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Neighbors call site of Needham crash dangerous

The Boston Globe

Two teenagers died in wreck nearby in 2006



By Lisa Kocian
Globe Staff / April 24, 2009

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For residents of Greendale Avenue in Needham, the head-on car crash this week that claimed the life of a prominent physician was tragically familiar.

In 2006, two teenagers died in an accident about two-tenths of a mile from where [REDACTED] a 60-year-old internist, was fatally injured Tuesday.

[REDACTED] a resident of Greendale Avenue, said that after the 2006 crash neighbors asked for installation of a stop light or other measures to slow traffic on the busy road.

Now she wonders whether that might have made a difference for [REDACTED]

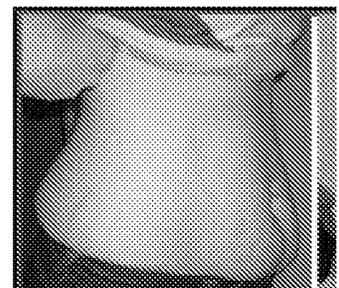
"It's scary. In the 31 years I've lived here, I've never allowed my children to be out front," said [REDACTED] adding that Tuesday evening's crash sounded like thunder. "I feel bad for what happened the other night, and maybe [it] could

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Police Chief Thomas Leary said there are many issues to consider when investigating the crash that killed Phyllis Jen.

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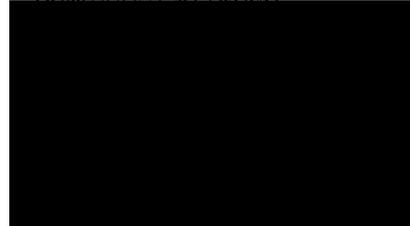
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On the trail of a killer

have been prevented."

█ the longtime medical director of a major physicians' group at Brigham and Women's Hospital, died after her 2007 Toyota Prius apparently crossed the center lane just before 6 p.m., as she was driving to her Needham home after work, according to police.

█ car collided with a Toyota Sequoia; the three people in that vehicle were not seriously injured. Police said Wednesday it did not appear speed or alcohol played a role in the crash, but they were investigating whether █ was using her Blackberry.

Yesterday, police Chief Thomas Leary said he could not go into detail about the investigation. He said there are many issues to consider, such as whether █ had a health issue that could have contributed to the crash.

"Although there was a cellphone in the vehicle, it doesn't necessarily mean that was the case here that this motorist was using a cellphone," he said.

Neighbors said traffic on the road, which runs alongside Route 128, has worsened in recent years. █ said her fence was knocked down twice by cars as they rounded the bend, and in a separate incident two parked cars in front of her house were totaled.

█ who lives down the street, said a motorcyclist lost control in front of her house about a year ago, and a driver hit three parked cars in front of her neighbor's house last summer.

█ said she almost saw another head-on collision while walking her dogs Wednesday morning. "Somebody blew their horn, and I looked, and this person was passing and trying to fit into traffic before he hit someone coming toward him."

The fatal crash in October 2006 involving the two teenagers happened in front of her house █ 19, and █ 18, died when their car hit a tree with such force that the vehicle broke in half.

"We put up a big fence down at the bottom of our property. I think it was psychological," said █ "I was down there gardening, and I'm thinking maybe this isn't a good place to ever be."

The police chief said the nearly half-mile stretch of Greendale Avenue where █ crash occurred has been the site of two to three crashes annually over the last five years, which "isn't exceptionally high." He said he couldn't recall a request for a traffic light.

But even if there was, it is unlikely federal guidelines would allow for one,

according to Anthony Del Gaizo, Needham's town engineer.

A roadway has to meet at least one of 14 federal conditions, such as traffic volume, to legally warrant a traffic light, he said. Although volume is higher now on Greendale because of construction on Route 128, it will improve in coming years as that project is finished, he said.

The two lanes of Greendale were part of the old Route 128 before it became the highway it is now, said Del Gaizo, so the road was designed for speeds higher than the 40 miles per hour allowed now.

Daniel Matthews, chairman of the Needham Board of Selectmen, said he expects the police chief and town manager to look into potential safety issues on Greendale.

"There are many possible causes of an accident, but when you have a fatality, you always look to see if there's anything about the road design we should look at," he said. ✖

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██████████ wrote:

Is it the road that causes accidents or the driver?

4/24/2009 6:54 AM EDT

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██████████ wrote:

Her loss is sad for her family and the whole community. If it turns out that being on her Blackberry was the contributing factor then it is even more sad. There have been a rash of recent deaths due to cell phone use while driving and they are only likely to increase. Perhaps we need to call this phenomena 'Death by Blackberry'.

4/24/2009 7:20 AM EDT

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██████████ wrote:

██████████ (Is it the road or the driver?)

It's a combination of the two. A badly designed road can make inattentive driving more likely, and make that poor driving more likely to cause bad accidents. And the fact that this road's "design" seems to involve a haphazard history of different uses suggests that it was never really designed. I don't drive it frequently (though I have, because I have friends nearby), but my recollection is that its width encourages speeds too high for a residential street with a lot of driveways and intersections. I wish the Lisa Kocian had talked to Needham's traffic engineer or road planners, and not just the police department. It's the police department's job to enforce traffic rules, not to design roads.

If 2-3 major crashes annually per every half-mile of roadway is normal for Needham, I'm glad I don't live in Needham!

██████████

4/24/2009 7:44 AM EDT

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[Redacted] wrote:

By all accounts [Redacted] was a wonderful human being and an outstanding medical doctor. It is important to determine the reasons for her tragic death -- whether it was a dangerous road, the use of a BlackBerry, not wearing a seatbelt, or some combination. If there are contributing factors that can be controlled by drivers then it will be important in such a high profile tragedy because of the potential good that can result. Her death has saddened many that know her and even those who didn't have personal contact with her.

4/24/2009 7:48 AM EDT

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