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March 9, 2020

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## ***Sheriff honored for buckling up*** **PRESENTED WITH SAVED BY THE BELT AWARD**

Chippewa County Sheriff Michael Bitnar's trip to Paradise was anything but.

On Saturday, Aug. 10, 2019, he was headed west on M-28, bringing a car full of supplies to the family cabin in Paradise, Mich. About 25 miles from his destination, an east-bound vehicle pulled into Bitnar's lane, leaving him a split-second to react. He was able to avoid a head-on collision, yet was hit hard enough on the driver's side of his Prius to roll multiple times before landing in a ditch. Bitnar suffered multiple injuries including a ruptured spleen, fractured ribs, a collapsed lung, and severe pain for weeks. But Bitnar survived the crash because he was wearing his seatbelt.



To recognize his life-saving decision, the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP) and AAA Michigan are presenting Bitnar with the *Saved by the Belt Award*. He will be honored at the 25<sup>th</sup> Michigan Traffic Safety Summit, 20 years to the day that Michigan's primary seat belt law went into effect.

"As a law enforcement officer, I have seen so many people die in crashes that wouldn't have if they had only worn their seat belt," said Bitnar. "Wearing a seat belt is the most basic way to ensure your safety during a crash and I'm thankful I wear mine every time I'm in a vehicle."

In Michigan in 2018, 192 people were killed in traffic crashes that were not wearing seat belts. A 2019 observational study by Michigan State University estimated statewide seat belt use at 94.4 percent.

Michigan's primary seat belt law took effect on March 10, 2000.

"During the last two decades, 3,454 lives have been saved because of the seat belt law," said Michael L. Prince, OHSP director. "Buckling up saves lives, and Sheriff Bitnar is living proof."

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***AAA in Michigan*** celebrated its **100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - A Century of Service** in 2016 and has more than 1.4 million members across the state. It is part of The Auto Club Group (ACG).

***The Auto Club Group (ACG)*** is the second largest AAA club in North America. ACG and its affiliates provide membership, insurance, financial services and travel offerings to over 9.5 million members across eleven states and two U.S. territories. ACG belongs to the national AAA federation with more than 58 million members in the United States and Canada and whose mission includes protecting and advancing freedom of mobility and improving traffic safety.

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