

Living Safe

Will It Work?

By Pete Hypes



As we watch the sidewalk repair and pedestrian crossing lights being put up in Chester, my question is, will it work? For the sake of pedestrians, safety improvements had to occur. The problem is that I believe that we are creating a perfect storm of sorts, where more people have the potential of being hurt. My information will not come because of research or a complete understanding of the end goal; it will come from what I have watched evolve in Chester over my lifetime.

Many of you know that my wife was a school crossing guard, for many years, at Chester Middle School and Curtis Elementary. In fact, she was one of the first or the first crossing guard at Curtis after the road was widened to five lanes. There were some who refused to put the school crossing lights back up, after the road had been widened. It took citizen inquiries, before that was rectified. There were many, who by word and action, would rather run over someone than heed the directions of a crossing guard. I know that the speed limit, coming into Chester from the east, was reduced from 45 mph to 35 mph. A traffic study was done while my wife was doing the Curtis crossing, and the average speed through Chester was 42 mph. I have no idea if any other studies have been conducted since that one. It is my hope that by reducing the speed limit on the east side that the average speed has dropped.

Along the same lines, Chester is not a quaint little village, off of the beaten path. I see Chester as the beaten path and a wide one at that. When Route 10 was widened to five lanes through Chester, it was as if we said, bring it on! Cars, trucks, dump trucks and tractor-trailers make up

a lot of what travels through Chester, each and every day. Though the speed reduces, coming in from the west, from 55 mph to 45 mph to 35 mph, the light in front of Fire Station 1 is the first traffic signal and hence the first thing to significantly slow traffic. If we really wanted Chester to be a place where pedestrians and traffic could co-exist, then we needed to provide a bypass around Chester and significantly restrict truck traffic through Chester.

Another thing that plays into this is the amount of traffic. We have a situation occurring where one vehicle could sit through four changes of a light in Chester before clearing an intersection. This might not seem like anything, if you are from Alexandria, but we are not in Alexandria. When intersections are not cleared because the green signal is too short, a problem occurs. I know that these pedestrian crossing lights will work in conjunction with traffic lights, but this does not address the impatience of people because of the frustration caused by these short sequence lights.

The last thing that I noticed is at the intersection of Old Centralia and West Hundred Roads. The pedestrian crossing light appears to be high, which will cause the pedestrian to have to look up, instead of forward only. This may not seem like much, but a short distance up could cause that which is happening right in front of a pedestrian to be missed. In other words, pedestrians with the right away, who get struck by a vehicle, are still going to the hospital. There are laws that protect pedestrians and police can probably enforce pedestrian crossing lights, but the cooperation will have to exist between motorists and pedestrians. It hasn't thus far, so I end where I started, will it work? My hope is yes.

RECENTLY DECEASED

- BARLOW**, Mr. Tommy W., 59, of Chester, husband of Theresa Barlow.
- BURCH**, Mrs. Mary Lois Oakley, 76, of Chesterfield, widow of Donald E. Burch.
- DAWSON**, Mrs. Sally M., 61, of North Chesterfield, widow of James P. Dawson Sr.
- GILL**, Mr. Charles A., 86, of North Chesterfield, husband of Mary Ann Horner Gill.
- HARGROVE**, Mrs. Henrietta S., 93, of Chesterfield, widow of Charlie Hargrove.
- HOVANEK**, Mr. George P. "Pollock," 83, of Chesterfield, a Korean War Army veteran, husband of Annette Hovanec.
- GUESS**, Mrs. Ann C., 86, of Chesterfield, widow of Alvin L. Guess Sr.
- LEE**, Mr. Jessie B., 84, of Chester, widower of Iva Winnie Lee.
- SPRUILL**, Mr. Elbert Jay, 69, of Chester, an Army veteran, husband of Patricia Spruill.
- SPURLOCK**, Miss Olivia Eleese, 20, of Chesterfield.
- TATE**, Mr. Robert E. Jr., of Chester, widower of Mary Tate.
- WALTON**, Mrs. Shirley M., 84, of North Chesterfield.
- WILLARD**, Mr. James Kent, 59, of Chesterfield, husband of Diane Hardison Willard.
- WINGFIELD**, Mr. Edward M. Jr., 65, of Chesterfield, a Vietnam War veteran, husband of Shirley Wingfield.

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