

AAAWORLD

THE HURD FAMILY TURNS TRAGEDY INTO ADVOCACY

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It was going to be a very special day. Twenty-six-year-old Heather Hurd was on her way to meet her parents and a wedding planner in Orlando, Florida, to discuss the arrangements for her dream wedding at Walt Disney World. But Heather never reached her destination that day. In the blink of an eye, in one terrible moment, she was gone, the victim of a distracted driver trying to send a text message on a mobile phone.

The tragic death of Heather Hurd is a heartbreaking story, and sadly, hers is just one among thousands of lives cut short by motorists distracted while texting, or in other words, driving “intoxicated.”



Russell Hurd (left) joined AAA Public Affairs Manager Ragina Cooper-Averella during the Heather L. Hurd 5K event at Harford Community College.

Born on March 10, 1981, in Maryland, Heather attended Harford Community College and Towson University, where she studied nursing. Her ultimate goal, however, was to work at Walt Disney World, so she had moved to Orlando to pursue her dream. On January 3, 2008, Heather and her fiancé, Patrick, were driving to meet a Disney wedding planner and her parents, Kim and



Russell, who were in Florida for the holidays. While stopped at a red light, Heather and Patrick were struck by the driver of a tractor-trailer who plowed into their vehicle and eight others at high speed. The truck driver was going 65 miles per hour up a slight incline while attempting to text his employer. He never applied his brakes. Heather died at the scene, and another young woman also lost her life in the crash.

While such a senseless tragedy would be enough to destroy many people, Russell and Kim Hurd turned their grief into action, fighting to increase awareness of distracted driving and working with lawmakers in Maryland and Florida to pass “Heather’s Law,” legislation that prohibits



Hurd family during Christmas 1996. Heather (top center) with her dad, Russell; mom, Kim and brother, Andrew.

texting while driving. In Maryland, AAA's Public and Government Affairs team joined the Hurds in advocating for the legislation, meeting with and testifying before legislators to emphasize the importance of making texting while driving illegal. "Heather's Law" passed in Maryland in 2009 and in Florida in 2013.

In 2008, the Hurds also organized what became an annual 5K event at Harford Community College to further raise awareness of distracted driving and to provide scholarships in

Heather's name. AAA is proud to have been a sponsor of the 5K since 2013. The sponsorship provides the opportunity to share information about AAA's advocacy efforts to combat distracted driving as well as to speak with families from across the region directly impacted by distracted driving.

A few years ago, the U.S. Department of Transportation launched a series of videos about driver distraction titled *Faces of Distracted Driving*. The series included Heather's story. In a video clip from the campaign, Kim said what most of us know but what many drivers don't practice: we could fix the problem of distracted driving by simply putting down our phones when we drive. Also in the video, Russell poignantly summed up the stakes for all of us when he said, "Everyone across the country has a Heather in their life; it's someone you love with all your heart. We have to do everything we can to protect them." To view the Hurd's powerful video, please visit <https://bit.ly/2PzaP9Y>.



If you have a distracted driving story to share, please email AAA at distracteddriving@aaamidatlantic.com.