



Army Wife Urges Safe Driving Choices

By Kathryn C. Weigel, Production Assistant

FORT LEE, Va. (May 20, 2010) – Two martinis, no seat belt, excessive speed and a sinuous coastal road were a recipe for disaster.

For Army wife Kelly G. Narowski, it meant a shattered T6 vertebra and an inconvenient life in a wheelchair for the last 11 years.

Narowski is the guest speaker for Drive to Stay Alive presentations by the Fort Lee Safety Office. The last presentation is set for today, 7 p.m., at the Lee Theater. Her series of eight talks kick off Fort Lee's 101 Critical Days of Summer safety awareness campaign.

At age 25, Narowski took the wheel of a friend's Jeep to drive them to a concert on a California beach, after her friend declared she had too much to drink. The trip from the passenger seat to the driver's seat was her last walk. She neglected to fasten her seat belt while her friend remembered to buckle up. The friend walked away from the accident. However, Narowski spent the next month in an intensive care unit having eight painful surgeries because she didn't.

Now an Army wife, Narowski has left behind a nine-year stint as a travel agent to devote herself full-time to help keep Soldiers safe. The safety educator pulled no punches as she hurled statistics and medical facts about the brain and spinal cord at Soldiers.

The purpose of her words, PowerPoint slides and video clips is to prevent Soldiers from getting injured needlessly, Narowski said. It is

also a cathartic process for her as she lives with the results of her high-risk choices.

“Think of your seat belt as your body armor,” she told members of the Golf Company, 244th Quartermaster Battalion, and Papa Co., 266th QM Bn., Tuesday. Narowski rattled off names of celebrities who died because they were not wearing seat belts – singer Lisa Lopes, Derrick Thomas of the Kansas City Chiefs and Princess Diana.

From seat belts she moved on to “the nation’s most commonly committed violent crime” – drinking and driving. The combination costs the nation \$50 billion a year, Narowski said.

Reminding Soldiers that a vehicle can be a 2,000-pound weapon, Narowski encouraged them to plan social activities to include a designated driver when alcohol is to be consumed. A drunk driver killed Los Angeles Angels baseball player Nick Adenhardt and two of his friends in 2009 and caused severe disability in a fourth, she noted.

“I’d rather have my inconvenient life in this wheelchair than be sitting in prison thinking about the three people I’d killed,” said Narowski.

“The No. 1 cause of all car crashes is not paying attention,” Narowski told the Soldiers. She mentioned cognitive distractions such as talking on the phone (even a hands-free model), texting, picking up something from the floor and driving while drowsy.

“Talking on a cell phone (while driving) is the same as being drunk,” she said.

Encouraging Soldiers to use their common sense, Narowski told them speed limit signs are posted for a reason. “A lot of science goes into determining the safe speed for a road.”

Narowski learned that the hard way. Although she got five speeding tickets in six years, she “didn’t get it,” she said. “I’ll pay for it forever.”

“As a U.S. Soldier, you are a high-quality person ... It would be a needless waste if something happens to you on the road,” she told her audience in closing.