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Vehicle sticker alerts police, fire officers that driver is diabetic

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By Michael Hirtzer, The Star

One night in the late 1970s, Mark Lippe was driving home from work when he blacked out behind the wheel and crashed into a tree.

When he woke up, police at the scene of the accident accused him of being high on drugs.

"They asked me how many reds I was on," Lippe said of the so-called "downers" common in that era. "I got very upset."

Woozy and disoriented, he was impaired, but not from the effects of alcohol or drugs.

Lippe is a diabetic. His crash was due to a low blood sugar episode.

But the police officers on the scene that night did not believe Lippe, who was put in a squad car and charged with improper lane use.

"It was disheartening to know that police just didn't care," he said.

Lippe did not want that to happen to his daughter, Lisa, who is 17 and also suffers from diabetes.

When Lisa was learning how to drive, Lippe told her the story, and she got an idea.

She invented a windshield sticker that alerts emergency workers of diabetic drivers.

"I told her about this, and she said, 'Let's do something so this never happens again,'" Lippe, now a 46-year-old Orland Hills resident, said.

"I don't ever want to experience what my dad went through," Lisa said. "There needs to be something that lets them know we have this disease."

The sticker is about four inches square and fits next to a normal city sticker or parking permit.

"You can see the decal 10 feet away from the car," Lippe said.

The Lippes secured the trademark for the idea in February. So far, they have sold about 200 stickers, for \$5.95 each, at Barcus Drugs and Walgreens in Oak Lawn, with a portion of the proceeds going to the American Diabetes Association.

They also handed out the stickers over the summer to teenagers attending a juvenile diabetes camp.

Nancy Harris, executive director of the Northern Illinois Area of the American Diabetes Association, said anything that can help alert more people to the disease is beneficial. Most diabetics also carry identification cards or wear bracelets notifying others of the disease.

"We think it is great what Lisa and her father, Mark, are doing with the stickers, and are thrilled to hear local pharmacies are selling them," Harris said.

"Any effort that raises awareness for people living with diabetes gets an 'A' in our book."

Lisa, a junior at Andrew High School in Tinley Park, said, "I just want to help others."

Lippe said that is typical of his daughter, who is a member of the student council and a peer mentor and student ambassador.

Lisa learned she had diabetes when he was 15, and checks her blood sugar about five times a day.

"She doesn't think, 'Why me?'" Lippe said. "She's just going full steam ahead with it."

Michael Hirtzer may be reached at mhirtzer@starnewspapers.com or (708) 802-8808.

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