

## **Story of Families of Highway Fatalities**

Every year, at least 42,000-45,000 people die on America's highways. About 1,000 of those lives are lost right here in South Carolina each year. Motor vehicle collisions claim more lives than most other diseases or types of violent death.

No one feels more strongly about making our highways safer than those who have suffered the devastating loss of a family member on the highways. The Highway Patrol began in 2003 to work with families of fatality victims to educate the public about safe driving behaviors.

In 2004, the department created the Fatality Memorial Web site [www.schp.org/inmemoryof](http://www.schp.org/inmemoryof). This site was created to allow families a public forum to memorialize their loved one. The site helped put a face on the alarming statistics.

Even with all of the collisions people see in the news, all of the safety initiatives through SCDPS and nationally, most people do not fully appreciate the scope of the loss on our highways. Not only has this forum provided a healing mechanism for the families but the memorial site has had the added bonus of providing a strong safety message. Parents, schools and families have used this site to educate their at-risk teen drivers about the deadly results of poor driving choices.

A further extension of the memorial site was the creation of a safety curriculum in 2004 for Highway Patrol troopers to use when talking with the public about safe driving. This curriculum addresses all age groups from preschoolers to senior driving. It uses photographs from fatal collisions in our state to illustrate the scope of the problem. But more importantly, it allows several families to share their heart-wrenching stories of loss.

The Highway Patrol now trains and certifies other law enforcement agencies and the military to use our curriculum, which has received overwhelmingly positive reviews. It is shown on a daily basis around our state in high schools, businesses, churches and civic organizations.

The Highway Patrol Community Relations' Officers began enlisting the families featured in our curriculum to go with us as we showed it. They, along with an entirely new group of families, began participating regularly with our Community Relations Officers in being 'safety presenters' at high schools, colleges, town hall meetings, businesses, military installations, churches etc. This provided an avenue for them to work through their grief while providing a compelling, lifesaving message to the public. In January 2006, we trained our first group of speakers for a formal Speakers' Bureau.

Additionally, we recognized the need for these families to share their stories with each other and heal. We also began to have families referred to the Highway Patrol who simply wanted to be put into touch with another family who had suffered a loss to help them work through their own loss.

We began to do this on an informal basis using some of our families who were further out from their tragedy. In late 2005, however, we formalized that process and our SCDPS Chaplain trained our first Peer Team.

We also formalized this group in 2005 naming it the **Families of Highway Fatalities**. FHF is comprised of three components:

1. **Highway Safety Speakers' Bureau**: Their job is to participate with our troopers and other law enforcement in safety presentations at various venues to promote safety issues especially seat belt usage. They are at work on almost a daily basis somewhere in our state. Family members frequently conduct print and electronic television interviews as well.
2. **Safety Ambassadors**: This group promotes any safety initiative that is currently being promoted by the agency. For example, in 2005 as we moved toward December 9, when our seat belt law became primary, our safety ambassadors distributed safety belt fliers in doctors' offices, grocery stores, Welcome Centers, schools etc. During Child Passenger Safety month, they distributed booster seat materials to daycare facilities, schools and other facilities to educate caregivers.
3. **Peer Team**: The Peer Team is an all-volunteer group. The Highway Patrol sends the group next-of-kin addresses for fatalities. They then generate a condolence card to new fatality families.

**Core Mission:**

Support ...Fellowship...Education

**Mission Statement:**

The Families of Highway Fatalities is dedicated to providing compassionate resources for families who have lost loved ones in motor vehicle-related collisions. Our goal is to provide Peer Support for grieving families, facilitate forums and opportunities for grieving families to meet; prevent further highway fatalities through public education and information; and to diligently work alongside law enforcement, first responders, the Legislature and other government officials as advocates for highway safety.