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Ferris, community launch pedestrian safety mobilization

BIG RAPIDS – Ferris State University Department of Public Safety Director Martin J. Bledsoe announced today that a pedestrian safety mobilization will be launched on Monday, March 14. “Pedestrian safety is a concern that has been, and continues to be taken seriously, especially on State Street,” said Bledsoe.

Bledsoe heads a 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; Karl Koivisto and David Vanstensel, Michigan Department of Transportation; James Santilli, Jr., Michigan Highway Traffic Safety Alliance and Ferris student; John Sonntag, Mecosta County sheriff; Maria Knirk, Student Government president; and Tim Vogel, Big Rapids Department of Public Works director.

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

The pedestrian safety mobilization will target pedestrians and drivers and include information about devices designed to enhance pedestrian safety such as; use of crosswalks, pedestrian warning signs, pedestrian signal indications, and reflective materials for nighttime visibility.

“On State Street, engineers have addressed issues such as lighting, signing, striping and intersection design, all of which reduce dangers to pedestrians,” Bledsoe said. “Plants and strip barriers were also added to discourage pedestrians from crossing in less safe, improper places.”

According to Bledsoe, education has been, and continues to be the highest priority. Education efforts include the following:

- Santilli and hall liaison officers have been, and continue to speak to hall directors, desk service managers, and resident advisors at weekly staff meetings, and have also spoken to student organizations.
- Public service announcements will be released on March 14 to WBRN, WYBR, WSNX, and Bulldog Radio.
- Posters funded by Student Government will be displayed around campus and provided to local businesses.
- Santilli and hall liaison officers will give short presentations at residence halls when requested.
- Santilli, Sonntag, and Department of Public Safety Officer Timothy Jacobs spoke to students in the residence halls during the winter semester.
- Bledsoe addressed concerns at the City Manager and Town/Gown meetings, in the annual report (FY 2004 - 2005), and e-mail messages to students, faculty, staff and citizens who have raised issues.

- Cook and Santilli spoke to the Student Government on Nov. 16, and also held a lengthy question and answer period.
- Ferris students, staff and community members are participating in a traffic safety research survey that is being conducted by Santilli through the 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.

Bledsoe stated he is often asked if the police are going to now begin issuing tickets to pedestrians. “Those laws have been on the books forever and walkers are rarely ticketed. The fact is the police are an extension of the education effort. It is law violators who will determine any court action by showing noncompliance that result in complaints from citizens or by causing a crash,” said Bledsoe. “Warnings and tickets heal quickly, broken bones and broken hearts can last a lifetime.”

Santilli believes the general public has a laissez-faire attitude about pedestrian safety. “I’ve seen so many near misses because a pedestrian crossed the street wherever they liked and failed to look for vehicles, or follow signal devices,” said Santilli. “On the other hand, I’ve also observed drivers who, when turning, look for cars but forget to look for pedestrians.”

According to the most current figures, Santilli said Michigan State Police records show that in 2003, the state had a pedestrian death toll of 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 could change your life, and the lives of those who surround you, forever.”

More details about pedestrian safety efforts at Ferris appear at the Michigan Highway Traffic Safety Alliance website, including laws and ordinances of which individuals should be aware.

www.mhtsa.us/resources/ferris.htm

PHOTO CAPTION:

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY MOBILIZATION – Ferris Pedestrian Safety Task Force member James A. Santilli, Jr. and Michigan State Police Trooper Christine A.M. Kaiser explain pedestrian laws to a group of University students. The task force is launching a mobilization effort for the campus and community on March 14.