

Nathan Richeson, 29, was struck and killed by a distracted driver in 2014. His parents are fighting for change. The Ohio Department of Public Safety is partnering to spread their message.



In his memory, in his name, THINGS HAVE TO CHANGE.

Nathan Richeson of Granville, Ohio, was dedicated, hardworking and humble. He earned his pilot's license when he was 16 years old after a lifelong interest in flying. Years later, he graduated from Ohio University with a Bachelor of Arts in aviation and went on to serve in the Ohio Air National Guard. He was always at the top of his class.

His parents, Cathy and Doug, will tell you anything you'd like to know about their son. Nathan loved his family.

Nathan was struck and killed by a distracted driver on August 29, 2014. He was 29 years old.

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At any given moment during daylight hours, more than 600,000 drivers are using hand-held cell phones while driving, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Association (NHTSA). NHTSA also reports that nationwide in 2014, more than 3,000 people were killed in crashes involving distracted drivers.

The crash that killed Nathan Richeson happened just south of Interstate 70 east on the ramp to Interstate 77 south. He and his wife Alyssa had pulled off to the far right side of the highway to fix a flat tire while on a trip to West Virginia to celebrate their second wedding anniversary.

It was Labor Day weekend around 3:40 p.m., and traffic was bottlenecked. Cars slowed to about 45 mph while passing the couple's camper. Alyssa watched the traffic at Nathan's request while he changed the tire.

Meanwhile, a distracted driver was also headed south on Interstate 77. She wove in and out of the bottlenecked traffic at a speed around 80 mph. She was texting two people at the time.

She tried to pass a car, but she lost control and swerved right. Witnesses at the scene remember hearing a screech of tires and the sound of her car impacting Nathan's vehicle as she broadsided him, as he tried to leap out of the way. He was killed on impact.

The distracted driver accepted a plea for a vehicular homicide felony in the third degree.

A white cross on the side of the road on Interstate 77, at the site of the accident, bears this inscription:

Nathan Douglas Richeson
Captain
USAF Pilot
KC 135 Stratotanker
Birth – Sept. 20, 1984
Taken from us – Aug. 29, 2014
Loving Husband, Son, Brother, Uncle and Friend

Nathan received full military honors at his funeral, in a church filled with friends, family and members of the Ohio Air National Guard. A KC 135 – the plane he started out flying – now reads Capt. Nate Richeson below the pilot's window in his memory. The cross on the side of Interstate 77 serves as a reminder of his life and the dangers of distracted driving.

It's not enough.

"In his memory, in his name, things have to change," Cathy said.

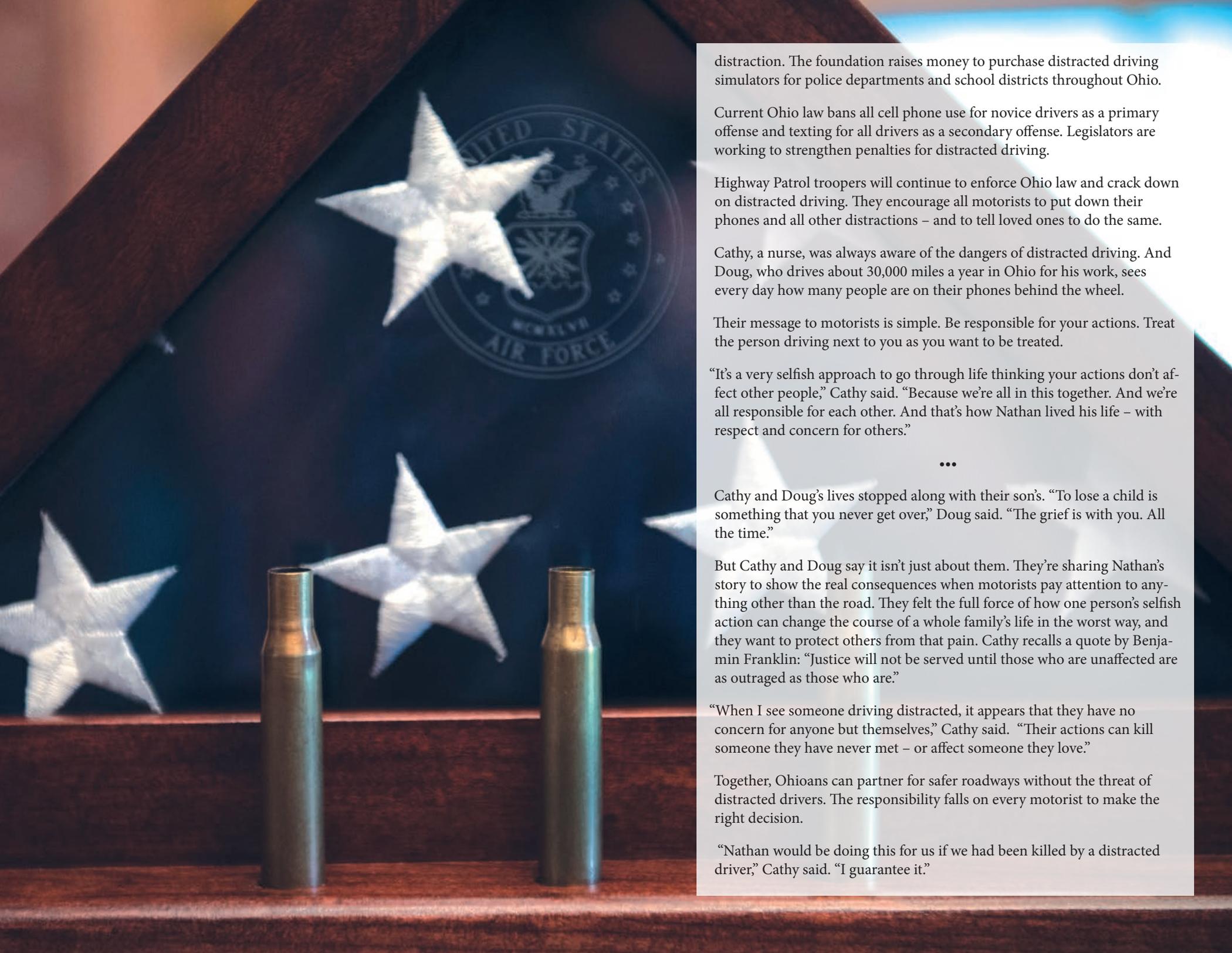
His parents thought about how much life Nathan had to live – that he wanted to serve his country, be a father and a Delta pilot. They thought about how outraged he would be – as we all should be – and would push for change.

