

Clearwater Ti

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BILL COATS

Highway harbors memories of tragedy

PALM HARBOR — It was 5 p.m. last Thursday, another night with another smashup on U.S. 19.

At Beacon Groves Boulevard, a Cadillac had slammed into a Mercury, which had spun into oncoming traffic and had gotten smacked again by a van. Victims were being loaded with bulky neck braces and rolled onto stretchers. Mercifully, they would survive.

Off to the side, virtually unnoticed in all the hubbub, stood the cross in memory of Nancy Vowell. The lavender bow, one of her favorite colors, fluttered in the night breeze. Its white paint reflected the flashing lights of seven law enforcement vehicles.

The cross marked the location where Mrs. Vowell died, during another collision, on another day, U.S. 19.

The result is an unforgiving death trap where your snap misjudgment can cause mayhem.

Paula Curns avoided U.S. 19 in before her own tragedy. But where she was, in a median turnpike packed with cars from four different directions. "People were coming up and pushing each other," she says.

"With so many cars traveling in all those lanes, you've got to be very careful."

Back in the 1950s, U.S. 19 was a dirt road. It was lined with woods and citrus groves. Nobody minded if a wealthy landowner built a store. But by the time county plan-

Sign law proves popular

By THOMAS C. TOBIN
Times Staff Writer

CLEARWATER — After two years of hard-core enforcement, the city's assault on "visual clutter" is about 75 percent complete.

From the malls and car lots of U.S. 19 to the hotels and gift shops of Clearwater Beach, business signs are smaller and lower to the ground.

The result is an overall effect that even opponents of the effort concede is a relief to the eye.

Clearwater's 9-year-old sign ordinance has "taken its toll" on the bottom lines and constitutional rights of businesses, says John Meek Jr., who organized the group Business Involved in Government to fight the code.

But he adds: "I can't say that it doesn't look better."

Less qualified was the praise of Carol Ann Morse, a Safety Harbor resident who regularly travels through Clearwater and recently wrote to thank city officials.

City officials disagree. In fact, they are considering a change in the ordinance that could require Dimmitt to take the flags down again.

The third challenge is a set of lawsuits filed in federal and state court by two billboard companies. Those actions are pending.

"This is do or die for a lot of these people," says Todd Pressman, a lobbyist who argues before the City Commission for businesses seeking variances to the sign ordinance. "It's just as important to them as a United States Supreme Court case."

'The sign guys'

The talk is just as dire on the other

