

Gwinnett's first crosswalk sting produces 82 warnings

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Just because drivers are traveling in 2,000 pounds of metal doesn't give them the right to bully pedestrians.

That message was brought home to motorists Thursday morning when Gwinnett County police conducted an undercover "crosswalk sting" at the intersection of Jimmy Carter Boulevard and South Norcross Tucker Road in Norcross.



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(ENLARGE)

Gwinnett Police officer Cynthia Hollis makes her way across the crosswalk at Jimmy Carter Boulevard and S. Norcross Tucker Road during the sting.

Police issued 82 warnings within 90 minutes to drivers for failing to stop for a pedestrian crossing the street in a crosswalk. One man was jailed for having a suspended license.

Most of the drivers who were stopped and issued warnings Thursday said they didn't know they were breaking the law.

"I didn't know I had to stop if she wasn't in my lane," said Wade Blackwell, a 45-year-old resident of Loganville. "It was ignorance of the law, I guess."

The decoy was Officer Cynthia Hollis, a youthful-looking female police officer with her hair pulled back in a ponytail. She wore jeans and an orange T-shirt and carried a backpack.

Hollis said the curb-to-curb trip was a bit nerve-wracking.

"I've had to stop and I've had to move over and I've had to hurry up for cars trying to go behind me," Hollis said. "One car honked at a female driver who was waiting for me to finish crossing, and she kind of was inching up a little bit—what we call bullying—because he was honking at her."



Vino Wong/AJC

(ENLARGE)

Gwinnett Police officers signal to vehicles to pull over for not stopping for a pedestrian during a crosswalk sting.

The area of Jimmy Carter Boulevard east of I-85 is well known for heavy pedestrian traffic. A large concentration of apartment complexes are concentrated within walking distance of shops and restaurants, said police Lt. Greg Osetkowski.

"In this area over the past few years we've had many fatalities," Osetkowski said.

Thursday's crosswalk sting was the first ever conducted in Gwinnett, but it will not be the last.

Michael Orta, program manager PEDS (Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety), said police agencies around metro Atlanta are beginning to perform regular crosswalk enforcement due to the rising number of pedestrian fatalities.

Every day in metro Atlanta, four pedestrians are struck, most of whom are injured or killed, Orta said. PEDS reports that about 80 pedestrians are killed in metro Atlanta each year.

Orta said a change in Georgia law in 1995 gave more protection to pedestrians.

The law requires drivers to stop if a pedestrian is in the crosswalk on their half of the road, even if the pedestrian is not in the driver's lane. Drivers trying to make a turn cannot turn behind or in front of pedestrians in a crosswalk. They must remain stopped until the pedestrian has finished crossing the side of the road onto which they are turning.



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Wade Blackwell, of Loganville, gets a warning citation from Corpl. H.W. King for not yielding to a undercover Gwinnett Police officer during a crosswalk sting.

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