

Seatbelt wearers honored after surviving wreck



Linda Sappington

Gregg Perkins, left, and Robert Ragland, right, stand with Montana Highway Patrol Trooper Terry Rosenbaum

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POLSON — Two men who survived a three-car wreck north of Polson on Feb. 25 were honored on Friday with a Saved by the Belt award, presented by Diana Schwab, representing Montana Department of Transportation's Buckle Up program, and Montana Highway Patrol Trooper Terry Rosenbaum.

Robert Ragland and Gregg Perkins shook hands in front of the courthouse Friday afternoon before each man was presented with a certificate, a keychain and a yearlong membership to AAA.

The first time the two men saw each other, they were on gurneys in the emergency room.

"It sounds like we're both a still a little stiff and sore," Perkins said to Ragland.

Perkins, pastor of the Foursquare Church in Polson, was waiting to turn left into his church from the northbound lane when a third man in a Ford Crown Victoria hit him from behind. The driver was on the phone and was not paying attention, according to Rosenbaum. The sedan then careened into the southbound lane, where southbound driver Robert Ragland could not avoid hitting the sedan broadside. The sedan was literally torn in half by the impact from Ragland's truck and trailer. The man that caused the wreck was not seriously injured.

While Perkins and Ragland did suffer injuries from the impact, they weren't life-threatening, although both were taken to the hospital via ambulance. Seatbelts saved both their lives, said Rosenbaum.

"Anyone who has traveled Highway 93 knows that fatal wrecks happen on a consistent basis because people don't wear their seatbelt," he said. "If you wear your seatbelt, your chances (of surviving the wreck) increase substantially."

Perkins, chaplain for both the Polson Fire Department and Police Department said he's seen a lot of car crashes, and always advises people to wear their seatbelt. "I always wear my seatbelt," he said.

Ragland said he does, too.

"I feel naked without it," Ragland said.

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