

Residents say cut-through traffic is deadly

By BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

A state project could eliminate cut-through traffic on residential streets in the Grand River/Middlebelt area of Farmington Hills.

Shelly Nichols, a mother of four who lives on Colgate near Grand River, has been frustrated by traffic problems — including a car hitting and seriously injuring her 18-year-old son Robert Hahn.

"I'm not blaming drivers," said Nichols, who quit her job as a nurse to stay home with her children. "I'm not blaming pedestrians. But something has to be done. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't do anything and someone else was killed."

Nichols said she became more frustrated and began collecting signatures from neighbors after the death of her son's friend Paul Umlah, who was hit as he crossed Middlebelt on March 16 and died from head injuries.

Farmington Hills police and engineers have not turned a deaf ear to the pleas of Nichols and her neighbors, but say there is a limit to what they can do.

"We put an officer there for a week in September of '91," said Sgt. Ray Cranston, traffic specialist for the Farmington Hills Police Department. "We had one violation for the week. That's not a good use of resources."

Short cut for drivers

To some motorists who would normally go through the light at Middlebelt, heading east, make a boulevard turn left to make a right to go north, taking a left on the cut-through at Grand River and Colgate saves going through three traffic lights. Therein lies the problem.

Motorists taking a short cut heading east on Grand River will

turn into the cut-through at Colgate. They'll often "fly" across the westbound lane of Grand River and into the narrow Colgate heading north to Liberty, then east the Middlebelt. With many young children and teens living in the area, residents are worried about the danger.

"It's sad that these kids are being hit," said Tracey Gilme, a mother of five who lives near Nichols on Colgate.

Gilme's 7-year-old daughter Jenna was hit by a car while on her bike. Jenna was not seriously injured, but she is worried that someone won't be as lucky next time.

"I have a two-year-old," she said. "I know she is going to want to get out in the yard. I'm worried about these cars flying down the street."

The sharp angle of the intersection, no "fairlane" in entering the cut-through, parked cars on either side of Colgate, snow piled up near the intersection in the winter, 24-foot setbacks from Grand River, a new Target Store west of the cut-through and delivery trucks using an alley between Nichols' house and the bindery all add to the problem, Nichols said.

More testimony

Businessman Ray Connell, who owns E&R Bindery on the west side of Colgate and Grand River, and Lou Bresler, who owns the Car Gallery on the east side of the same intersection, agree with Nichols.

"Police patrol it pretty good here," said Bresler, who has been at the location for almost four years. "But when people park in front of the tool company (Peninsular Machinery Co. — east of the Car Gallery), you can hardly see the traffic coming from Middlebelt."



STAFF PHOTOS BY SILVANO LEMIEUX

Connell, who has been at his present location for eight years, said one accident actually sent a truck through his company's east wall and into the bathroom.

"I think the speed is the biggest problem," he said.

Connell said cars and trucks making the cut-through to Colgate will often "gun it" into the subdivision to avoid oncoming traffic from Middlebelt.

Nichols said eliminating that cut-through would solve the problem.

Farmington Hills city engineer Kevin McCarthy said the state is planning to do just that beginning this summer.

"They are going to eliminate several cut-throughs all along

Grand River," he said. "They are also going to change some others so they don't lead directing into subdivisions."

McCarthy said that the city has been active in efforts to improve traffic patterns in the area, with yield signs, traffic monitoring and enforcement.

Cranston said not only would it be illegal for the city to restrict access to Colgate, but it could backfire.

"Taxpayers are entitled to use that road," he said. "Plus, if you put up a sign, it's going to be a clue to motorists who don't already know that there is a short cut."



Ray Connell



Lou Bresler



Shelly Nichols

Traffic tragedies

Residents on Colgate and Liberty streets are trying to change a traffic problem caused by motorists using their streets as a short cut to Middlebelt. There have been serious injuries and a recent fatality in the area.

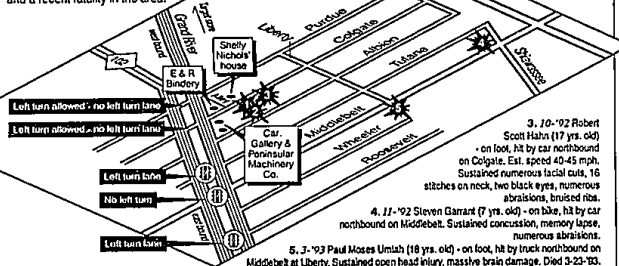


TABLE: GRAVES/STAFF ARTIST

Woman hurt in cut-through crash

A Novi woman was taken to Bedford Hospital after she rear-ended a truck as it made a left-hand turn on the Grand River cut-through at Colgate at 11:45 a.m. Thursday.

Sharon Lee Pound, 34, tried to move from the left lane on east bound Grand River, but her 1983 Dodge Aries clipped the right rear end of the trailer of a 1992 Freightliner truck driven by Robert Dexter, 49, of Farmington, Ill. He was not injured.

Police said Dexter had signaled and was making a legal left turn at the time of the accident. Pound was ticketed for failure to stop in an assured clear distance.

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Because activity brings on pain, your arthritis may not permit you to undertake strenuous exercise; as a result, you lose muscle. You may feel that this loss is what makes you weak; if you could rebuild muscle, you would regain your strength.
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Arthritis of the forearms and shoulders compromises the freely guiding motions that allow you to raise your arm or turn your forearm in an arc. In turn, you lose this capability of the arm to act as efficient fulcrum.
The same is true for your legs. You become tired walking because your leg muscles spend your heel-toe gait to minimize knee and foot pain rather than acting as efficient levers for your stride.
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