

news

Message of driving safely finds support

I am filled with gratitude. The fourth annual event to commemorate the National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims on Nov. 18 was well attended.

Achieving Justice

PAUL HERGOTT



I didn't do a count myself, but I am told that there were more than 100 people. The numbers have been slowly increasing each year, a trend that I hope will

continue.

I am grateful, and thankful, for those beautiful people in my world who have been coming to this very chilly event, each year, to support me.

Road safety is important to these friends and co-workers, but it is their kind support of me that brings them out. Thank you.

I am grateful, and thankful, for the RCMP, fire services, and ambulance services leadership, specifically Insp. Brent Mundle, operation supervisor Glenn Braithwaite and local fire chiefs Jeff Carlisle (Kelowna) and Jason Brolund (West Kelowna), whose attendance (along with supporting firefighters to operate Ladder No. 1 which illuminated the event) was squarely all about road safety, but who put their trust in me in my organization of this event.

I am similarly grateful, and thankful, to Dave Gibson, regional safety officer of School District 23, ICBC, Designated Dads, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Kelowna and District Safety Council, Young Drivers of Canada and BrainTrust Canada for their representative attendance at the event.

I am grateful and thankful to Harry Callaghan, of Astral Radio, and Julie Hill, of Power 104/Q103.1, who assisted with promoting the event, and Lauren Pullen of Global News; Barry Gerding with the *Kelowna Capital News*; and Nicholas Johansen with Castanet, for reporting on the event.

Without promotion, there would be no event. Without reporting, the important road safety message doesn't get out.

Join the RCMP and others who refuse to use the word "accident" when referring to a road traffic incident, because the word "accident" is suggestive of a random, unavoidable part of our world.

The RCMP who investigate crash after crash after crash are the most qualified to help us understand that the vast majority of crashes are entirely avoidable with simple common sense and attention to the task at hand.

The subtle use of language can have a powerful impact on attitudes and behaviours. How incredible if all the local news media might follow this important road safety protocol.

I wonder if ICBC might follow suit in all of their publications? Might this be an initiative that takes hold and makes our community a leader in road safety? I confess that I am feeling a touch of giddy optimism in that regard.

This and other small seeds of change have the capacity of germinating and growing to help change our driving culture to one where the act of driving is recognized to be an inherently dangerous activity, just like operating power saws and firearms, commanding a similar level of sensibility and undivided attention.

That's all it will take to greatly reduce the unbearably significant ongoing losses arising from road traffic incidents in our communities.

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DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

West Kelowna mayor feels the pain of traffic crash victims

Barry Gerding

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As the mayor of West Kelowna, Doug Findlater is called upon to speak at many public events on behalf of the city he represents.

And at first glance, the ceremony held in the Orchard Park Shopping Centre in Kelowna to mark the Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims was another of those events, organized by West Kelowna lawyer Paul Hergott, a *Kelowna Capital News* columnist, on civil litigation issues related to road crashes.

But the gathering of more than 100 people on a cold November evening was one Findlater didn't want to miss, because he is a road crash victim himself and still lives with the trauma and physical impact of that life-changing event to this day.

Speaking at the ceremony, Findlater recalled how he became a crash victim, hit by an impaired driver in the evening while making a left turn from St. Paul

Street onto Bernard Avenue.

"It was March 27, 1981 when an impaired driver hit me. It was a life altering event. One I never forget. The firefighters needed the jaws of life to free me from my car and I was hurt bad," Findlater said.

He was taken to Kelowna General Hospital where he would remain for the next two months, a period that he barely remembers today, and one which the doctors were not sure if he would survive.

Findlater ultimately had his spleen removed surgically and suffered a fracture to his pelvis which caused nerve damage he still deals with to this day.

"There are days when I feel pain in my leg and I have to wear a brace, but I have adapted my life and tried not to let it stop me from doing what I want to do," he said, noting he is able to snowboard with his grandkids today at Big White Ski Resort by wearing special snowboarding boots.

"I had a long recovery from my injuries and I was

fortunate I worked for the federal government as my job was still there for me when I was able to get back to work.

"But that one event changed my life forever. There was eventually a settlement paid out by ICBC, but in the end the compensation is just not worth it."

As mayor, Findlater said he continues to champion traffic safety measures in his city to reduce the opportunity for crashes.

He cited the left-hand turn signals for intersections along Highway 97, which he says while delaying the progress of traffic may seem like a nuisance, have effectively stopped the serious left turn crashes into the opposite flow of traffic caused by impatient or reckless driving.

Hergott said the statistics surrounding motor vehicle crashes on our roads is staggering: A 2014 report said globally some 3,500 people are killed every day in road traffic incidents, 215,000 people are injured; in Kelowna there has been 678 collisions this year.



West Kelowna lawyer Paul Hergott speaks at the Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims held Wednesday evening in Kelowna.

Hergott said every day and a half, someone in British Columbia is killed in a road traffic crash, and every 6 1/2 minutes someone is injured.

"In a 2007 economic analysis study, which will cost more today, it was found the economic impact of people involved in road safety collisions is \$9 billion per year. That is the annual budget for the ministry of education and half the budget for the ministry of health," he said.

Hergott said as a lawyer handling civic lawsuits related to motor vehicle collisions, the magnitude of the loss has weighed on him as has the senselessness of each and every crash.

"For each and every file I have handled, the loss would have been completely avoided had the drivers simply driven sensibly and paid attention to the road ahead of them."

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