This fall, the Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS) is partnering with the Ohio State Highway Patrol on an education campaign about distracted driving that involves Nathan's story. The message is shared by ODPS, troopers, and the Richesons: the decision to drive distracted cannot be tolerated.

The Richesons are standing with the Maria Tiberi Foundation, a campaign to end distracted driving started by Columbus news anchor Dom Tiberi and his wife Terri. Dom and Terri lost their daughter Maria to a car crash in 2013 caused by an unknown

A video of Nathan's story is available on the Ohio Department of Public Safety's YouTube ([youtube.com/OhioPublicSafety](https://www.youtube.com/OhioPublicSafety)) and on the Patrol's Facebook ([facebook.com/ohiostatehighwaypatrol](https://www.facebook.com/ohiostatehighwaypatrol)).

Facebook users can change their profile header to a photo supporting the cause by visiting publicsafety.ohio.gov/distracteddriving.



distraction. The foundation raises money to purchase distracted driving simulators for police departments and school districts throughout Ohio.

Current Ohio law bans all cell phone use for novice drivers as a primary offense and texting for all drivers as a secondary offense. Legislators are working to strengthen penalties for distracted driving.

Highway Patrol troopers will continue to enforce Ohio law and crack down on distracted driving. They encourage all motorists to put down their phones and all other distractions – and to tell loved ones to do the same.

Cathy, a nurse, was always aware of the dangers of distracted driving. And Doug, who drives about 30,000 miles a year in Ohio for his work, sees every day how many people are on their phones behind the wheel.

Their message to motorists is simple. Be responsible for your actions. Treat the person driving next to you as you want to be treated.

“It’s a very selfish approach to go through life thinking your actions don’t affect other people,” Cathy said. “Because we’re all in this together. And we’re all responsible for each other. And that’s how Nathan lived his life – with respect and concern for others.”

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Cathy and Doug’s lives stopped along with their son’s. “To lose a child is something that you never get over,” Doug said. “The grief is with you. All the time.”

But Cathy and Doug say it isn’t just about them. They’re sharing Nathan’s story to show the real consequences when motorists pay attention to anything other than the road. They felt the full force of how one person’s selfish action can change the course of a whole family’s life in the worst way, and they want to protect others from that pain. Cathy recalls a quote by Benjamin Franklin: “Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”

“When I see someone driving distracted, it appears that they have no concern for anyone but themselves,” Cathy said. “Their actions can kill someone they have never met – or affect someone they love.”

Together, Ohioans can partner for safer roadways without the threat of distracted drivers. The responsibility falls on every motorist to make the right decision.

“Nathan would be doing this for us if we had been killed by a distracted driver,” Cathy said. “I guarantee it.”