

Feature Writing

2019 Central Texas Invitational Meet

You are a reporter for the League-town Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a feature story as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as direct or indirect quotes. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have 60 minutes. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or entry. Put your number on your paper.

Leaguetown High School is located in Central Texas and has 1,110 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In late October, junior Debi Pettis was in a car accident on CR 451. Moments before veering off the road and crashing into a tree, Debi was replying to a text from her boyfriend. The accident trapped Debi in the car for almost an hour. Firefighters had to use the jaws of life to get her out of the car. When the firefighters finally freed Debi, she had only a weak pulse, both her legs had multiple breaks and she had a 4-inch gash across her right cheek. She also had a collapsed lung. After three surgeries to repair her legs and lung, Debi returned home in late November and returned to school last week.

This week, Debi started a campaign at the school called “Trunk It and Leave It.” The program encourages drivers to put their cell phones in their trunks before getting in the car to drive. Debi made posters for the hallways and also is doing a weekly announcements to promote the program. Debi also created a pledge for drivers to sign that states the driver will put his or her cell phone in the trunk before driving. Starting next week, Debi will have the pledge in the cafeteria during lunch for students and staff to sign. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed this Wednesday, Dec. 11.

■ DEBI PETTIS, junior

“I don’t remember everything about the accident. I remember looking up from my phone, and then the tree was right there. Then, I remember the firefighters calling me and telling me that they would get me out. I was so scared. I couldn’t move at all. I kept going in and out of consciousness.

“The three weeks in the hospital was tough. It wasn’t until the second day when the doctors stabilized me that I truly regained consciousness. I promised myself that if I survived that I would do something so others could learn from my mistake. I don’t want anyone to have to go through what I did.

“Texting while driving is stupid. It’s as simple as that. But almost everyone I know does it. I did it all of the time even though I promised my parents that I wouldn’t do it, and even though it’s illegal.

“When I was in the hospital I came up with the ‘Trunk It and Leave It’ campaign, and I pitched it to Principal Bearinger when she visited me. She thought it was a great idea and supported me 100%. I know there are lots of campaigns about waiting to text when you are driving, but this one is a little different. I want drivers to be physically separated from their phones. Then, they won’t be tempted. Before I started driving, I always said I wouldn’t text and drive, but it’s hard when you are driving and hear a text arrive on your phone. Students need to know that texting isn’t worth it. I was texting my boyfriend about what movie we should go see when I had the accident.

■ DEBI PETTIS, continued

Something so trivial almost cost me my life. Every text can wait until you get home. If students need proof, they can look at my face. The 4-inch scar is a constant reminder that texting while driving isn't worth it.

"Before starting the campaign, I researched some statistics to help educate other students. I was shocked. According to the Department of Motor Vehicles, distracted driving accounts for approximately 25% of all motor vehicle crash fatalities. Driver distraction is reported to be responsible for more than 58% of teen crashes. We all know what most 'distracted driving' is — using our phones."

"I want to do more than announcements and posters. I want to get promises from every driver in this school. This is how we can save lives. Already, I've seen some students and staff put their phones in their trunks before leaving school. The first time I saw a student do it — that was my happiest and proudest day."

■ ELYSSA BEARINGER, principal

"I love the 'Trunk It' campaign. I will be in the cafeteria on Monday to sign the pledge. Since Debi shared her idea with me, my cell phone has been in my trunk on every drive. And I have seen several students and staff do the same thing before they leave our parking lot. I truly believe this pledge will save lives."

"I visited Debi that first day in the hospital. I should say I visited her family. Debi was in such critical condition that I didn't see her. We didn't know if she was going to make it. Thankfully, by my second visit Debi was doing so much better."

■ BRENDA PETTIS, Debi's mom

"That day was the worst day in my life. When I got the phone call that Debi had been in a wreck, I thought for sure it was a fender bender. Then, the officer told us to meet him at the hospital. My heart sank. The officer wouldn't tell me that she was OK. He only said she was still breathing when they pulled her from the car."

"It's been a long road, but Debi has made an almost full recovery. She was lucky. We were lucky. When Debi told us about her 'Trunk It and Leave It' idea, I was so proud. She wants others to learn from her mistake. Teens think they are invincible, but they are not. Debi is living proof of that."

■ MICHELLE DONALDSON, junior

"I will sign the pledge, but I started putting my phone in my trunk after I saw Debi's poster. At first, it was hard. If my phone was on really loud, I could still hear it beep from the trunk. My impulse was to turn and get it. I used to text and drive all of the time. I never thought it was a big deal, but then I talked with Debi and saw her scar. It's not worth it. Not at all."