



Workshop in Ocean City focuses on dangers of distracted driving

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Posted: Wednesday, July 27, 2011 12:01 am

By ELISA LALA, Staff Writer |

To help spread the message that distracted driving can take lives, the Ocean City Police Department and the Casey Feldman Memorial Foundation joined with StreetSafe Driving Academy to hold a daylong education workshop on Saturday in the parking lot of the Ocean City Community Center.

The Casey Feldman Memorial Foundation was formed in 2009 by Dianne and Joel Feldman, of Springfield, Pa., shortly after their 21-year-old daughter, Casey, died when she was hit by a distracted driver while she crossed a street in Ocean City.

Casey was a senior at Fordham University majoring in journalism and a seasonal waitress at a restaurant in Ocean City. According to its website, caseyfeldmanfoundation.org, the foundation provides financial support to individuals, groups and institutions whose interests and goals align with those of Casey.

The Casey Feldman Foundation also speaks out against the dangers of distracted driving.

In 2009, 5,499 people, including Casey, died because of distracted drivers, Joel Feldman said.

"I was a distracted driver before Casey died," Joel said. "Most people are."

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During a seminar on driver safety at the Ocean City Community Center on July 23, Joel and Dianne Feldman, of Springfield, Pa., promoted safe driving and raising awareness of the dangers faced by pedestrians at crosswalks. Their daughter, Casey, shown on the poster beside them, was killed by a car as she was crossing the street at a crosswalk in Ocean City two years ago.



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Distracted driving can range from texting and talking on the phone while behind the wheel, to eating while driving, reaching down to grab a dropped item, changing CDs, using a GPS, turning around to yell at rowdy children in the back seat and many more examples, he said.

"You can't multitask while driving," Joel Feldman said. "That's the message."

In order to prove how dangerous distracted driving can be, StreetSafe Driving brought to the workshop a Drive Square Simulation System, the most advanced and realistic driving simulator available.

The simulator puts people behind the wheel of a stationary vehicle while allowing them to drive in virtual reality wearing computerized goggles. As the participant drives, distractive elements are added into the mix. For example, drivers may receive a text message they are asked to read while driving in bad weather or through a construction zone.

Drivers younger than 20 make up the highest percentage of fatal crashes, said Meg Kramer, founder of StreetSafe Driving Academy, a comprehensive driving training program with centers in Haddonfield, and Bryn Mawr and Blue Bell, Pa. StreetSafe's mission is to create competent and safe drivers, and put an end to distracted driving, Kramer said.

"Our mission really is to save lives," she said. "Eighty percent of crashes nationwide involve distracted driving within three seconds of the crash."

After getting behind the wheel of the Drive Square Simulator System at the workshop, 16-year-old Stephanie Thomas, of Havertown, Pa., who has her driving permit, said she thought she would be able to manage it.

She, and many others, failed and crashed when distractions were added to the exercise.

"I learned I definitely can't drive while texting," Thomas said. "That's why I turn my ringer off when I get in the car."

Throughout the summer, StreetSafe will offer behind-the-wheel lessons for teens in shore towns. Kramer said she decided to hold teen lessons in Ocean City and the surrounding shore areas through the summer because many of her clients who vacation at the shore had voiced an interest.

Likewise, summer is also the deadliest season for teen drivers and beach towns are full of vehicle and pedestrian congestion.

Officer Laura Hall, of the Ocean City Police Department's Traffic Unit, who was called to the scene at Casey Feldman's accident, said OCPD focuses on the safety of its residents and visitors by holding events such as the Drive Safe Program, bike rodeo, school bus safety and more.

"You can't change fate, but you can control your own actions," Hall said. "As a department, we want our city to be the safest, best place that it can be."

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