

## NORMAL WEST STUDENT WINS CAR

Publication: The Pantagraph  
Section: News  
Edition: Main  
Published: 04/30/2004  
Page: A5

### Caption:

Normal West junior Wesley Shriver, middle, received a hug from his dad, Ronnie Shriver, on Thursday after winning a 2004 Mitsubishi Eclipse from Operation Cool at the Illinois State University Bone Student Center. Looking on is Carol Ambler of Mitsubishi Motor Manufacturers of North America.

## NORMAL WEST STUDENT WINS CAR

By Sharon K. Wolfe

NORMAL --The winner of a shiny blue Mitsubishi Eclipse said he believes divine intervention liberated him from his current set of wheels -- a 1989 Ford Escort.

"I couldn't have done it without God," said Wesley Shriver, a 17-year-old Normal Community West High School student. He said he had been praying ever since he found out several weeks ago he was one of 30 finalists from his school to be chosen to attend the Tri-County Operation Cool giveaway Thursday at Illinois State University's Bone Student Center.

"We prayed and prayed about it," said his father, Ronnie. "Here we are -- we won. I can't believe its totally free."

The car giveaway was the climax of the annual program that rewards students who wear seat belts and drive safely. It came after 225 prizes of gift certificates and electronics were awarded amid cheering, dancing and clapping from the high-energy audience.

DeWitt County Sheriff Roger Massey estimated the crowd was 800 to 850 people, and about three-quarters of them students.

While there was plenty of laughter, the message was a serious one: Drive safely and be sober behind the wheel or face serious -- maybe fatal -- consequences.

Speaker Keith Patterson of Wauconda said he saw a semitrailer truck while driving to the Twin Cities with a sign on it: "Your face here if you don't wear a seat belt."

Dan Irvin, a spokesman for Mitsubishi Motors North America, which donated the car, said one thing teens don't realize is that every parent looks out the window when a child drives away and wonders if it will be the last time they see them.

Distracted driving -- use of cell phone, eating hamburgers, talking with passengers, for example -- are some of the ways people end up in accidents, said Rachel Schlipmann of Country Insurance and Financial Services.

Melissa Paschold of State Farm Insurance Cos. said people think air bags make seat belts unnecessary, but they are designed to work with seat belts.

Operation Cool works with 22 Central Illinois schools to promote seat belt usage through education and award incentives, Massey said previously.

The program targets teenagers because their traffic crash fatality rate is four times higher than the rate for drivers between 25 and 69 years old, Massey said. The habit of wearing a seat belt is credited with saving more than 30 teenage lives in Central Illinois area in three years, he said.

One group that enjoyed the event was Sara Jane Bretzman and her daughter, Connie, of Long Point and Jill Wicks and her daughter, Jenna, of Ancona. The daughters attend Woodland High School in Streator.

They didn't win the car, but Connie Bretzman was a finalist for it, so she got \$100 on top of winning an earlier gift certificate. When Jenna Wicks won a computer, she broke into a spontaneous dance.

Dateline: NORMAL  
Art: PHOTO  
Photographer: STEPHANIE OBERLANDER