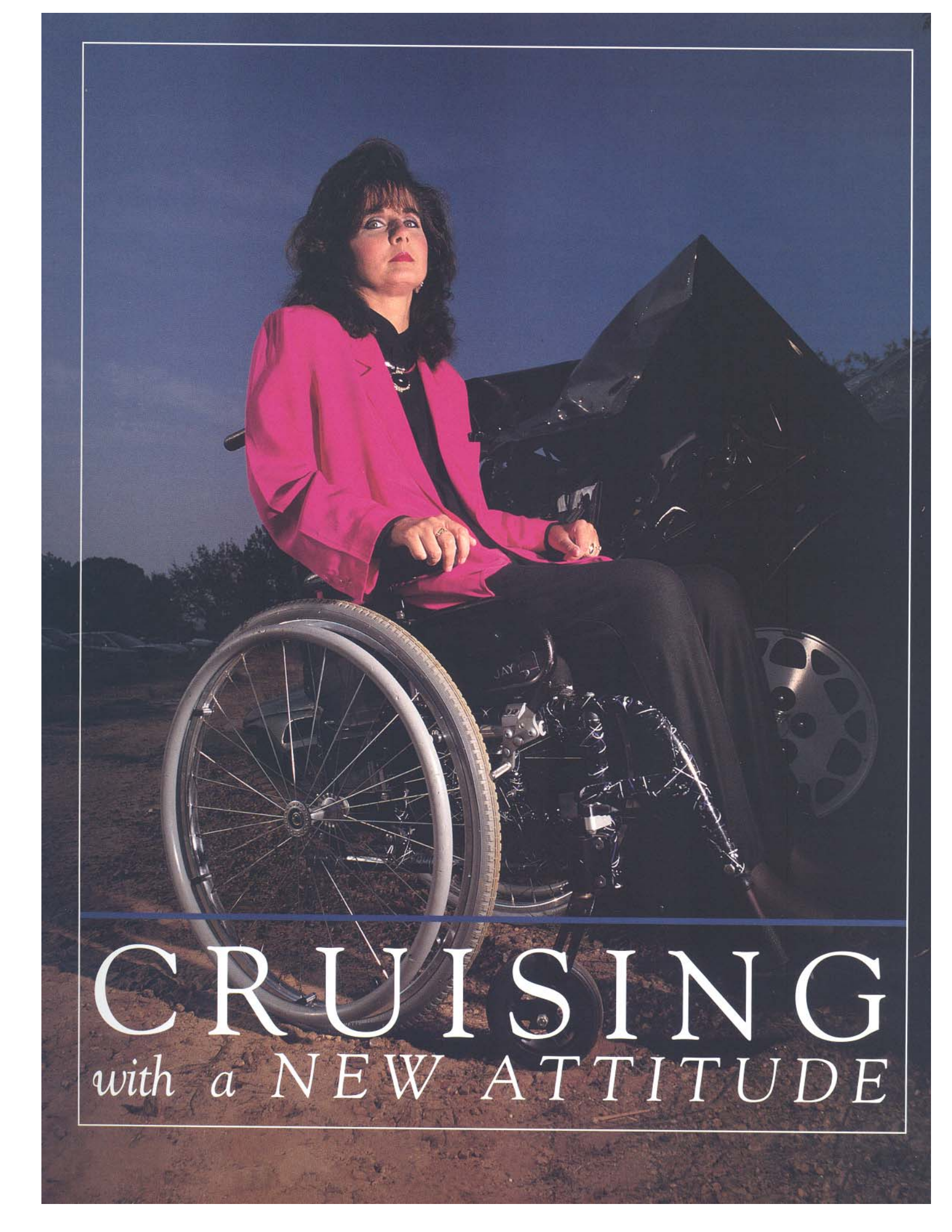


A woman with dark, curly hair and a bright pink blazer is seated in a wheelchair. She is looking upwards and to the left. Her right leg is a prosthetic, wrapped in shiny, crinkled material. She is sitting in front of a dark-colored car, with its rear wheel visible. The background is a dark, clear sky at dusk or dawn, with some distant trees and a car visible in the background. The overall mood is contemplative and powerful.

