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Ferris, community address pedestrian safety concerns

BIG RAPIDS – A Ferris State University Pedestrian Safety Task Force is utilizing engineering, education and enforcement to ensure the safety of pedestrians on campus, especially those crossing State Street.

“I want the community to know that pedestrian safety is a concern that is being taken extremely seriously, especially on State Street,” said Martin J. Bledsoe, director of the Ferris Department of Public Safety. Bledsoe heads the task force of: James Cook, assistant director of public safety; Kevin Courtney, director of the Big Rapids Department of Public Safety; Clare Kwant, grounds superintendent; Micki McClelland, Big Rapids Township supervisor; John Sonntag, Mecosta County sheriff; Karl Koivisto and David Vanstensel, Michigan Department of Transportation; James Santilli, Jr., Michigan Driving to Save Lives coordinator and an FSU student; Amanda Umlandt, Student Government president; and Tim Vogel, Big Rapids Department of Public Works director.

Last year, former FSU Student Government President Jason Granger raised concerns about pedestrian safety. As a result, a pedestrian safety committee, which is now the Pedestrian Safety Task Force, was formed to address safety issues.

Santilli was asked by Bledsoe and Granger to serve on the task force due to his previous and current involvement with traffic safety at the state, federal, and international levels, and to also represent students by serving as a liaison between the student government and the task force.

“The task force has focused on engineering, education, and enforcement, which are all essential tools for improving pedestrian safety,” said Santilli. “None of them alone is a total solution, but together they can bring about significant safety improvements for pedestrians and drivers.”

According to Bledsoe, the first step to creating a safe environment for pedestrians and drivers is through engineering strategies. “On State Street, engineers have addressed issues such as lighting, signing, striping, and intersection design, all of which reduce dangers to pedestrians,” he said. “Plants and strip barriers were also added to discourage pedestrians from crossing in less safe places.”

The second step to creating a safe environment for pedestrians and drivers is through education to help ensure safe travel habits, and awareness about the needs of pedestrians. According to Bledsoe, education is the highest priority. Education efforts include the following:

- Santilli, Sonntag, and FSU Public Safety officer Tim Jacobs spoke to students in the residence halls during the 2004 winter semester, and will do so again during the winter semester of 2005.
- Bledsoe addressed concerns at the City Manager and Town/Gown meetings, in the Annual Report (FY 2004 - 2006), and e-mail messages to students, staff, and citizens that have raised concerns.
- Cook and Santilli spoke to the FSU Student Government on Nov. 16, and also held a lengthy question and answer period.



FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY
NEWS SERVICES & MEDIA RELATIONS

- Two posters – one that targets pedestrians, and one that targets motorists will be placed in academic buildings and residence halls on campus.
- An e-mail message will be sent to all FSU students and staff.
- FSU students, staff, and community members are participating in a traffic safety survey that is being conducted by Santilli through the FSU Department of Public Safety. The survey focuses on issues pertaining to alcohol/drugs, pedestrians, safety belts, speed and stop signs. The survey allows students, staff, and community members to express their concerns, and also will assist officers with determining traffic assignments.
- Santilli is working in partnership with members of Student Government to develop a flyer that will be given out in all academic buildings on campus. The new shuttle bus schedule will also be included.
- A news release is being issued to inform the public of the safety efforts, and enforcement actions that are planned to be taken.

With engineering and education efforts underway, Bledsoe said the enforcement priority is approaching. “It will be heavy on visibility and warnings, with eventual tickets issued to flagrant violators,” he noted. Enforcement will be aimed at both pedestrians and drivers, and will be conducted by the Ferris and Big Rapids Public Safety Departments.

“Warnings and tickets heal quickly, broken bones and broken hearts can last a lifetime,” said Bledsoe. “Many people have called and requested that something be done, and that is why we are being proactive in this regard.”

