

Scholarship recipient is designing the future

University of Michigan grad student teaching sister importance of safe driving

By Andrea Russell for ATSSA



The Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission dedicated a sign in memory of John Fletcher in 2018 that was designed to remind motorists to Move Over or Slow Down. His widow, Amy Fletcher, and the couple's younger daughter, Katie, attended the dedication ceremony, held during National Work Zone Awareness Week.

University of Michigan graduate student Christopher Fletcher and his friends hit the road recently for a visit to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore near Lake Michigan. Along the way, they made a quick stop at a welcome center.

There, Chris saw the American Traffic Safety Services (ATSS) Foundation's National Work Zone Memorial for the first time in several years.

The traveling Memorial honors more than 1,600 roadway workers and others killed in work zones across the country. The name of Chris' father, Forest "John" Fletcher, was among those inscribed on the Memorial.

"We just happened to stop at a highway rest area, and it was

there," Chris said. "It was pretty impactful seeing it again."

John Fletcher was an assistant foreman for the Ohio Turnpike Commission. He was supervising a bridge maintenance project near Fremont, Ohio, on Jan. 24, 2012, when he was struck and killed by a tractor-trailer that had veered into the work zone.

In addition, two of Fletcher's coworkers were permanently disabled in the crash.

Fletcher, of Perrysburg, Ohio, was 53 years old at the time of his death. He left behind his wife, Amy, and their children, Lorna, Chris and Kate.

Chris, now 24, was 11 when his dad was killed.

"I was in science class, and they pulled me out to go to the principal's office," he said. That's where he found out about his father's death.

"I did not know how to process it at all," he recalled.

Chris was one of 12 recipients of an ATSS Foundation Roadway Worker Memorial Scholarship for the 2024-25 academic year. The competitive scholarship program offers up to \$10,000 annually for dependents of roadway workers killed or permanently disabled in work zone incidents. Students who demonstrate a strong commitment to volunteerism are eligible to apply for an additional \$1,000, given in honor of Chuck Bailey, a roadway safety member who died in 2002.

'CARED ABOUT EVERYBODY'

Chris remembers his father—who, like himself, was known to many as "Fletcher"—as a hard

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS DUE FEB. 15

Applications for 2025-26 Roadway Worker Memorial Scholarships are due by Feb. 15.

The scholarships offered through the ATSS Foundation provide financial assistance for post-high school education to dependents (children and spouses) of roadway workers killed or permanently disabled in work zone incidents.

For details, Foundation. ATSSA.com/Scholarship.

worker and kind neighbor who cared deeply about his family.

"He really cared about everybody around him," Chris said. Because Fletcher worked for the Turnpike Commission, he often heard gripes over taxes from his elderly neighbors, even though the turnpike is funded by tolls, Chris said.

Despite having to endure those complaints, "every time it snowed, we were there. He would wake me up and drag me out. He'd use the snowblower, I'd do the shoveling, and we'd clear all their driveways and sidewalks."

Fletcher also loved road trips, taking his family to Colorado and to Hersheypark in



John Fletcher and his son, Chris, enjoy an outing at a restaurant in the summer of 2006.

Pennsylvania. The family's last excursion before the crash was a Route 66 road trip.

"He really wanted us to see the country," Chris said.

ASPIRING ARCHITECT

Chris' father studied urban planning in college and Chris took his first architecture and drafting course in high school. As part of that class, students enter a regional contest calling for designs that solve the expansion needs of a local partner.

During his sophomore year, participants were asked to design an aquatic center at a local camp. His entry won second place.

"That really opened my eyes to, hey, maybe I can do this as a career," said Chris, who placed in the competition again during his junior and senior years.

After high school, he studied architecture at Bowling Green State University, just 15 minutes from his family's Ohio home. He also worked part-time for a firm that designs churches and was involved in marketing and brand development for a

full-service architecture firm during the pandemic.

"I've always wanted to have my own firm, so it was invaluable learning how the process works of establishing [a business]," said Chris, who still manages the firm's website. He said the staff let him make design decisions and "taught [him] far more about the field than any school ever could."

Chris also was involved with the nonprofit American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), which is dedicated to volunteerism, he said.

He earned his Bachelor of Science in architecture from Bowling Green in 2022 and now lives in Ann Arbor, Mich., where he is working toward his master's degree at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning.

When he learned last spring that he would receive an ATSS Foundation scholarship, he was grateful. He said it's been frightening to rack up debt because of out-of-state tuition, expensive class materials and the cost of living in Ann Arbor.



Chris Fletcher celebrates his 2022 graduation from Bowling Green State University with, from left, his mother Amy Fletcher and sisters Lorna and Kate. He is now pursuing a master's degree at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning.

The scholarship also "brings a lot of my focus and my memories back to my dad," Chris said. "I'm grateful that the organization has faith in me and sees potential in me."

A BRIGHTER OUTLOOK

Receiving the scholarship provided a needed boost for Chris.

"Honestly, getting the scholarship was pretty impactful in changing my outlook," he said, acknowledging that he has battled depression since his father's death and has found aspects of grad school challenging.

Despite a demanding class schedule and workload, Chris has found joy in carving out time to pursue photography and videography, and he's hoping to start a side business. One of his shots recently won the Fuller Award in the 2024 American Institute of Architects (AIA) National Photography Competition.

"Film and photography really influence a lot of my design," he said.

Growing up during the Great Recession near Toledo, Cleveland and Detroit also had an impact on his architectural studies and helped shape his focus on sustainability.

"I'm interested in how you rebuild and revitalize Rust Belt cities ... and how we can build buildings that withstand the test of time," he said.

Chris isn't the only one in his family achieving goals and pursuing passions.

Amy Fletcher was a marketing executive before leaving the workforce when her oldest daughter was born. After her husband's death about 14 years later, Chris said his mom "really got involved with finances and things like that. And making sure we know what we're doing and how to

be a proper adult. I'm very proud of her."

She's also a passionate gardener and a member of the Truck Safety Coalition, Chris said.

"Her job now is making sure her kids make it through these pivotal years of our lives," he added.

Chris' older sister, 26-year-old Lorna, has begun her residency at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. His younger sister, Kate, is 17 and in her senior year of high school. She may pursue criminal psychology and plans to apply for the Foundation's Roadway Worker Memorial Scholarship, Chris said.

ATSSA's mission of advancing roadway safety is critical, and Chris incorporates it as he helps Kate learn to drive.

"I tell my sister, 'Think about the [drivers] in front of you and

around you as other people. If there's someone in front of you going under the speed limit or braking a lot, try to imagine that they have a birthday cake or maybe a dog that just had surgery in the back," he said.

"So many people are wrapped up in their own lives, they don't consider other people."

As he reflected on his own experiences, Chris said it's the people in his life that have inspired his gratitude.

"People are anyone's greatest asset," he said. "Even though I struggle at times to be social and network, time and again it has been proven to me that the greatest things in life are my good friends and mentors." //

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