



Couple whose daughter died help to dedicate crossing light at dangerous Regent Square intersection

A STRIDE FOR SAFETY

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By Dan Majors, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Donald and Yuling Wei hesitantly stepped off the curb yesterday afternoon along South Braddock Avenue at Biddle Street, the Regent Square intersection where their daughter, Evelyn, was struck and killed while crossing three years ago.

But they were walking under the safety of the city's new flashing-yellow overhead crossing lights, dedicated to their daughter and paid for, in part, out of the settlement received in the couple's lawsuit against the city.

"From Day One, when the family first came to see me, the thing that they were most interested in was trying to see that nobody else had to relive what they lived through," their attorney, John P. Gismondi, said during a small dedication ceremony at the intersection near Frick Park.

"The lawsuit was always about trying to make this a safer intersection for people. To their credit, it was their idea to approach the city and make sure that cost was not an issue."

The crossing lights, which are activated when pedestrians push buttons on curbside poles, cost \$75,000. The Weis, who won a \$465,000 settlement from the city, donated \$10,000, as did Mr. Gismondi. The rest of the cost was covered by a grant from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources because of the intersection's proximity to Frick Park.

Evelyn Wei, 33, a researcher at UPMC, was struck and killed by a car as she walked her dog back from Frick Park to her home on Braddock Avenue at around 7 p.m. on Jan. 21, 2004. A jury awarded her husband, Mike Sukel, and her parents \$3.7 million in 2005, but the city, by state law, was liable for a maximum of \$500,000.

"It's with mixed feelings that we are here today," said Mr. Wei, who lives with his wife in Monroeville. "We are gratified that this pedestrian-activated traffic control is finally in place. On the other hand, we are saddened that it is because of Evelyn's death we are here."



V.W.H. Campbell Jr., Post-Gazette

Donald and Yuling Wei with the new pedestrian safety signal at Biddle Street and South Braddock Avenue. Their daughter, Evelyn Wei, 33, was hit by a car and killed at the intersection in 2004. The Wei family along with their lawyer, John P. Gismondi, paid the city \$20,000 toward the cost of the crossing lights.

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"[Our] interest has always been to make this a safer intersection, a safer place for the adults and kids who use this park for decades to come."

The crossing lights, which flash for 60 seconds, are cautionary and do not stop traffic. In fact, commemorative plaques on the poles warn pedestrians that the lights "[do] not guarantee a driver will stop."

"We have to remember that in the city of Pittsburgh, pedestrians do have the right of way at an intersection," City Council President Doug Shields said. "[Monday] there was another tragedy on West Liberty Avenue in Dormont where a woman was struck and killed. Hopefully, this could be part of the message for a change in the culture of Pittsburgh."

The Weis' ceremonial first crossing also amounted to a chance to evaluate the setup. Afterward, they had two concerns that city Public Works Director Guy Costa promised to address in the days ahead: The length of time per activation will be stretched to a minute and a half, and some form of flashing light will be installed so pedestrians can be sure the system is activated. Right now, the flashing lights are aimed at oncoming traffic and not visible from the curbs.

The new lights were welcomed by neighborhood residents who have been trying to address safety issues at the dangerous intersection for years. Carrie Webber, president of the Regent Square Civic Association, said the effort "gained momentum after Evelyn's accident."

"I'm just so pleased," said Ms. Webber, who lives on Lancaster Street. "I have a 4-year-old and a dog. For all the residents, we just think it's wonderful. The traffic through here travels pretty fast and the drivers aren't always aware of the pedestrians. I'm just so impressed that [the Weis] were willing to participate in this after their tragedy."

John Danzak, who has lived on South Braddock Avenue for 15 years, said the city has been responsive to residents' concerns.

"To the city's credit, every time something has happened here, the city has responded and made an additional improvement," he said. "The city has not sat by idly. They've painted the crosswalks, they posted signs. This is perhaps the icing on the cake."

Asked about how long it took to get the crossing lights approved, purchased and installed, Mr. Wei said, "Considering government as government goes, it's not that simple. It's the end result that counts."

Correction/Clarification: (Published April 5, 2007) The age of Evelyn Wei, the pedestrian struck by a car and killed on South Braddock Avenue at Biddle Avenue in Regent Square in January 2004, was incorrect in this story as originally published on April 4, 2007. She was 33.

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