

Next Step in Auto Safety Proves to be a Lifesaver

By Craig McGuire

When 1998 model cars appear in dealer showrooms across America, driver and front-seat passenger airbag systems will be federally mandated standard equipment -- but Sheephead Bay resident Howard Weber needs no convincing to use one today.

An airbag, he said, saved his daughter's life.

On a cold December morning in 1992, Weber, an attorney at a downtown Brooklyn-based law firm, was driving his daughter Jessica to school at P.S. 272, 101-24 Seaview Avenue in Canarsie. As the car in front of him approached the intersection of Flatlands Avenue and East 81st Street, a child stepped out into traffic, forcing the driver of that car to slam on his brakes.

At the moment Weber's 1990 Lincoln Continental plowed into the rear of the vehicle, nine-year-old Jessica had just climbed over the seat, and was poised to crash through the windshield.

Weber remembers reaching his arm out to stop his daughter as she headed for the windshield. Suddenly, the passenger-side

placed by the car's manufacturer. Said Weber, "Hopefully, we will never have to see them again. But, I feel safer driving just knowing the airbags are there."

"The Lincoln I bought was one of the first equipped with dual airbags," said Weber, "But to tell you the truth, I would have bought it without them. Not anymore -- I wouldn't even consider a car without airbags."

Growing numbers of automobile drivers and passengers in Brooklyn and across America are testimony to the effectiveness of airbags.

Following the accident, the AllState Insurance company approached the Webers and invited them to participate in a commercial advocating the use of airbags, that was aired nationally.

That the government has mandated airbags for all passenger cars, vans and light trucks is official recognition of what safety experts and the general public have already concluded: airbags save lives.

Introduced in the mid-1980s, currently about 70 to 80 percent of new cars sold in the United States

cate for the use of airbags, because I was very impressed because they prevented any injury," said Weber. "They really hold you in place."

Last year in Washington, the Webers were invited to a dinner hosted by consumer advocate Ralph Nader to honor the inventors of the airbags.

A study conducted by the United States Department of Transportation of actual traffic accidents found that airbags reduce the risk of death in a head-on collision by 29

percent. In releasing the study, the DOT warned, to get the maximum protection of an airbag system, the driver should also be wearing a lap and shoulder seat belt.

According to a fact sheet released by Morton, the world's leading manufacturer of airbags, "Studies by government and insurance industry analysts show as many as 15,000 highway deaths each year could be prevented if all vehicles involved in accidents were equipped with airbags."

"Thankfully the govern-



Howard Weber & his daughter Jessica.

ment is mandating airbags," said Weber, "because they are the reason my daughter is still here."

Jessica is now attending

Mark Twain Intermediate School for the Gifted and Talented, 2401 Neptune Avenue in Coney Island.

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