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MICHIGAN'S FIRST AUTO THEFT FORUM BRINGS TOGETHER EXPERTS TO DISCUSS AUTO THEFT TRENDS AND IMPROVING MICHIGAN'S COMMUNITIES, SEPT. 12

Pioneering forum looks to improve Michigan auto theft prevention – state in the top five in the U.S.

EAST LANSING, MI (12 September 2001) – Experts from law enforcement, the insurance industry and automobile manufacturers and dealers, as well as prosecuting attorneys and state legislators will come together at Michigan's first **Auto Theft Forum 2001**, a groundbreaking summit focusing directly on the problem of auto theft in Michigan. Hosted by the Automobile Theft Prevention Authority of Michigan (ATPA) and Help Eliminate Auto Thefts (HEAT[®]), the inaugural event will feature presentations and discussions on current trends in auto theft and auto theft related insurance fraud in Michigan. The all-day event is scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 12 at the MSU Kellogg Center in East Lansing.

The ATPA and HEAT[®] have assembled an impressive panel of guests and participants. Margaret Scott of the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office, Commander Hilton Napoleon of the Detroit Police Dept., Chris Hogan from DaimlerChrysler and Kevin Rinke from the Detroit Auto Dealers Association, among others, will serve on panels to discuss auto theft problem identification. Tom Ginster, Criminal Justice Advisor for Governor John Engler and Patricia Nash of the Michigan Dept. of State will be among those giving individual presentations. Inspector Annemarie Gibson of the Michigan State Police, Leanne Snay of the Insurance Information Association of Michigan, and others will assist in facilitating round table discussions. Commissioner Frank Fitzgerald of the Michigan Insurance Bureau will serve as the event's keynote speaker.

With such a wide variety of industries and experts attending the session, auto theft will be discussed as a comprehensive, statewide issue, affecting a broad spectrum of industries and communities.

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As the state continues working to attract new business investment and workers from outside the state, forum organizers understand quality of life issues will become increasingly important. "Auto theft has become more than an issue of crime, it has become a quality of life issue," said Val Vitols, executive director of the ATPA. "We want to change the point of view that auto theft is a victimless crime. Unsafe streets and high insurance rates hurt everyone and affect Michigan's economy and ability to attract new business as well."

While Michigan auto theft rates have dropped 25% since 1985, the state still ranks in the top five in the country for auto theft. In founding this forum, the ATPA and HEAT[®] hope to present new ideas and solutions to those dedicated to the fight against auto theft, as well as bring together experts who might not otherwise get an opportunity to brainstorm and discuss the issue.

"We are excited about what can be accomplished with a panel of this caliber. These are all well-respected and highly knowledgeable professionals who are rarely all in the same room – I think the results will be very exciting," said Terri Miller, director of HEAT[®]. "We are pleased with how far Michigan has come in combating auto theft in the last sixteen years, and are hoping this forum will provide the launching pad to continue and increase this success."

The Michigan Automobile Theft Prevention Authority is funded by a statutory assessment on auto insurance policies. It seeks to improve and support vehicle theft law enforcement, prosecution, prevention and education programs by establishing statewide planning capabilities and coordination of dedicated funding sources.

HEAT[®] operates a toll free confidential tip line, 1-800-242-HEAT, for citizens to report auto theft related information. Since its inception in 1985, HEAT[®] has awarded more than \$2.2 million to tip callers. During that period, the HEAT[®] tip line has received 5,484 calls leading to the arrest of 2,445 suspects and has recovered 2,999 vehicles valued at more than \$34 million.