Santilli said according to 2003 state police records, the pedestrian death toll for Michigan stands at 169 persons, and for each pedestrian killed, there were 14.7 pedestrians injured. “On average, there was one pedestrian injured every three hours 32 minutes, and one bicyclist injured every four hours 54 minutes in Michigan,” said Santilli.

He reminded students, staff, and community members to “drive alert and sober, buckle up, and slow down. A traffic crash can occur in mere seconds, and change your life and the lives of those who surround you forever.”

LAWS AND ORDINANCES THAT INDIVIDUALS SHOULD BE AWARE OF
MICHIGAN VEHICLE CODE (EXCERPT)

Act 300 of 1949

257.613 Applicability of regular traffic control signals to pedestrians; special pedestrian control signals; violation as civil infraction.

Sec. 613.

(1) If special pedestrian control signals are not utilized, the regular traffic control signals as indicated in section 612 shall apply to pedestrians as follows:

(a) Green indication. Pedestrians facing the signal may proceed across the roadway within a marked or unmarked crosswalk.

(b) Steady yellow indication. Pedestrians facing the signal are advised that there is insufficient time to cross the roadway and a pedestrian then starting to cross shall yield the right of way to all vehicles.

(c) Steady red indication. Pedestrians facing the signal shall not enter the highway unless they can do so safely and without interfering with vehicular traffic.

(d) Red with arrow. Pedestrians facing the signal shall not enter the highway unless they can do so safely without interfering with vehicular traffic.

(2) If special pedestrian control signals are installed, they shall be placed at the far end of each crosswalk and shall indicate a “walk” or “don't walk” interval. These special signals shall apply to pedestrians only to the exclusion of a regular traffic control signal or signals which may be present at the same location, as follows:

(a) Walk interval—Pedestrians facing the signal may proceed across the highway in the direction of the signal and shall be given the right of way by the drivers of all vehicles.

(b) Don't walk (steady burning or flashing) interval—A pedestrian shall not start to cross the highway in the direction of the signals, but a pedestrian who has partially completed crossing on the walk interval of the signal shall proceed to a sidewalk or safety island while the don't walk interval of the signal is showing.

(3) A person who violates this section is responsible for a civil infraction.

MICHIGAN VEHICLE CODE (EXCERPT)

Act 300 of 1949

257.676b Interference with normal flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic prohibited; exception; violation as civil infraction.

Sec. 676b.

(1) A person, without authority, shall not block, obstruct, impede, or otherwise interfere with the normal flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic upon a public street or highway in this state, by means of a barricade, object, or device, or with his or her person. This section shall not apply to persons maintaining, rearranging, or constructing public utility facilities in or adjacent to a street or highway.

(2) A person who violates this section is responsible for a civil infraction.

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

PARKING, TRAFFIC, AND PEDESTRIAN ORDINANCE

SEC 7.2

PEDESTRIANS RIGHT-OF-WAY, CROSSWALK

When traffic-control signals are not in place or not in operation, the driver of a vehicle shall yield the right-of-way, slowing down or stopping if need be to so yield, to a pedestrian crossing the roadway within a crosswalk when the pedestrian is upon the half of the roadway upon which the vehicle is traveling, or when the pedestrian is approaching so closely from the opposite half of the roadway as to be in danger, but no pedestrian shall suddenly leave a curb or other place of safety and walk or run into the path of a vehicle, which is so close that it is impossible for the driver to yield.

SEC 7.8

CIVIL INFRACTION

A person who violates this chapter is responsible for a civil infraction.

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

PARKING, TRAFFIC, AND PEDESTRIAN ORDINANCE

SEC 7.4

PEDESTRIANS ON STREET

Where sidewalks are provided, it shall be unlawful for pedestrians to walk upon the roadway. Where sidewalks are not provided, pedestrians shall, when practicable, walk on the left side on the street or highway facing traffic which passes nearest.

SEC 7.8

CIVIL INFRACTION

A person who violates this chapter is responsible for a civil infraction.