

Summer 2017

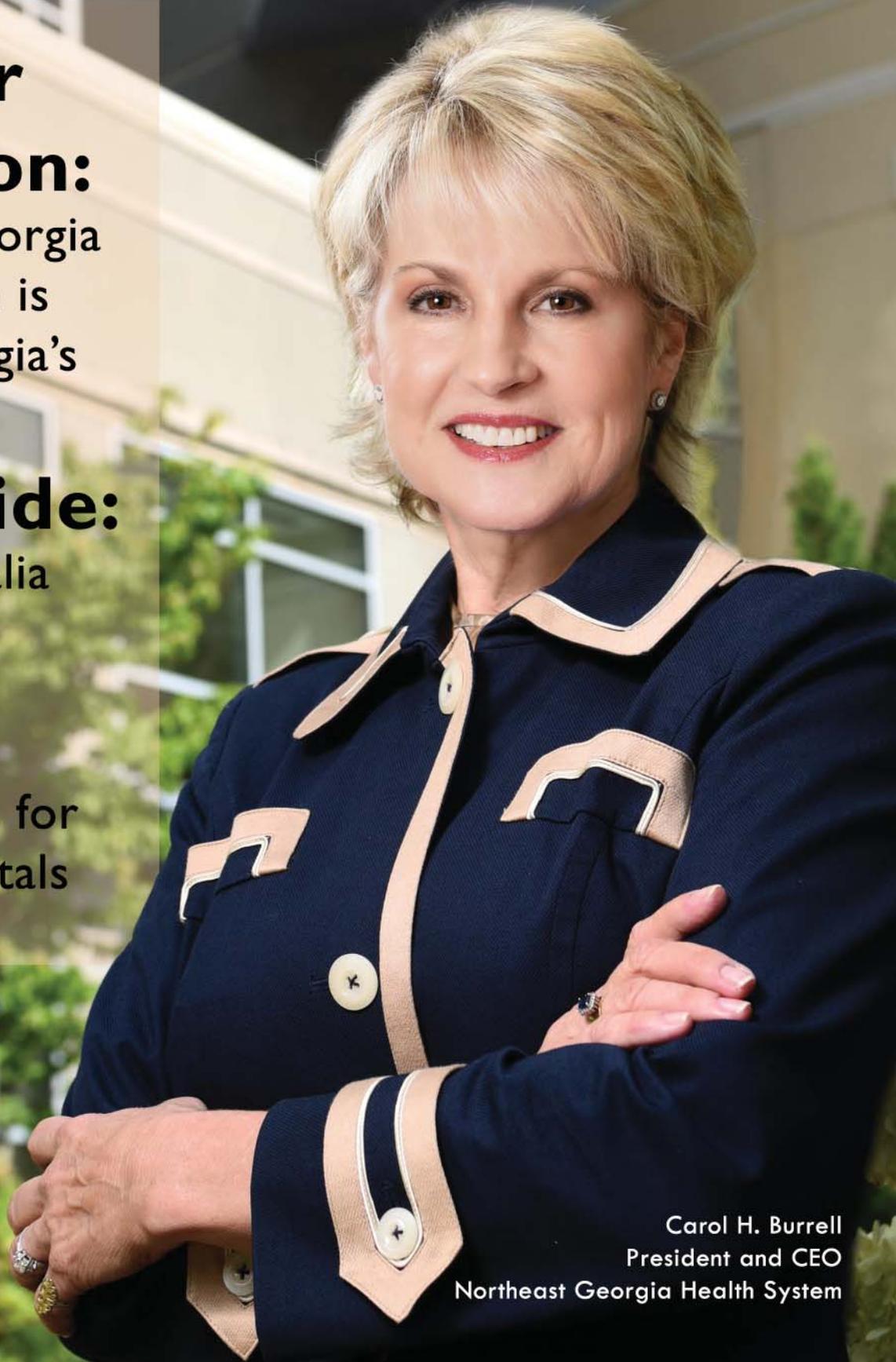
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## Shepherd Center Helps Keep Teens Safe on the Road

Free app educates parents and teens on driver safety

By Jeff Sunderland

As you travel around the state, you have probably noticed the Georgia Department of Transportation Interstate signs displaying an alarming messages, such as, "Georgia Roadway Fatalities This Year: 860."

Since 2008, more than 11,000 traffic fatalities have occurred in Georgia, according to the Governor's Office of Highway Safety.

What is even more troubling is the number of teens injured and killed. In fact, nationwide, traffic-related fatalities is the leading cause of teenager deaths.

But hope is near as a Georgia hospital has created a one-of-kind resource to help decrease fatalities.

The Shepherd Center, a top-10 rehabilitation hospital for people with spinal cord and brain injuries, has launched a free app to help prevent automobile accidents and injuries.

Partnering with the Governor's Office of Highway Safety and IT management consulting firm CapTech, Shepherd Center's certified driver rehabilitation specialists and injury prevention experts used their specialized training to create AutoCoach, an innovative app that makes it easier for adults to effectively teach their teens to drive defensively and safely.



*Logo courtesy of CapTech*

AutoCoach tracks training hours as well as night driving hours.

Both are prerequisites for obtaining a driver's license in Georgia; however, the app's curriculum is applicable in all 50 U.S. states. AutoCoach is available as a free download in the Apple App and Google Play stores.

"With motor vehicle crashes being the leading cause of death for teens in our country, we must make sure our youngest drivers receive the proper training before they get behind the wheel," said Harris Blackwood, director of the Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety. "It has been a great pleasure to partner with Shepherd Center and CapTech in developing this first-of-its-kind, comprehensive driver's education app that will help parents, grandparents and other adults provide training in a manner teens will be able to learn and use when they begin driving on their own."

AutoCoach features include a customizable parent-teen agreement, a graduated driver's licensing quiz by state, distraction notifications, a driving log and a 10-chapter curriculum for parents based on best practices. The curriculum covers basic topics, such as adjusting mirrors, seats and tire pressure, and the difference between double yellow and dotted yellow lines, as well as complex driving skills, such as merging onto crowded highways, driving around 18-wheelers and safely recovering from an overcorrection.

"Some parents might choose to spend very little time on the most basic chapters and spend more time teaching more complex skills," said Emma Louise Harrington, MSPS, Ed.M., director of injury prevention and education at Shepherd Center. "And that's fine. Some kids already know the very basics and their parents are comfortable with their teens' knowledge of those."

Harrington continued, "But in the more complex chapters there are good refreshers for the parents. It's vital that teens learn these things."

AutoCoach is a time commitment for parents, but the hope is that once parents weigh the time commitment against the risks, it will be an easy decision and can save lives. In fact, it could even decrease the number of on non-fatal accidents as well that send thousands others to Georgia's hospitals.

"Hospitals are encouraged to use and promote the app," said Mitchell Fillhaber, Shepherd Center senior vice president of corporate development and managed care. "Our goal is to make this free app available to all Georgia hospitals so they then can make it available to their employees, donors and Board members, along with members of their communities across the state." 