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Lori Thorton, a junior elementary education major, relaxes during a free chair therapeutic massage from the hands of licensed massage therapist Crystal Frank at the Health Fair held

in the MSC flagroom Wednesday. The free massages were held at a booth sponsored by the Galleria Day Spa & Wellness Center in Bryan.

Dallas police officer is killed when SUV slams into squad car

DALLAS (AP) — An off-duty Dallas police officer was killed in a highway accident when a sport-utility vehicle slammed into the back of his slow-moving Crown Victoria squad car, causing it to burst into flames.

Officer Patrick Metzler, 31, died in the early Wednesday morning collision. He was an eight-year veteran of the Dallas Police Department, and is survived by his parents, brother and sister who live out of state.

Police departments have complained that Crown Victorias are prone to catch fire when struck from the rear at high speed because the gas tank is positioned behind the rear axle.

At least a dozen officers across the country have been killed in fiery crashes in Crown Victorias since 1983.

Metzler was one of three officers driving slowly along a freeway as escorts for a large truck with lighted arrows directing cars away from a closed lane, said Dallas Police Department spokeswoman Janice Houston.

Investigators said the driver of the SUV, Jeffrey Goddard, 23, of Dallas, swerved in front of the sign truck and struck Metzler's vehicle, which was the last of the three police cars.

Alcohol is suspected as a factor in the crash. Police said witnesses reported that the red Jeep had been swerving and traveling above the speed limit.

Goddard and an unidentified passenger were taken to Baylor University Medical Center. Goddard suffered a broken hip, and was listed in fair condition Wednesday. The passenger suffered minor

injuries, police said.

Goddard was booked on suspicion of intentional manslaughter. Blood alcohol test results will not be available for several days, Houston said.

The fatal collision comes one month after the Motor Company's announcement that it had concluded a study to determine what modifications could be made to police Crown Victoria to reduce the possibility of fire in rear-end collisions.

The study recommended installing a shield kit for certain parts along the rear axle to protect the vehicle from puncture sources, Ford spokeswoman Sara Tatchio said.

Ford agreed last month to provide kits for approximately 350,000 Crown Victorias. The kits will start being shipped out Monday, said spokeswoman Kristin Kinley said.


She said the shield kits are the first official recommendation Ford has made to police departments regarding modifications to Crown Victorias.

However, Dallas police officials said Ford recommended changes last October, and that Metzler's vehicle recently had been modified in accordance with that recommendation.

"Basically, the procedural code called for the removal of a sharp edge component from the rear axle that could puncture the gas tank in a rear impact collision," said Jennifer Li of the Dallas Police Department.

The modifications weren't made until September because the department did not learn of the recommendation until May 2002, said Dallas Police Department Fleet Manager Sgt. Mike Flusche.

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