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Photo by Steve Myrick

The truck remained parked on State Road Police while police investigated the accident.

Bicyclist killed in State Road accident

By Steve Myrick

A day trip to the Vineyard ended in tragedy Tuesday for a vacationing Melrose family. Dina Dececca, 40, of Melrose was killed Tuesday afternoon on State Road near Camp Street, just west of downtown Vineyard Haven, when she fell from her bicycle into the path of a tractor trailer truck.

Tisbury police and emergency rescue personnel responded to the scene about 2 pm, following a report of a bicyclist struck by a tractor trailer. Because the accident involved a fatality, state police took control of the investigation.

Bruce O'Donnell, 46, of Oak Bluffs, operated the 2009 Kenworth tractor, which was hauling a 2011 Mack trailer westbound on State Road, where Ms. Dececca was riding a bicycle westbound on the sidewalk, according to Sgt. Thomas Medeiros, Martha's Vineyard State Police barracks commander. As the tractor was passing Ms. Dececca, she lost control of her bicycle and fell under the trailer. She was pronounced dead at the scene.

The State Police Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Section, the State Police Collision Analysis Reconstruction Section, and the State Police Crime Scene Services Section arrived on the Vineyard late Tuesday to assist with the investigation.

State Road was closed for approximately three hours during the investigation.

Police closed the road from Main Street to the Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road. All vehicle and foot traffic was detoured around the scene.

Traffic was backed up throughout the afternoon, with delays of an hour or more.

The truck, owned by E.C. Cottle Inc., remained parked in the road as police continued their investigation into the evening hours. The flatbed truck had arrived from the mainland on the Steamship Authority and carried a load of bricks and other construction material.

Yesterday, state police trooper David Parent said no charges were expected to be filed.

He said the truck had no safety violations, and the E.C. Cottle Company has a good safety record.

"It just appears to be a freak accident where she lost control and fell off the bike and the truck just happened to be driving by," Trooper Parent said.

A big help

Mrs. Dececca was riding in a group that included her husband, their daughters ages 10 and 7, and another couple and their three boys.

Tisbury Police chief Dan Hanavan and town EMTs responded to the accident call. Chief Hanavan said that Jeremiah Mendez, an Oak Bluffs police officer who was off-duty at the time, and Kevin Donovan, an assistant deputy sheriff, were in traffic when the accident occurred and immediately stopped to help. "Both were a big help," Mr. Hanavan said.

The accident happened in front of Mac PC Sales and Service. Owner Frank Hebert said he heard the heart-wrenching screams of the father and children. Everyone was just frozen on the street, he said.

Mr. Hebert said the truck had been moving slowly in the stop-and-go traffic inching up the hill.

He sent coworker Heather Munson out to the street to bring the families into the store where they remained until about 4:15 pm. "I closed the store, I shut the phone system down," he said.

The children were very upset and crying. Mr. Hebert said he and Ms. Munson did their best to comfort the children and prevented them from going outside. An EMT and later a counselor arrived.

"It is going to take awhile to forget about," Mr. Hebert said, then added, "and I don't think I ever will. It was the kids I felt so bad for."

Later, Mrs. Dececca's family members and friends were brought to the nearby Hanover House Inn where they could be made more comfortable as the investigation continued and arrangements were made to transport them to the mainland.

"We gave them as much space as they needed," inn owner Stephen Perlman said.

The accident happened in front of the law office of Geohan Coogan, a Tisbury selectman. In an email to The Times, Mr. Coogan singled out Mr. Mendez who, he said, jumped out of his car and took immediate control of the situation. "Thank God he was there, if for no other reason than to take control of an impossible situation," Mr. Coogan said. "He stopped traffic, and awaited assistance in an orderly and professional manner."

Mr. Coogan echoed the comments of many witnesses. "I heard some screams that no

parent would ever want to hear," he said.

Mr. Coogan said that without the actions of officer Mendez, the situation in those first moments surely would have been more chaotic.

Change needed

E.C. Cottle Inc. is a family-owned lumberyard and building materials supplier with headquarters on Lambert's Cove Road in West Tisbury and on Edgartown Road in Edgartown. Mr. O'Donnell has worked for the company since he was a teenager and is part of the family, Ed Cottle Jr. told The Times.

Mr. Cottle said the entire Cottle family and Mr. O'Donnell are reeling from the tragedy. "Bruce [O'Donnell] is a good, decent man and is probably the safest driver we have per mile," he said.

Mr. Cottle said that the investigation included a review of Department of Transportation records and the company has not had one violation over 29 inspections. "My father takes pride in his equipment," Mr. Cottle said. "If he wouldn't drive it, he is not going to ask anybody else to drive it."

He said in other circumstances Mr. O'Donnell might have been one of the first responders. "This is what he does for the town of Oak Bluffs. He is a member of the dive team and the rescue squad, and he goes and saves people."

Mr. Cottle said local and state officials must address the portion of State Road where the accident occurred. "It is totally unsafe for bikes and the traffic coming off the boat," Mr. Cottle said. "The poor family. It is just a tragic thing. I just wish the family the best."

Yesterday, Lorraine Parish, a dress designer, whose shop is on the corner of Camp Street, told The Times that she also heard the screams. She said she and other neighbors plan to take action. They will print and erect signs to warn bicyclists of the danger of riding bicycles along the steep, heavily traveled section of State Road. She said people need to walk bicycles.

"It is so dangerous," she said. "What I see happening out here is frightening."

So devastated

Laura Dececca, the mother of John Dececca answered the telephone at the family's home in Melrose yesterday.

"We are so devastated," Mrs. Dececca said through tears. "She was the best mother and wife, and daughter, and daughter-in-law. You couldn't have asked for a better person."

Dina Dececca managed a restaurant in Melrose and was actively involved in her daughters' school and their activities, the family said.

Laura Dececca's son and daughter-in-law had rented a house in Falmouth for one week with close friends, Kathy and Chris Prochner. They decided to take a trip to Martha's Vineyard, where they had visited before. Laura Dececca's son John Jr., Dina and their two girls, Olivia, 10, and Ella, 7, and the Prochners and their three sons traveled to the Vineyard.

Mrs. Dececca said her son and the family were very grateful for the kindness extended to them while on the Vineyard.

"They really couldn't have gotten along without the acts of kindness that everyone bestowed on them," she said. "They were taken to a bed and breakfast and they were just wonderful. And there was a computer store, and the girls said, they were just so nice to us."

Asked to describe her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Dececca said, "She was loved, loved by everyone who knew Dina."