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# Advocates say releasing names can be a positive

VICTIMS from A1

Spokesperson Const. Danny Martini said Peel police made the decision in the Manan case for investigative purposes.

“Just because there’s so little information to go off of, it’s just to get public awareness,” she said.

It’s traditionally “case-by-case” whether to give out names of road victims, Martini said, “just because it’s so situational and every case presents so differently.”

Peel police have guidelines on the issue, Martini added, but “it is something they’re looking at getting more structured word-ing on.”

If anyone recognizes the teen, a Grade 11 student who loved music and art and wanted to be a pediatrician, they might have some information that could help the case, she added.

And, “it makes it more real.”

Spokesperson Const. Caroline de Kloet said Toronto police don’t release the names or road deaths as a “standard proce-dure,” unlike with homicide victims.

But, on rare occasions, the service may also release an identi-ty “for investigative purposes,” she said.

“We don’t name them, we never do,” she said, adding she is not sure of the rationale for the practice.

Of the 42 pedestrians and one cyclist killed in Toronto last year, by the Star’s count just a single victim was formally named by Toronto police, several days after her family had already identified her to the Star and other media.

Celeste Jones, a 34-year-old beloved daughter and sister who loved books, film and tele-vision, was killed in August after a driver hit her as she crossed Sheppard Avenue East,



STEVE RUSSELL TORONTO STAR

The spot on Jarvis Street near where a 65-year-old man was hit and killed in Toronto on Saturday.

and then fled. Her family kept a vigil over the spot where she was hit, hoping the person who left her would turn themselves in. In an interview with the Star, her father begged drivers to “be more humane.”

The case is still unsolved.

Releasing Jones’s name was “something that was done through Crime Stoppers,” de Kloet said, noting the group had made a video re-enactment of the crash.

(In 2019, four of the city’s 42 pedestrian victims were killed while on foot on a 400-series highway, which are patrolled by the Ontario Provincial Police. Sgt. Kerry Schmidt said the OPP releases the names of these victims except in cases of suicide.)

Last year was one of Toronto’s most deadly for pedestrian deaths in recent years, tied with 2018 for the highest since 2002, when 50 were killed.

Several of the pedestrians killed were named by the Star or other media after reporters spoke with witnesses, friends and family. Their stories often

made it to the front page and the city’s morning shows — but most victims were never identi-fied.

Those unnamed victims in-cluded people like the 76-year-old woman who was hit twice and killed while crossing a Scar-borough crosswalk — by the drivers of both a turning trans-port truck and, minutes later, a car — around midday in August. Neither driver stayed with her.

At least 25 of those pedestri-ans were over the age of 60. Many were killed on large sub-urban streets in areas such as Scarborough.

In New York, NYPD spokes-person Sgt. Mary O’Donnell said that the force releases the names and identities of any killed pedestrians and cyclists after notifying family as a mat-ter of “public record,” just like Toronto police and others do for homicides.

New York, like Toronto, has seen a recent rise in traffic deaths amid efforts to imple-ment a Vision Zero road safety plan.

Last summer, Toronto city

council approved a beefed-up “version 2.0” of the plan, adding more red light cameras and re-ducing speed limits on some streets.

Identifying victims is some-thing Gil Penalosa, founder and chair of the non-profit 8 80 Cities would like to see become commonplace.

It’s “very, very important” to release the names of all pedes-trians and cyclists killed by drivers, he said.

Following the 2018 Yonge St. van attack, in which a driver intentionally mowed down 26 pedestrians in North York, the names of the 10 killed victims were officially released by the provincial coroner and Toronto police a few days after the crime. (By that time, local me-dia had already named many of the victims.)

The stories of those victims, complete with relatable details of their lives, were widely pub-lished along with their photos.

“So, all of a sudden, people re-alized it could have been me,” Penalosa said.

Releasing identities is a way to

“humanize” road safety and help mobilize public opinion and spur politicians to action, he said.

“This is a huge crisis, that peo-ple are afraid to go out and walk because they might be killed,” he said.

“And I think that having the faces — and not only the faces, but as much as possible about the person and the family, then (the public will) realize, ‘oh, it’s a high school student,’ or ‘it’s a mom,’ or ‘it’s a dad.’”

As the World Health Organi-zation put it in a 2007 report on road traffic crashes: “Behind each statistic there is a story of a father or mother, son or daugh-ter, brother or sister, grand-child, colleague, classmate or friend whose life was trans-formed in an instant by a road crash.”

Lawyer and road safety advo-cate Patrick Brown takes a cau-tious approach.

“If a family consented to the release of the name of the per-son who was killed, then I would think that it would be helpful for the police to release that name in order to change behaviour,” he said.

“If consent was not provided, I would not expect them at all to release the name.”

There’s a “positive side” to putting a name and face out there, he said, but the families are also victims, “and you don’t want to victimize them twice.”

But Brown and Penalosa agree the advocacy from the families of road crash victims and survi-vors has resulted in positive change, both in Toronto and in other cities.

“In my experience, many of them feel compelled to want to have change, and do want at times to get the story out so that it doesn’t happen to other peo-ple,” Brown said.

“They want to end this.”

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