

# Be aware of blind pedestrians: it's the law!

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The Corsair

Imagine being blind and trying to cross a busy street. Using your hearing and white cane as your guide, you step out onto the street. Honk! Your heart is pounding, knowing that you almost got hit again.

Many motorists do not understand the law requires that they stop their vehicles so that someone with a white cane can cross the street, even if not at an intersection or crosswalk.

White canes, sometimes with red tips, are legally recognized symbols that the person is either blind or visually impaired.

Blind UWF student Jessica Woods recalls a frightening experience:

"My mom and I were walking across the parking lot at Walmart, and a driver didn't even stop. When he saw the cane he almost ran over me. I would just

like him to understand the importance of acknowledging the white cane or the guide dog."

Woods, formerly a Pensacola State student, remembers a time when she and a visually impaired friend were walking across the street campus. "We were walking across the street and I had my cane out," Jessica's friend said. "Three times we could have gotten hurt, because the drivers in the car did not stop. I was scared."

Many sighted people do not understand what the law protecting blind pedestrians says.

This is a state law:

"[Whenever] a pedestrian is crossing or attempting to cross a public street or highway guided by a dog guide or carrying in a raised or extended position a cane or walking stick which is white in color or white tipped with red, the driver of every vehicle approaching the intersection shall stop before processing,

shall take such precautions as may be necessary to avoid injuring such pedestrian."

Additionally, sighted citizens are prohibited from carrying a cane that is white, or white with a red tip, unless they are blind or partly blind.

Independence for the Blind of West Florida (IB-WEST), a training center for the blind and visually impaired, recently organized an event to help spread the word of the white cane law.

On Oct. 15, IB-WEST celebrated White Cane Day with speeches from U.S. Representative Jeff Miller, Pensacola Mayor Mike Wiggins, and IB-WEST Executive Director Russell Rieder.

"It's not really about the white cane, is it?" Rieder said. "What is it about guys?"

The crowd responded with enthusiasm, "Independence."

"Independence," Rieder agreed, "but what is it really about? It's about your achievements, the struggles that the blind and visually impaired go through every single day.

That's why we're here."

As you can see, being blind and trying to cross the street can be a very hard and scary thing to do. But if motorists and white cane users obey the laws, we can all travel safely.