POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR
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LEADERSHIP

Crime is down, crashes are up

After falling for decades, motor vehicle crash fatalities are increasing again, nationwide and in Pennsylvania, thanks in part to more motorists reading or sending text messages while driving.

In fact, according to a survey by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, teenagers (16 to 18) are no longer the most reckless drivers. It's millennials (19 to 24), who do more texting while driving, speeding, and running red lights than any other age group.

Whatever the cause, motor vehicle crashes kill more than twice as many people as homicides in Pennsylvania.

Here in Montgomery County, 34 residents were killed in car crashes in 2014 (the most recent year available) and 16 were murdered.

For the average person, however, the ratio of injury or death from a car crash is much greater than 2 to 1 over homicide.

Most assaults and murders are committed by relatives, acquaintances, and co-workers of the victim. Another major category of assaults and murders involves people who live dangerous lifestyles: They deal drugs or frequent bars where fighting is common.

The innocent bystander who is murdered by a stranger is quite rare — far less common, for example, than the innocent motorist who is killed or maimed by a total stranger driving drunk.

Commentary by Tom Hylton

Statistically, the most dangerous thing my wife and I do each week is drive to the grocery store.

But people can be wildly irrational when it comes to assessing danger.

Here are the facts for mortality in Pottstown, from the state Bureau of Health.

In 2014 (the most recent year available), 259 Pottstonians died.

Of those, 57 died of heart disease and 51 died of cancer.

A total of 25 residents died in accidents, of which the most common were falls and poisoning, which includes drug overdoses (a growing cause of accidental death all over the country).

Two people were murdered, and six committed suicide.

The rest — 188 residents — died of natural causes such as strokes, respiratory diseases, diabetes, and Alzheimer's.

Unfortunately, all the screaming headlines and public handwringing about crime leads people to think Pottstown — which has a higher percentage of poor people than the surrounding suburbs — is dangerous. It's not.

In fact, we enjoy a much higher quality of life than places that require a car for every errand.

What kills more people, cars or crime? Cars.