

Town crosswalk lights the way for pedestrians, motorists

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■ New Garrett Park project helps residents cross Strathmore Avenue

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Garrett Park's newest crosswalk is hard to miss.

That's because the crosswalk — located at the corner of Keswick Street and Strathmore Avenue — features blinking yellow lights that line the street when sidewalk sensors detect motion from a person about to cross.

"I think it catches the motorists eye better than the installation at Kenilworth [Avenue]," said resident Dick Pratt, who uses the crosswalk when he walks around town with his wife, Peggy. "I actually feel safer crossing at Keswick."

In 2004, as part of a \$4.4 million State Highway Administration Community Enhancement project, a flashing pedestrian-operated traffic signal was installed at the corner of Kenilworth and Strathmore avenues to help residents walk across Strathmore Avenue — a state highway that literally divides the town into two parts.

The project began in 2003 and has also included adding curbing, resurfacing and restriping parts of Strathmore Avenue and adding the lighted crosswalk at Keswick Street.

Now that the crosswalk is completed, the project is in its final stages, with some remaining landscaping work scheduled to start in the spring, according to State Highway Administration spokesman, Chuck Gischlar.

The crosswalk, which cost about \$37,000, was installed late last summer and began working in November.

It is the second lighted crosswalk to be constructed on a state road. There is also a lighted crosswalk on the northbound Route 29 ramp that leads to the Beltway, coming out of Silver Spring, Gischlar said.

The Garrett Park location was chosen because of its proximity to schools — Holy Cross School and The Academy of the Holy Cross, which are both on Strathmore Avenue and Garrett Park Elementary School, located on Oxford Street — where there tends to be a high volume of pedestrian traffic, Gischlar said.

Plans to build additional crosswalks will

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Garrett Park resident Elin Quigly

be made once state officials determine how well the two already set up are working, Gischlar said.

There are two other lighted crosswalks in Montgomery County.

Both are in Rockville — one on Twinbrook Parkway and another on Chapman Avenue near the Twinbrook Metro Station — and were installed as part of the City of Rockville's pilot pedestrian safety program,

according to county spokeswoman, Esther Bowring.

The Twinbrook Parkway crosswalk was installed in January 2004 and is maintained by the county. The Chapman Avenue crosswalk was installed in February 2004 and is maintained by the City of Rockville.

Rockville officials are currently trying to determine whether the crosswalks help with pedestrian safety, so plans to install them at other locations aren't being considered right now, Bowring said.

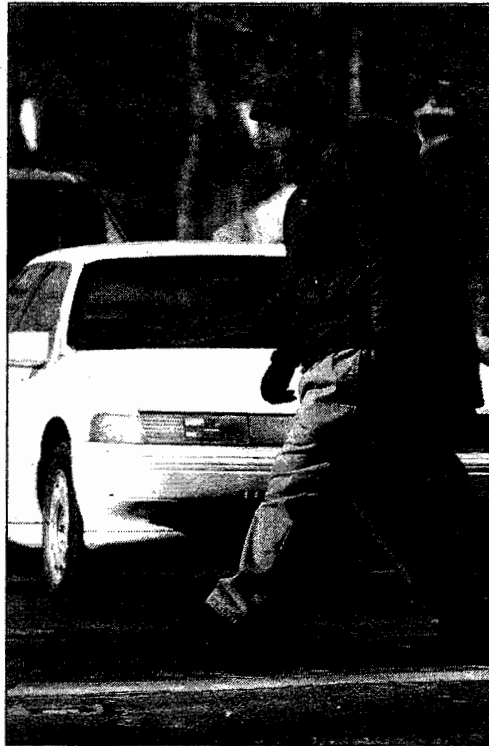
In February 2004, two children were hit by a minivan while crossing in the crosswalk on Strathmore Avenue near The Academy of the Holy Cross. That incident — in which both children survived — along with another that killed a pedestrian crossing a street in Wheaton prompted residents to talk with state officials about what could be done to improve pedestrian safety in town.

Garrett Park resident Elin Quigly, a former Town Council member who lives on Keswick Street and used the crosswalk the first day it worked, said she was happy it had finally been installed.

"We're thrilled and delighted with it. I think it will be especially valuable in the summer because that's the crossing to the [town] swimming pool," Quigly said. "I think the biggest thing about pedestrian safety is getting the cars to slow down."

Garrett Park Mayor Carolyn Shawaker said the crosswalk was especially important in a community that prides itself on being pedestrian friendly.

"I think this will help," she said. "People make a very major item of this being a walking town. Many people in town walk for exercise or for pleasure."



DAVID S. SPENCE/THE GAZETTE

Garrett Park residents Dick and Peggy Pratt cross Strathmore Avenue at the new crosswalk at Keswick Street, which flashes a series of lights embedded in the road after being activated by walkers in the crosswalk. The crosswalk was part of a State Highway Administration Community Enhancement project and is designed to help drivers better see pedestrians — especially at nighttime — on the roads.