

# Courtney Force focuses students behind the wheel

Photos by Randall Bohl

FORD'S AWARD WINNING TEEN SAFE DRIVING  
**Driving Skills**  
FOR LIFE  
skillsforlife.com



**E**stablished in 2003 by the Ford Motor Company Fund, the Governors Highway Safety Association and a panel of safety experts, Ford Driving Skills for Life teaches newly-licensed teens the necessary skills for safe driving.

"We've had the opportunity to host several Driving Skills for Life programs in both Phoenix and Tucson over the years, and we always get a great response from local teens and their parents," said Jim Graham, manager of the Ford Driving Skills for Life program. But, he added, "this is the first time we are bringing the program directly to high schools in the state."

### Ford program expands to Arizona

The vast majority of high schools in Arizona no longer offer driver's education programs. Largely due to budget cuts, they have now become nearly obsolete in our state. In response to this, Ford brought its award-winning national teen driver safety program, Driving Skills for Life, to Coronado High School in Scottsdale and Perry High School in Gilbert in November, as part of a nationwide 32-school tour Ford launched earlier in the year.

In response to growing awareness about teen fatalities and driver distraction, the Ford Driving Skills for Life program announced a \$1 million expansion for 2011 and launched a 30-city national tour. As the national tour proved its effectiveness, Arizona dates were added to the schedule with the support of funding from Ford's Operation Goodwill Phoenix program.

We visited the program at Coronado, where students engaged in hands-on driving courses set up in



the school's parking lot. Students started at the crack of dawn (6:50am at Coronado), participating in hands-on, behind-the-wheel modules designed to equip each student with the fundamental skills necessary for safe driving.

### Courtney Force makes the point

A morning assembly addressed the entire student body on the issues of safe driving, after which hands-on driving sessions continued throughout the day. Grabbing students' attention and providing positive focus was NHRA drag racing driver Courtney Force, who—besides currently attending Cal State Fullerton with a major in communications—and in addition to having been a high school cheerleader in the not-so-distant past—is a Top Alcohol drag racer for John Force Racing.

Courtney is the youngest daughter of 15-time NHRA Funny Car national champion John Force. Courtney earned her NHRA competition license in 2005. She started her racing career in Super Comp before earning her Alcohol Fuel license and moving to Top Alcohol dragsters (TA/D), along with her sister Brittany, in 2008. She reached the final round twice in 2009, at Seattle and Pomona. Courtney Force recorded a career best reaction time to date of .006 in the final event of 2009 at Pomona and went on to win her first national event in 2009, in the Top Alcohol Dragster category at the 22nd annual NHRA Northwest Nationals in Seattle. Force has raced her sister Brittany on three occasions, beating her every time.

A respite from cafeteria food came during lunch with community partners like Red Means Stop Traffic Safety Alliance, local police and fire departments.

### A course that should not be optional

The key basis for the program is the grimmet: vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teenagers. Ford Driving Skills for Life teaches students skills in four specific areas: Hazard Recognition (including avoidance of distractions), Vehicle Handling, Space Management and Speed Management. The program aims to teach students the crucial skills they need to be better, safer drivers. One highlight was a Ford Mustang equipped with skid plates, which gives a highly controlled and highly accurate environment for students (or anyone) to learn how to properly correct their steering in the event they lose control. Students also ran the cones in the new Ford Focus and Ford Fiesta.

"Student driver safety is always a concern, since vehicle crashes kill more teens than anything else in our country," said Perry High principal Dan Serrano.

"The hands-on modules conducted by Ford's professional drivers will grab our students' attention and provide them with crucial driving skills that will help prepare them for potentially dangerous road situations," added John Biera, principal at Coronado High School.

"Arizona represents a small percent of all licensed drivers, but they cause more than four times as many crashes as the average," says Alberto Gutier, director of the Arizona Governor's Office of Highway Safety. "Through partnerships like the Driving Skills for Life program, we can work to reduce the negative statistics associated with teen drivers." ■

