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Buckle Up for the Gold

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Last week's Olympics in Italy gave Newark residents a chance to follow some of our local skaters. Seeing the proud parents of those champions watch their children compete pointed out their unselfish dedication and sacrifice to ensure that their children had the tools to try for Olympic gold. When skater Michelle Kwan withdraw from the Olympics because of an injury, I was reminded of the most essential tool for anyone—whether she or he is competing for gold or in life—is a healthy and injury-free body, something all parents can strive to give their children.

The final week of the Olympics coincided with National Child Passenger Safety Week, a week in recognition that car crashes are the leading cause of death and unintentional injury to children. Although correct and consistent use of child safety seats prevents child deaths and injury, four out of every five car seats are not installed properly, and more than 60 percent of Delaware parents and caregivers do not use booster seats.

To be a “gold medal” winner parent, keep your children injury-free by making their children are buckled up in child safety seats or booster seats. Correct use of car seats can reduce the risk of death or injury to children by up to 71 percent. Delaware's child restraint law is based on a study by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, which states that 4- to 8-year-olds who are secured in booster seats are 59 percent less likely to be injured in a car crash than children restrained only by a safety belt.

Kathy Myers, coordinator of Safe Kids Delaware, says, “Child passenger safety is a commitment that lasts a lifetime. Too many kids move from booster seats to seatbelts before they are big enough.” Booster seats aid children in using adult seatbelts properly. This means the shoulder belt crosses the center of the child's collarbone and chest, with the lap belt low and snug on the hips, not stomach. If children move from a car seat into an adult seatbelt too soon, they are at risk for head, neck and spinal injuries. Delaware law requires children up to age 6 or 60 pounds must be secured in a properly secured safety seat. No child under 12 may sit in the front seat if the vehicle has an airbag in the front passenger seat.

Safe Kids Delaware, the Office of Highway Safety and University of Delaware Cooperative Extension collaborate with police agencies to conduct child restraint checkpoints. Last week Newark Police officers conducted seatbelt and child safety-seat patrols throughout the city. In a checkpoint at Downes Elementary, educational brochures about the child restraint law and locations to have your child's car seat inspected for free were distributed to parents.

Maybe participating parents did not receive gold medals but they got something more precious than gold—the reassurance that they have done what they can to keep their children safer in the car.

For more information on car seats and a list of the Office of Highway Safety's fitting stations where you can have your car seat inspected for free, visit the Extension website at <http://ag.udel.edu/extension/safety/trafficsafety/csfittingstations.htm>.

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