



DELAWARE

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION **PRESS RELEASE**

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Bells Toll Throughout Delaware

Survivors Plead: Move Over, Slow Down – It's the Law

"It's hard to move on It's hard to make new memories, and I can't change the old ones,"

--- Deborah Nelson, three years after her husband Phillip Nelson Jr., 42, was killed in a work zone.

Smyrna – At 11 am this morning, the sons of Phillip Nelson, a DelDOT employee killed within a work zone on Father's Day 2006, tolled a bell 32 times in memory of their father and all the DelDOT employees killed in the line of duty, opening a press conference held at the Smyrna Rest Area in observance of National Work Zone Awareness Week.

At the same time, at the Old State House in Dover, and throughout the entire state, bells tolled at churches, town halls, and fire halls in memory of these brave employees and for support of work zone awareness.

Recognizing the challenging work of employees in DelDOT's Toll Collectors, Surveyors, Motor Vehicle Personal, Traffic, Maintenance, Construction, Pavement, Planning and Bridge divisions and DelDOT contractors, the event was part of National Work Zone Safety Awareness Week, which runs from April 6-10. DelDOT is reminding travelers to drive with caution within work zones and to respect the job and the lives of these men and women. The central focal point of the campaign is the Nelson family, and DelDOT employee Matt Gardner, who had 13 broken bones as a result of the same work zone incident.

Standing at the site of the Delaware Highway Memorial Garden, which memorializes those killed along Delaware roads and highways, Governor Markell spoke. "We take for granted that most of us work in a safe, comfortable environment. But we need to remember that there are mothers, fathers, friends and other members of our communities who are working near vehicles speeding by carelessly and at excessive speeds. This does not only include those men and women within work zones, but also toll collectors, traffic safety technicians, pavement marking staff, DMV fuel compliance workers, and gasoline station compliance officers. Every one of these workers put their life on the line every minute, every hour, of each day."

The sobering facts bear this out:

- Nationally, one work zone fatality occurs every seven hours.
- Nationally, one work zone injury occurs every 15 minutes.
- Four out of five work zone fatalities are motorists.

Secretary Wicks, introducing Mrs. Deborah Nelson, told the group that, "when Deborah Nelson of Smyrna said goodbye to her husband Phillip Nelson Jr., on Father's Day June 18, 2006, she had no idea it would be for the last time. On that day, Phillip – a Delaware Department of Transportation North District Employee - volunteered for duty to patrol state roads to help disabled or stranded motorists. Phillip was called out to assist a

motorist along Summit Bridge Road near Boyds Corner, as was DelDOT employee Matthew Gardner. Arriving on the scene approximately the same time, the two men parked their vehicles on the shoulder and got out.

“Suddenly, and without warning, a vehicle careened off the road striking Phillip, killing him instantly, then hitting Matthew, breaking 13 bones, puncturing a lung, fracturing facial bones and breaking teeth. I believe that hearing their stories best illustrates the need for drivers to remain alert to road conditions at all times, whether within a work zone or not. It only takes split second of inattentiveness for a vehicle to become a lethal weapon.”

In an emotion filled voice, Deborah told the group about that fateful day. “We all had breakfast together, and he kissed me goodbye, said ‘so long’ to the kids, and that he would be back in time for dinner. I was preparing a special Father’s Day dinner for him when a neighbor called to ask me if Phil was working that day, because there was an accident and that DelDOT workers were injured. Later that evening two officers came to my door and told me that Phil wasn’t coming home. He wasn’t ever going to have that special dinner I prepared for him.”

Matthew Gardner, critically injured in the same incident, then told the gathering his story. “It happened so fast. I never saw any of it. Next thing I remember, I was in the hospital and I never saw Phil again,” said Matthew, now 26. He was hospitalized for almost three weeks and spent another four weeks in physical rehabilitation. Matthew went back to work for DelDOT as soon as he could – and he still works in roadway work zones - although he has physical limitations and lives with metal rods in his right leg, left shin and a metal plate in his right shin. “I love being out there,” Matthew said. “You have to have a healthy fear working on the road, but if people would just move over, slow down. We got families and friends to get home to.”

Trends are showing aggressive driving; following too closely and inattentive driving appear to be leading causes of these crashes. While DelDOT requires its employees to get regular work zone safety training, workers want to remind drivers that work zones are designed to warn motorists of upcoming hazards. When traveling through a work zone, please pay careful attention to the traffic control devices present.

- When you see the “orange and black”, please be extra cautious.
- Warning signs will let you know what to expect.
- Drums or cones will delineate your path of travel.
- Flag persons will help direct you along the way.
- Slow down and expect the unexpected.

Closing the ceremony Ninth District State Senator Karen E. Peterson, and 28th District, State Representative William J. Carson Jr., requested that Secretary Wicks, Matt Gardner, and Nelson family join them at the podium. Senator Peterson and Representative Carson then presented Secretary Wicks with a Senate Resolution officially designating April as Work Zone Safety Awareness Month.

“Whenever I drive past a work zone, I fear for those workers’ lives,” said Deborah. “I see too many motorists not paying attention and it’s so upsetting. People are so intent on getting where they are going they just don’t understand how dangerous it is for workers on the roadways.”

Said Phil III, “I just miss having my dad here.”

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