

OUR VIEW

Safer streets could start with a wave

The concept is simple enough: Stop. Look. Wave.

At intersections and crosswalks — anywhere, really, that pedestrians, bicyclists, wheelchair users, skateboarders and motorists might face each other — pause, make eye contact and give a wave to acknowledge each other before moving on.

That is at the heart of a campaign unveiled last week called "Newport Waves," which includes a short video featuring well-known local residents, from Newport Patrol Officer Jimmy Winters to Boston Marathon bombing survivor Heather Abbott, doing "the wave."

"We're encouraging all pedestrians, motorists, bicyclists and skateboarders to use nonverbal communication and wave," Danielle Abruzzi of Newport said during the unveiling event last Wednesday. Her husband, Sid Abruzzi, owner of Water Bros surf and skate shop, is in the video.

The campaign is an outgrowth of an effort to make Newport's streets safer, supported by a \$10,000 federal grant.

Newport and Providence were chosen for the "Safe Streets for All" grants in Rhode Island since they have the highest number of crashes between vehicles and pedestrians, bicyclists, wheelchair users, mopeds or other "vulnerable users" in the state.

Newport had 179 such crashes from 2009 to mid-2014, and four deaths from such accidents since 2012, according to the state Department of Transportation's "Vulnerable User Crash Data."

Two of the deaths were of pedestrians who were struck by vehicles in crosswalks in daylight in clear weather.

"The campaign is based on a simple proposition to wave to



for the production and hanging of 25 banners around the city, if the City Council on Wednesday approves the request to hang them — T-shirts and an educational component in the city's schools.

"It's all about teaching road safety to the young people we are stewards of," said Superintendent Colleen Burns Jermain.

Many other organizations, from the Jane Pickens Theater to Discover Newport, have signed on as partners in the campaign, which is just part of the focus of the grant being implemented by Bike Newport, the Newport Police Department and the city's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission.

The advisory commission is studying local ordinances and state laws specifically in connection with pedestrians, bicyclists, pedestrians/motorists and bicyclists/pedestrians, and the effectiveness of enforcement.

The Police Department is retraining officers on the enforcement of pedestrian and traffic ordinances. The department also recently stemmed an

each other," said Bari Freeman, executive director of Bike Newport, which is spearheading the campaign. "Too often, the sentence heard after an accident is, 'I thought you saw me.'"

In addition to the video, which was created pro bono by Worldways Social Marketing, the campaign will include banners around the city—Senate President M. Teresa Paiva Weed, D-Newport, has secured a \$5,000 legislative grant to pay

its enforcement of bicycling ordinances, issuing warnings and citations for violations.

"It's an ongoing effort to remind the influx of tourists and seasonal workers that they are obligated to abide by the same rules of the road as (drivers)," Sgt. Corey Huck said.

All of these efforts—awareness, education and enforcement— together will help to make Newport's streets safer for all of us.