**

It's the holidays, and if you're a boss, you know what that means.

Company parties and other festive shindigs may cause employees to drink more than usual. Some are tempted to get behind the wheel even though they are not sober.

That's why many companies around metro Detroit are signing up for a new designated-driver program that takes intoxicated workers home in their own cars.

The Designate -- the Birmingham-based firm that offers the service -- sends out two drivers to meet clients. One takes the worker home in his or her own car, the other trails behind to pick up the driver. The company can also arrange for workers to be driven from location to location in their own car.

The Designate is the brainchild of Tom Proctor, a Birmingham resident who kicked off the driver program last St. Patrick's Day.

He recently began marketing the firm's service to local businesses as a benefit for employees. Companies have signed on.

Pleasant Ridge-based ePrize, Southfield-based Virchow Krause, the Detroit Lions and Ford Field are among the businesses that have used the Designate's program.

Proctor's pitch is that driving under the influence costs every U.S. company about \$200 a year per employee. The Designate's program is designed to cut those costs and enable companies to protect their workforce.

Companies can buy coverage for their entire staff, or they can pay for experts from the Designate to come in and educate workers on the dangers of drinking and driving.

Craig Nelson, managing partner for accounting and consulting firm Virchow Krause & Co. LLP, appreciates the fact that workers don't have to worry about



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their vehicle.

Nelson, who recently moved to Detroit from Madison, Wis., said his old office also had a designated driver program. He tried to use a similar one in Detroit, but no one used it.

“The difficult part has always been about leaving your car behind,” Nelson said. “People don’t feel safe leaving their car overnight. It seems like a better answer for not that much more cost.

“In a business like ours, it’s all about the people. We have a work hard, play hard environment.”

Virchow Krause said it does not monitor who uses the program, but asks that the Designate watch for employees who might be abusing it.

Proctor said he and his business partner came up with the idea over casual conversation.

“We had no idea what kind of demand we’d have,” Proctor said. “We did some runs around St. Patrick’s and then we settled in on how to grow the business.”

Even though the business has taken off, Proctor said he’s had to try to change how people view the service.

“People have the perception that if they need a designated driver, they have to be falling-down drunk. ... You don’t have to be visibly impaired,” he said.

Not only can employees convicted of drunken driving lose their license and go to jail, they also may compromise a professional license and miss valuable work time, Proctor said.

“People who do a lot of entertaining are in a tough spot,” Proctor said. “We feel that it’s a risk-management technique.”

Proctor encourages companies to keep a high level of confidentiality.

“If the company wants to know information, we can provide it, but we recommend to keep it at arm’s length,” Proctor said.

The Designate employs 35 people, and all drivers have to take a Breathalyzer test before every shift. The cost depends on the mileage. Users are charged \$50



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for trips of up to 10 miles. It is an additional \$2 per mile after that.

EPrize, an online promotions firm, began using the Designate nine months ago.

“Because of the age group and our culture, it fit perfectly. The intent is truly for use on your personal time,” said Robyn Marcotte, senior vice president of talent.

Marcotte said she’s in charge of paying the bill, which she receives once a month. She never sees who uses it. The company, however, does have a provision that flags employees who might abuse it. Services are typically used between 10 and 14 times a month, Marcotte said.

“We want team members to be safe,” she added.

Contact **MARGARITA BAUZA** at 313-222-6823 or [mbauza@freepress.com](mailto:mbauza@freepress.com).