

Sheriff's deputy escapes serious injury

By: Dick Kelly Boone TODAY

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Matt Dominick, a deputy with the Boone County Sheriff's Department, escaped serious injury and possibly death in an accident last Saturday near the intersection of U.S. Highway 30 and County Road R18. According to Boone County Sheriff Ron Fehr, Dominick had been assisting the state patrol with the investigation of an accident at the intersection and was about to climb into his patrol car when out of the corner of his eye he noticed a motorist passing parked vehicles along the roadway. Dominick made attempts to get the motorist to stop, but those attempts were ignored. Dominick, who was in the path of the vehicle, jumped clear just before the vehicle slammed into the rear of his patrol car. The impact forced the patrol car forward some 75 feet where it burst into flames and exploded.

"Five seconds later and (Dominick) would have been in his patrol car," said Fehr. "I think he's lucky to be alive. The impact forced the doors on his vehicle to jam."

Fehr said Dominick, who is on vacation this week and could not be reached for comment, was able to get the driver of the other vehicle, Katie Gehling, 21, Carroll, out of her car and both jumped into a ditch. He said the patrol car contained ammunition in the trunk and also some fireworks that Dominick had confiscated a few nights earlier.

"It was kind of chaotic for a few minutes," said Fehr, referring to exploding ammunition and fireworks in addition to a burning vehicle.

Fehr said his department has not yet learned why Gehling ignored Dominick's attempts to get her to stop, adding that alcohol was not a factor. Fehr said his conversations with Dominick and other witnesses have indicated that Gehling was traveling at least 50 miles an hour when she vehicle struck the deputy's car.

"The lights on (Dominick's) car were flashing, but she was too close for his own safety," Fehr said.

Fehr said he has since learned from members of the state patrol that 35 law enforcement officers have lost their lives and several others have suffered serious burns in similar accidents since 1999. Dominick was driving a new Ford Crown Victoria. The vehicle was valued at \$20,000 and Fehr said it contained another \$15,000 to \$20,000 in equipment, including a \$9,000 radio.

Fehr said he is hopeful of getting a replacement car in the next couple of weeks, adding that it could take even longer because most of the special equipment has to be ordered. He said a transport vehicle has been placed in service and will be used until the new vehicle is received.

Fehr said the Dominick's patrol car will be torn apart next week in an effort to see what caused the gas tank to be punctured. He did not single out any particular law enforcement agency, but said past tendencies have been to install radio equipment in the truck, a procedure that requires holes to be drilled into the base of the trunk. As a result, holes have also been drilled into gas tanks.

"That problem has been solved," Fehr said, adding that he has been told by state troopers that beginning in 2005, Ford Crown Victorias will include a box-like structure around gas tanks that will prevent gasoline from spreading if the tank is punctured.