



Neighbors & Friends,

If you've driven through the streets of Leawood Estates, or down Lee Blvd lately it's hard not to notice the trees wrapped in green ribbon. The color green can mean a lot of things. Universally, the color green has been known to symbolize growth, change and renewal. If you live in Leawood, Kansas, and have a child who attends Brookwood Elementary, or Shawnee Mission South High school, then you also equate green with school spirit. The reasons above are why the color green continues to hold deep meaning for the Ommert family.

Our son Duke was a 4th grader at Brookwood Elementary, and most recently lost his life attempting to cross Lee Blvd. If you've watched the news or seen the story on social media, there has been a lot of misinformation about where Duke was hit, and what he was doing the afternoon our lives were forever changed. Our community is still trying to understand how one of the most caring, likable, talented, and influential people in our lives is no longer with us.

We also want the public to know that what happened to Duke was not an isolated event. He is one of four pedestrians in the last 5 years who has been hit by a vehicle attempting to cross Lee Blvd safely. Recently, Taylor Havens, a local mother of 3, stopped for a pedestrian at 85th and Lee, when she was rear ended by an 85 year old man on his phone. "It's not if the next incident, it's just when." Her quote echoes the desperation, frustration, and anger parents have had with community leaders and council board members who have failed to prioritize pedestrian safety. If you see a green ribbon, be aware, they are more than a symbol of who Duke was, they are a stern reminder of what needs to take place to ensure another life is not lost. This is how Duke spent his last afternoon with friends, it is by no means the end of his story.

Our Story

Duke spent the afternoon of October 13, 2025, playing outdoors with several friends. They had been traveling on scooters, to and from one another's homes, and throughout the neighborhood on a scavenger hunt of sorts. At the time of Duke's accident, he and another classmate had been leaving a house on the east side of Lee (between 103rd and the south entrance of Lee Circle). They've been told numerous times that the sidewalk is the only

safe option, while traveling on Lee in either direction. Currently, sidewalks only exist on the West side of Lee despite the fact that pedestrians would have to trespass on private property on the East side of Lee to find a safe place to cross. In addition to trespassing, the terrain on the east side of Lee makes it nearly impossible for pedestrians, especially those with special needs, to travel to a safe place to cross. (This puts pedestrians and children who attend Brookwood Elementary, or who need to access the bus to Indian Woods, at risk EVERY time they try to cross Lee.)

After crossing, the two boys would ride north together before parting ways at the crosswalk (only recently installed) at 98th street. Duke did not make it to 98th street that day, he was struck by an oncoming car as he attempted to cross Lee Blvd to get to the sidewalk. Despite having looked both ways before attempting to cross, he was completely unaware of the approaching south bound sedan which struck him at 35mph. The driver of a tall SUV (traveling North) confirmed to police that Duke had in fact looked both ways before crossing. Duke began crossing Lee (east to west) immediately after the northbound SUV passed assuming what he thought was a safe “gap” in traffic. The tall SUV (traveling North) not only impeded Duke’s visibility of the oncoming car but also obstructed the driver from seeing Duke as he attempted to cross.

The driver, found not to be at fault, was driving the legal speed limit, and was traveling to the Leawood dog park via GPS (through Apple CarPlay). Duke was immediately rendered unconscious but was revived at the scene and ultimately taken to Children’s Mercy Hospital. Duke’s ventilator was removed on October 21st surrounded by his family and pastor. He never regained consciousness.

Duke could’ve been any one of the children who navigate through our neighborhood to and from their friends’ homes. He could’ve been your child, or grandchild. The driver who hit Duke was without fault, meaning it could’ve been you who hit Duke, or your new teenage driver, or your elderly parents. Not only that but had the driver been going over the speed limit, and/or had they been driving a large SUV or full size truck, Duke might have died in the street – a detail I always push far from my mind, because it’s much too painful to imagine. Instead, I remind myself that my worst day was his best day.

I wonder if when Duke got to heaven he was asked, “What did you learn on earth?” I can say with confidence, his response would’ve been “No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.”

Duke was a leader. He was athletic, beautiful, and brilliant. He was kind, funny and he loved to compete. Despite all those things, he was told none of them would matter unless he was kind.

We have a binder filled with letters from Duke's classmates, from his teachers, and from parents who wanted us to know how Duke had changed them or impacted their children. Not a day goes by that we don't miss Duke. Our hearts physically ache in his absence. Out of that pain, has come a love that makes our hearts swell equally with pride for the boy he was growing up to be.

Duke loved his friends, and as they grew in age, they all thrived on being able to come and go to each other's homes to trade sports cards, play wiffle ball, or to meet at the pond to fish. The very reasons we wanted to make Leawood the place our children grew up in. There are so many changes that need to be made to make our neighborhoods a truly safe place to play and roam in. Not only for Duke's classmates, but for their siblings, little and big, and for their parents, and their grandparents.

So, if you have a green ribbon wrapped around your tree, it signifies that you, too, care. Not only for Duke, but for the things he cared about, and that you, too, will stand behind the things that he stood behind.

What are we asking for?

- 1. Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon to cross Lee at the intersection of W. 102nd Street to the south entrance of Lee Circle.**



Children and adults who live on the East side of Lee need a safe place to cross to access the sidewalk on the West side of Lee. Lives shouldn't be at risk to get to the bus stop. Not in Leawood, and a preemptive measure is needed to prevent future tragedy from occurring. A Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon is needed to cross Lee at the intersection of W. 102nd St. to the south entrance of Lee Circle.

Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon (PHB), "typically referred to as a HAWK signal," it is used to both warn and control traffic at a pedestrian crossing. It is activated by a pedestrian push button and uses a combination of circular yellow and red traffic signal displays to first warn motorists of a pedestrian that is about to cross the street, then require the motorist to stop for the pedestrian crossing, and then release the motorist to proceed once the pedestrian has cleared the crossing. The Beacon is a hybrid between a pedestrian traffic signal and a stop sign." - [Pedestrian Crossing Policy City of Leawood](#)

2. Sidewalks on the East side of Lee and inside Leawood Estates.

The streets are narrow, that has not changed, nor will it. Since the 1960's, the average sizes of the trucks / SUV's parked on our side streets have gotten larger, and this is in addition to the landscaping trucks, and Amazon delivery trucks rushing up and down our streets. We haven't even taken into account distracted driving, cellphones, and texting while driving. Our streets are not logistically wide enough anymore for our kids to safely ride a bike without error, or for families not to have to walk single file through the streets. We love our trails, and how they interconnect etc., but right now families need safe options in our own neighborhoods. We don't want to drive to a trail to take our family for a walk. I'm definitely not going to send my 10 year old to a trail made for serious bikers and runners. Not having sidewalks for children to navigate back and forth from play dates, is not a dilemma, it's a real problem with life and death consequences.

Why a sidewalk on the east side of Lee was ever optional will be a question my family asks themselves every day for the rest of their lives.

What does the research say?

The statistics below are taken from a journal article in [February of 1957, by the American Planning Association](#) ("Sidewalks in the Suburbs," American Society of Planning Officials, PAS Report, No. 95, Feb, 1957):

- About 6,000 deaths occur annually in the United States from accidents among children at ages 5–14 years, the leading cause of death in this group. Motor vehicle mishaps accounted for two-fifths of the total accident mortality among these insured children in 1953–1955. Of these, over half were pedestrians, but the proportion varied with age. Among children 5–9 years of age, almost three-fourths of the victims were pedestrians, whereas at ages 10–14, the proportion was only a little over one-third.
- How major a cause death by accident is in this age group is seen when it is compared with death from other causes? The loss of life from accidents among boys 5–14 years was more than four times that from cancer and other malignant neoplasms (the second highest cause), fully seven times that from acute poliomyelitis, and nine times the loss from pneumonia and influenza combined. Among the older elementary school boys — those at ages 10–14 — accidents took a greater number of lives than all other causes together. Accidents account for well over a fourth of all the deaths among girls and far outrank any other cause.

In light of the recent passing of our son, Duke, a sidewalk on the East side of Lee should be considered a basic human right.

Whether commuting to and from school, or walking with family and pets for leisure, residents of Leawood have the right to feel safe walking to and from their homes without fear of being struck by a car. Using taxpayer money to fund artwork and sculptures is overindulgent and should never be prioritized over pedestrian safety. Sidewalks are no longer an afterthought and must be installed once a decision has been made on how to utilize the space at 96th street and Lee.

An alternative and effective solution

Sidewalks built using pervious concrete is one solution that will appease homeowners and help reduce storm water runoff and flooding. It should be a win-win solution, which will hopefully start a conversation that leads to changes within the streets of Leawood Estates and beyond. Pervious concrete allows water to penetrate, which means the trees can stay, and in times of heavy rain, rather than collect, pervious concrete helps divert storm water back into the soil. This can prevent the overflow of storm drains, and areas prone to flooding like basements.

An article from the [Columbus Dispatch](#), highlights two very practical, but important reasons why pervious concrete might be the best solution to creating sidewalks for every resident in Leawood:

- Drainage systems on real estate properties are becoming expensive, but permeable concrete reduces stormwater buildup, lessening the need for water retention ponds, swales, or similar installations.
- Sidewalks and paths made of pervious concrete are accessible to people using mobility aids, such as walkers or wheelchairs, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Next Steps

It was important for our family to share Duke's story, not only to honor his memory, but to highlight the dangers and impossible decisions that our children, and some Leawood residents are faced with daily.

Quite frankly, it felt irresponsible and negligent not to. No other family should have to endure a loss like ours on account of poor city planning. Duke's case "was not another careless kid on an electric scooter." He was a leader and encouraged his peers and fellow classmates to be the best versions of themselves.

Placing the blame on children is inexcusable. Faulty traffic planning, which did not consider children and pedestrians crossing a busy road in a residential area is to blame. This is and will continue to be a “traffic engineering problem” that needs an IMMEDIATE fix.

Every day kids are making the same decision to cross the same street, the same way, because they have no other alternative. Next time the driver may be going 45mph which is usually the speed traveled on Lee (despite it being 35mph), and the child may NOT be wearing a helmet if they are walking home from school. You may not cross Lee by foot, but if you drive on Lee, you are at risk of shouldering the undue weight and responsibility of having attributed to a pedestrian’s death. Thank you for supporting Duke and all our children and neighbors within the Leawood Estates community.

Together we can make a difference, and fight for change that ensures we truly do live to see another day.

Thank you,



Ryan, Monica, Duke & Mila Ommert



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