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DAILY DIGEST

Thursday, September 4, 2003 12:00AM EDT

STAYING SAFE

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Look before you back

Staying Safe - Driveway Deaths

By AISLING SWIFT, Staff Writer

DURHAM -- Nineteen-month-old Joshua Bass ran outside, following his cousin to the church van, spotted the headlights that so entranced him and ran to touch them.

No one, not even his 15-year-old cousin, knew he was in the Oxford Manor apartments parking lot in Durham at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 19. Within moments, the 15-seat Dodge van with six passengers pulled out and turned left, knocking Joshua down. His chest was crushed, and his neck and skull fractured. He died a day later.

"I honestly don't think he knew the child was there," Durham Police Officer Michael Goodwin said of Toney McClammy, 42, a driver for New Covenant United Holy Church, who was not charged.

Every year, children die this way. Sometimes it's a church or day-care van. More often, it's parents or close relatives at the wheel.

Even nonfatal crashes can cause fractured skulls, broken bones and crushed chests. Three years ago, Mariah Starr Potter, 3, suffered serious chest and internal injuries when her father, Brett Duane Potter, 42, didn't see her as he backed his Buick Regal out of a driveway in northwest Durham.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, an average of 390 people, including 116 children younger than 4, are killed in off-road, back-up accidents each year. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says children ages 1 to 4 account for 30 percent of those killed, but experts believe the numbers are higher because no agency tracks that data.

"We're losing children every week from being backed over," said Janette Fennell, co-founder of Kids 'N Cars, a nonprofit group that tracks nontraffic accidents involving children and vehicles. "A van is a 6,000-pound weapon. ... There's a whole mix of huge vehicles that have changed driving. Now we have minivans, SUVs and pickup trucks."

Kids 'N Cars documented 58 such accidents last year.

Some states realize something needs to be done. In 2001, New York enacted "Joey's Law," requiring cross-view backup mirrors on commercial vehicles 8 1/2 feet to 18 feet long with

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N.C. Supreme Court censures judge

Wake Superior Court Judge Evelyn Hill was censured today by the N.C. Supreme Court for conduct that the court said brought the judicial office into "disrepute."

Bush kicks off N.C. reelection effort

At a \$2,000-a plate luncheon attended by 550 persons, Bush said the country was winning the war against terrorism abroad and that the troubled economy was recovering at home.

Orioles hire Lee Mazzilli as manager

Mazzilli, 48, becomes a major league manager for the first time. He agreed to a two-year contract with two one-year club options.

Farmer races the killing frost

Farm workers rush to get sweet potatoes out of the fields before the first fall frost comes as soon as Sunday morning.

Markets show gains

But investors wondered whether stock prices might be getting too high

Six die in helicopter crash

The U.S. soldiers killed near Tikrit, Iraq, were from the 101st Airborne Division.

Treatment helps avoid breast loss

New radiation method is quicker and more focused.

Tally alters election results

Incumbent Gloria Faley loses seat on Chapel Hill-Carrboro school board.

2 dead in Durham apartment

An N.C. State graduate and a man she once said was stalking her are found fatally shot.

Playoff charge begins

A total of 256 schools are vying for eight state championships.

Canes go on the offensive

Carolina nets six goals, two by Craig Adams, in a big win over the Rangers.

Stores unsure on holiday help

Merchants wary of adding many employees, despite good forecast.

Sony, BMG to join music

Only Universal would be larger.

cube-style or enclosed delivery bays. The law was named after a boy killed by a delivery truck in his driveway.

At the urging of Kids 'N Cars, Consumer Reports tested the blind spots of a sedan, minivan, SUV and pickup while backing up. For an average driver, blind spots ranged from 12 feet for a sedan to 29 feet for a pickup. With short drivers, they ranged from 17 feet to 51 feet .





Fifteen-seat passenger vans, like the Dodge Ram B350 that killed Joshua, have prompted the greatest outcry. "This is what most churches, school sports teams and groups, day cares and senior citizen centers use," Fennell said. "There are regular people driving them, not trained bus drivers."

New technology includes sensors, video, convex-bubble lenses for side mirrors, and reverse sensing radar systems. A North Carolina company manufactures the Rostra Obstacle Sensing System, which mounts behind the rear bumper to alert drivers to obstacles as far as 12 feet behind.

Joshua's great-aunt, Delonnia Bass, thinks something as simple as bells on a toddler's shoelaces -- popular in the 1960s -- could have saved Joshua. "Being that age, the bells would be a good idea because with the bells ringing as a toddler ran, you could hear that," she said.

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