CRUISING

with a NEW ATTITUDE

A SPLIT SECOND ON SENIOR CUT DAY IN 1979 CHANGED KIM ALEXANDER'S LIFE FOREVER

WHEN THE CAR SHE WAS IN SKIDDED OFF THE ROAD AND HIT A TREE.

AFTER THE CRASH, A SPINAL CORD INJURY LEFT ALEXANDER PERMANENTLY PARALYZED AND IN A WHEELCHAIR. AT AGE 18, HER ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIP AND OTHER LIFE PLANS WERE SHATTERED.

"Sometimes you don't get a second chance," says Alexander '88 (M '92), a Clemson Extension associate in Family and Youth Development. "Other people can help you pick up the pieces, but they can't put them back together for you."

Instead of giving up, Alexander put the pieces back together herself and kept going. She found a new goal: to eliminate teen injury and death from traffic crashes.

Nationally, crashes are the number one killer of teens. And worse, South Carolina has the largest number of teen fatalities in the United States. In 1998, S.C. teens died at a rate 34 percent higher than the national average, according to the S.C. Department of Public Safety.

"The greatest tragedy is that the majority of these injuries and deaths are preventable," says Alexander. "Crashes are not accidents; they are caused by unsafe decisions."

After her recovery, people began to ask Alexander to speak to teens about consequences of such crashes and about dealing with life afterward, at first within the state and then throughout the Southeast.

"When you're speaking with teens, you have 45 minutes, and then it's over. I always hoped what I presented stayed with them for a lifetime, but I began to see they needed more than a single presentation," she says. "I realized I wanted to give teens tools to examine the consequences of their actions and to take control of their own decisions so that they would be safe, alive, free from injuries."

Between speaking engagements and with the help and support of friends and especially her mom, Alexander also managed to earn degrees in marketing and in guidance and counseling services at Clemson.

In 1994, still pursuing her goal, Alexander received a \$450,000 grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the S.C. Department of Public Safety to develop a national model for teen driving safety. "Cruisers: The A.T.T.I.T.U.D.E." was born. (A.T.T.I.T.U.D.E. stands for Active Teens Taking Initiative To Understand Driving Experiences.)

In addition to presentations, the program includes a yearlong high school safe driving, safe decision-making curriculum. Alexander directs the program, which was pilot-tested through the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service network

during the 1998-99 school year in four high schools in Sumter and Chesterfield counties.

Lakewood High in Sumter County was one Cruisers site. Their activities included drive-in checks at fast-food restaurants — teens checking other teens to see if they were wearing seat belts. They also participated in a monthlong anti-DUI campaign, hosted a state traffic safety conference and had a successful Prom Promise campaign.

The Cruisers curriculum focuses on driver attitudes, knowledge and decisions by teaching life skills. The six main skills are respect for self and others, assessment of consequences, communication, responsibility, self-awareness, decision making and problem solving.

"Every time adolescents drive, they are faced with life or death decisions," Alexander says. "We give them the skills to make safe choices."

Students assess their readiness to drive as well as their self-respect and responsibilities while driving. Through a variety of exercises, teens practice increasing alertness, recognizing emotions and refraining from acting on emotions like anger while driving. They analyze crashed speeding vehicles through crash dynamics. And they learn about other consequences such as DUI laws and increased insurance rates.

Thanks to Alexander and Cruisers, more than 500 high school students and others from across the nation attended the 42nd annual National Student Safety Program (NSSP) conference at Clemson this summer.

Geared to make youth more aware of highway safety, the annual conference was planned and led by students — with such activities as a mock crash with ambulances, emergency personnel, media and a coroner. It also included teen-friendly highlights — "Elvis and the Lawman," policemen from California whose "Chief Operator" songs promote traffic safety; a former Top Gun pilot; and a banquet to rival any prom.

Other Cruisers developments include Clemson's fund-raising drive to make it an endowed program; national, regional and state presentations; and endorsement by NASCAR's Busch Series driver Lyndon Amick and his team.

For more information about Cruisers or about supporting the endowment, call 864-656-0664. ☎

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B Y G I L E S S I N G L E T O N