

## Teen driver safety campaign unveiled in Cartersville

Jon Gargis

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Susan Kessler hopes a simple decal will help reduce teen driving fatalities in Georgia and across the country.

Kessler, director of the not-for-profit Caution and Courtesy Driver Alliance, was one of several speakers at a press conference Wednesday to announce a new statewide safety campaign targeting all young drivers with a learner's permit and first-year drivers.

Proponents of the campaign hope to put magnetic decals on the vehicles of young drivers that warn other motorists that they are sharing the road with inexperienced drivers.



"By identifying teen drivers, other drivers can be alerted," Kessler said. "The magnet that says just simply 'Newly licensed,' alerts other drivers to be careful out there, that these kids are doing their best and they've got to get real-world experience just like we have."

Wednesday was the first day of distribution of 1,500 decals at Department of Driver Services locations in Bartow, Cobb and Rockdale counties. DDS offices across the state will provide new drivers information about the campaign and details on how to order the decals, which are about \$10 each.

"It's about two Starbucks coffees to help save your kid's life," Kessler said. "It's a steal."

Kennesaw recently became the first city to purchase decals for its teen drivers, who picked up their decals at city hall and the public library.

Cartersville Mayor Matt Santini attended Wednesday's event and said he felt the decals could have an effect on reducing teen driving fatalities.

"I think everybody's been there, where you wonder what [someone's] doing behind the wheel of a car, and when you see this 'newly licensed' magnet, it gives you a level of understanding and also makes you aware you need to be more careful around them," Santini said. "I think it's something very simple that can be done that can have a tremendous impact."

Kessler said she hopes the decals will put a dent in the staggering number of teen driving fatalities.

"Every year, over 5,000 teenagers die [nationwide]. That's over five-and-a-half jumbo jets full of kids," she said. "If five-and-a-half jumbo jets full of teenagers every year came down in this parking lot, that

would make news, and that's what's happening.

"We know we can't get it down to zero, but every single crash, every single fatality, we're going to work on it step by step," she added.

The press conference also included a presentation from Robert Dallas, director of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety, who read a proclamation from Gov. Sonny Perdue declaring October as "Teen Driver Awareness Safety Month." Dallas and Commissioner Greg Dozier of the Georgia Department of Driver Services spoke during the conference and praised the decal campaign.

Another proponent of the campaign who spoke at Wednesday's event was Alan Brown. Brown and his wife, LuGina, lost their son Joshua in a car crash in 2003. The two soon thereafter began the Joshua Brown Foundation to raise money for a driver's education program at Cartersville High School.

After getting the Georgia Legislature to pass "Joshua's Law" — which requires Georgia 16-year-olds to complete driver's education before they can obtain their license — the Browns and the foundation now focus on getting modern driver's education instituted in all Georgia high schools.

Alan Brown said the decals, in addition to driver's education and buckling up, can help keep the state's teen driving fatalities on a downward trend.

"The more of these we can give out to 15- and 16-year-olds, the more lives we can save," Brown said. "In other parts of the world, they do the same thing. LuGina and I, we spent some time in Europe this summer, and we saw a lot of cars with an 'L' on them — a red sticker with a yellow L — that means 'newly licensed driver.' They're having terrific results with it all over the world, so why not here?" Brown said he hoped lawmakers would take notice of the decal campaign and take it a step further. "After the initial phase is over with, I'd like to see it become law," he said. "I'd like to see it mandatory where a newly licensed driver would have this or something similar to this on his or her vehicle for the first year. I'm willing to help and work to see this happen."

Though affixing the decals on teens' cars is not yet a state law, it will become a rule for new drivers at Cartersville High School. Principal Jay Floyd said the school will require newly licensed 16-year-old drivers to put the decal on their cars.

Floyd said he hoped the decals will help keep his driving-age students safe.

"We do not want any more monuments or memorials in our courtyard," he said. "Since we started our 21st century classroom for driver's ed. — thanks to Alan Brown, Joshua's Law and his foundation — we have not put any monuments in our courtyard."

Floyd added that one of the magnetic decals will soon see some use in his household.

"As a parent of a 15-year-old, I want to say, 'Thank you,'" he said, "Because today, my son will drive home from football practice, and before I get in my truck, I will take out my magnet, put it on the back of my truck and we'll drive home."

For more information on the newly licensed decals, visit [www.newlylicensed.org](http://www.newlylicensed.org).