

J. Stannard Baker Award for Traffic Safety

Award Application: Description of Meritorious Activities

In 2003 Ron Melancon was ticketed for running into the back of a trailer that was almost transparent. He recognized immediately the need to make trailers more visible and contacted his Delegate in the General Assembly, Jack Reid, who sponsored House Bill 429 (2004) to require reflector tape on all new trailers sold.

This new requirement would help with the problem of visibility. And it caused Ron to look more closely at trailer safety and notice how many accidents were occurring when trailers came loose from towing vehicles, causing serious accidents and many deaths. This was the beginning of Ron's quest to make the highways safer by requiring vehicle/trailer connections to meet a higher standard of quality. Ron contacted insurance companies, trailer companies and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and received no assistance. He decided to "go it alone," distributing flyers, which he printed himself, talking to state and federal political representatives, letters to newspapers, researching trailer safety and accidents, establishing a web site. In the years following, his efforts spread from Virginia to many other states.

During the 2010 General Assembly session, I sponsored Senate Bill 646, which further strengthens the connection between vehicles. This legislation passed both the Senate and the House of Delegates unanimously, and the driving force behind this legislation was Ron Melancon. It is my understanding that other state legislatures are considering this same bill, as well as New Zealand lawmakers. Ron's goal is to bring the requirements of SB 646 nationwide. Ron was also responsible for Delegate O'Bannon sponsoring House Bill 145, which requires reflectors on trailers of 3,000 pounds or less.

Ron's effectiveness as an advocate for highway safety is one of those instances where an ordinary man has done extraordinary things. But Ron Melancon is only ordinary in the sense that he is one person acting on his own. He is not a paid lobbyist nor is he acting on behalf of a large corporation to effect change. Ron is a high energy, enthusiastic activist who sees a highway hazard in loose, runaway trailers and feels compelled to do something about it, knowing that to do nothing will result in the loss of lives. He gives so much of his time and energy, and at his own expense, to follow up on accidents, report them on his web site, and try to get the attention of those who are in a position to change laws. The web site, DangerousTrailers.org, is an extensive, interactive site with information on each state. The most amazing and wonderful thing that Ron has brought about is that he is saving lives every day when trailers are connected safely and stay connected, preventing accidents. We will never know how many lives have been saved by Ron's efforts, but we know that there have been many, and this number will continue to grow. For this reason, I am honored to nominate Ron to receive the J. Stannard Baker Award for Highway Safety.