

Always Remembered

Thursday, April 20, 2006 3:13 AM EDT

By Kimberly Starks
Marietta Daily Journal Staff Writer

KENNESAW - A local nonprofit foundation will launch a Web site in May to memorialize teens who have died in car accidents.

The Teen Safety Research Center, a division of the Joshua Brown Foundation, created www.teensremembered.org as an opportunity for parents, family and friends to share memories and interact with other affected parents nationwide.

It also is a vehicle to encourage parental involvement in teen driving and generate a campaign to strengthen driver education laws in several states, including Georgia.

"Every parent who has lost a child has an interest in drivers' education," said Pat Wilder, executive director of the Joshua Brown Foundation. "This is an opportunity for them to find a voice."

According to the Automobile Association of America, car crashes are the No. 1 cause of death among 15- to 20-year-olds. Fatal car crashes claimed 30,917 teens nationwide between 1995 and 2004. The majority of fatalities in these crashes were teens other than the driver, the association said in its report, "Teen Drivers: Everyone is at Risk."

In Georgia, 301 teenagers died in car crashes in 2004, the latest information available.

A car accident in east Cobb Tuesday involving Lassiter High School junior Kayla Ray Gattis is the second teen-related fatality in Cobb County this week.

On Monday, South Cobb High School student Marc Hardy Lagardere died in a one-car crash on the East-West Connector in Austell. Three teen passengers were injured in the wreck, the Cobb County Police Department said.

Tuesday's crash was the fifth teen car fatality in Cobb this year.

Alan Brown, founder of the Joshua Brown Foundation, said the Web site is for "other parents that share my pain."

"We want to help in the grieving process and help create change," he said.



Brown's 17-year-old son Joshua died in a July 2003 crash when his car hydroplaned in Cartersville during a rainstorm. He developed the nonprofit and proposed legislation for more stringent driving laws in Georgia, now called Joshua's Law.

The foundation is located in the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service at the Kennesaw State University Center on Chastain Road.

Researchers nationwide are working with the Teen Safety Research Center to examine and create an interactive drivers' education curriculum for Georgia schools. Drivers' education is not state mandated but is optional to school districts under Joshua's Law.

"Kids are kids, and they sometimes don't take things lightly or don't understand the risks," Brown said. "A 21st Century drivers' education will make them aware of the consequences and of the risks."

Family can post pictures and write short memoirs about their teen on the Web site for others to view.

"It's a small taste of why drivers' education is important, and why teen driving affects everyone," Ms. Wilder said.

The Web site and the foundation should persuade Georgia lawmakers to formulate stronger driving laws.

"The foundation is a vehicle to saving lives," Brown said. "We're nowhere near there, but we're gaining on them."