



Tommy Malone

Shepherd Center donor and trustee's career leads him to a passion for injury prevention.

BY JOHN CHRISTENSEN

Atlanta attorney Tommy Malone is nationally known as a "Super Lawyer," whose specialty is representing people with catastrophic injuries. Although his practice is thriving, he'd like nothing better than to put himself out of business.

"I'm afraid the public thinks that every lawyer wants to see more people injured," says Tommy, 71. "Nothing could be further from the truth, and I think most lawyers think as I do. Unfortunately, I've always known that if I spent my life trying to make health care or the roads safer, there will always be cases to keep me busy."

Tommy has been involved with Shepherd Center for about 20 years. He is a regular donor, as well as a past member of the Foundation's Board of Trustees, and his current focus is the hospital's injury prevention program.

"I've spent my career working with more tragedies than you'd want to hear about," he says, "and I believe all were preventable."

One of his most notable cases involved Drew Bianchi, 23-year-old California pre-med student, who sustained a traumatic brain injury in an accident caused by a truck driver talking on a cellphone.

Tommy's client was awarded \$49 million in damages. Despite the enormous settlement, Tommy says, "No one would want to swap places with Drew."

That accident, he says, caused him to focus his attention on distracted driving.

"People who are on cellphones while driving can be as dangerous as people who are driving under the influence of alcohol," he says. "While we know texting is dangerous, even just having a telephone conversation can be dangerous. People can get hurt very badly or lose their lives when drivers are distracted for any reason."

He believes the best way to eliminate distracted driving is to educate children about its dangers before they start driving.

"I was anxious to help with Shepherd's injury prevention program, which lets kids know while they're in school how dangerous it is to be distracted while driving," he says. "If someone thinks they're smart enough to drive and text, it may be too late to change bad habits. It's easier to prevent the habit from developing than it is to get them to stop."

Because the distracted driving initiative is so new, there are no statistics to prove its impact on decreasing the danger. It will be years before the children who are educated about distracted driving will be on the roads themselves, so it will be some time before we know the effectiveness of the program, Tommy says. He also believes laws

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prohibiting texting or phoning while driving won't eliminate the problem unless drivers appreciate the enormous risk.

"There's a lot of work to be done," Tommy says. "Nobody could come to know the people with catastrophic injuries that I've been honored to represent without loving them. I've been profoundly impacted by what's happened to them and have tremendous admiration for them. It is what's in my heart that drives me to do what I can to help prevent those kinds of tragedies." *

Tommy Malone, left, and Herndon Murray, M.D., medical director of Shepherd Center's Spinal Cord Injury Program, talk following a program on distracted driving at Shepherd Center.

