



The Designate

Changing the American Evening

May 10th, 2007 The Designate steers drinkers clear

When veteran Birmingham entrepreneur Tom Proctor took a look around his world for his next business idea, one recurring observation remained at the front of his awareness like a blinking red light: America has a drinking problem.

But the problem is not the drinking itself, Proctor says. It's the inability of American society to separate the culture of business and social drinking from the sacrosanct culture of the automobile. It's not that Americans love to drink and drive, he says. It's that in a metropolitan area such as Detroit, with little public transportation and taxi service, there are really not many alternatives. And that is precisely both the societal problem and the businesses niche that Proctor was going for when he founded about six weeks ago a new Birmingham company, The Designate.

It's a simple idea, really. Get a professional driver to pick you up when you are physically unable to drive yourself back... in your own car. It's not a limo or taxi service. It's your own, on-call designated driver who will pick you up from the bar, the wedding or the business lunch that dragged on until last call—and make sure both you and your car end up safe at home.

It's a uniquely American solution to a uniquely American problem. Proctor does a great deal of business in England and the rest of Europe, where infrastructure has allowed for a business and social culture that can separate drinking from driving.

"You go to England, you go there for business meetings, and you start drinking wine at lunch and you go all day long but no one would ever, ever, ever get behind a wheel of a car," Proctor says. "Well, they've got it right. They realize that people are going to go out and enjoy themselves and they manage to, from a societal perspective, absolutely never, never screw around with getting behind a wheel. Now, here what we do is we play this game of chicken."

So, he launched The Designate, in part, to give business and social drinkers a fighting chance in this game to have a little fun while staying safe and out of jail.

"People aren't screwing around anymore and they don't care if you're dressed in a thousand-dollar brooks leather suit just coming from your bankers," he says. "if you're over the limit you're going into a very bad spot called Oakland County Jail, Wayne county jail if you're less likely."



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Proctor, a former owner of a large privately held insurance underwriter, plans on investing about \$250,000 of his own funds into the business. He also is joining forces with Walsh College, which helped him get it off the ground and provided partial funding for the salary of Arthur Kelly, the company's director of operations and a recipient of a college fellowship.

But the partnerships that really helped the most in getting The Designate off the drawing board and into the real world were the establishments that have agreed to help promote the service, Proctor said. They include Birmingham's Townsend Hotel/Corner Bar, Forte, Dick O'Dows Pub, Phoenicia and Pampas, among other restaurants and pubs.

The Designate has designated Birmingham, the Bloomfield's and Troy to begin with, but hopes to grow countywide in two months and grow from 12 drivers to 30-40.