

Pace yourself

Parent recruits drivers to slow down Stonehaven

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BY Daniel Reid



As the city and school councils consider raising the speed on Stonehaven Drive to 50 kilometres per hour, Heather Kirk is recruiting parents to keep things safe around two Bridlewood schools. This Pace Car pilot program will be introduced at Roch Carrier Elementary School and St. Anne Catholic School next week. "Ideally you're a Pace Car everywhere you drive."

Heather Kirk has a need for speed ... limits.

The mother of three is introducing a program to help calm the speed of traffic on Stonehaven Drive at two Bridlewood schools.

Pace Car Drivers, essentially "mobile speed bumps," are being recruited to stick to the speed limit at all times, thereby slowing potential speedsters in the name of student safety.

"People typically have good intentions but you get caught up in moving with the flow," she said.

Pace Car Drivers will become invaluable speed enforcement agents, said Kirk, as the city and local school councils consider raising the speed on school-laden Stonehaven to 50 kilometres per hour, with the exception of school zones, which would remain 40 during school hours.

The Pace Car concept is modelled after motorsport racing: during an accident on the racetrack, a pace car pulls to the front of the pack to safely slow the speed of cars, until the course has been cleared.

The analogy's fitting for Stonehaven, said Kirk, as drivers can sometimes cruise dangerously fast down the snaking street lined by four elementary schools.

"It's busy," she said, in reference to mornings in front of St. Anne where her three young children go to school. "You've got 400 some students walking to school and you've got people rushing to work."

The pilot program at Roch Carrier Elementary School and St. Anne Catholic School in Bridlewood starts next week. If it's successful, the Pace Car program will be also adopted at St. James Elementary School and Elizabeth Bruyere Catholic School. Maybe even citywide, said Kirk.

Pace cars have already proven successful in cities across Australia – where the program originated – and the United States.

"You're basically just promising to be doing what you're supposed to be doing. Ideally you're a Pace Car everywhere you drive."

## ROAD RAGE

Kirk hopes people's common sense overrides their road rage and rising blood pressure as they get stuck behind a car donning a Neighbourhood Pace Car sticker.

"I think at heart, people want the kids to be safe," she said. "Hopefully they'll give (Pace Car Drivers) that due respect."

"We know when people are driving 40 kilometres per hour there are people honking at them, angry at them for going the speed (limit)," said Cathy Curry, trustee for the public school board. "They're furious the traffic is going so slowly."

With a pace car sticker in the back window, telling other drivers that the person slowing them down is a school volunteer, Curry thinks it should stop the rude reactions.

"People understand that this is about student safety," she said.

"I describe it almost like a Block Parent. This is sort of 'I'm driving a safe speed, we're keeping this roadway safe for you.'"

"When you're driving today, too often you're in a hurry or thinking about other things," said Kanata South Coun. Peggy Feltmate. "This kind of reminder, again, puts the onus on the community."

“Most of the speeding, 99 per cent of it, is people living in the area.”

Jane Hill, principal at St. Anne, said the program could make the street safer for the many kids that already walk to school.

“We can teach the children all we want about crossing the road safely but it’s usually the adults (that are the problem),” she said.

The Stonehaven and Grassy Plains Drive intersection is especially dangerous, she said.

Shortly before and after school starts, lights at the intersection turn red in all directions so children can cross without competing with cars.

It doesn’t seem to stop some drivers from turning right or trying to sneak through the intersection at the last second, said Hill.

“(The lights are) very clever but you still have to think about cars that are turning,” she said, “and cars running red lights.

“We just want to make sure (kids) don’t get run over.”

## KANATA NORTH

Alex Ribeiro, a parent of three students at Jack Donohue Public School, said if the pilot program is successful in Bridlewood he’d like to see a similar program introduced at schools in north Kanata.

“The idea is great and would make a difference,” he said.

The only problem, specific to Jack Donohue, is varying speeds on feeder streets, he said. Halton Terrace and Penrith Street both have a speed limit of 50 kilometres per hour.

In 2006, as his wife and youngest daughter – who was in kindergarten at the time – attempted to cross Penrith at Halton in front of the school, they were almost struck by a parent who started driving while parked on the wrong side of the road.

Ribeiro had a similar experience while walking the same daughter to school.

As he waited on the side of the road to cross the street, a nearby student darted out to cross what seemed to be a momentary gap in the near constant flow of traffic.

“I had to grab the student by the shirt collar and yank back otherwise they would have been hit by a minivan,” Ribeiro told the Kourier-Standard in 2007.

He’d like to see the speed on both streets lowered to 40 kilometres per hour, during school hours, to ensure student safety.