

Toll Collector Jim Wirth Remembers Howard Collier, His Fallen Co-Worker

Toll Collector Howard Collier was struck by a van at Loves Park Plaza and killed instantly on August 28, 2003. Jim Wirth was working his booth the day his friend died.

(At right, Jim Wirth speaking outside Tollway headquarters in 2005. He is reporting for the SEIU Local 73 bargaining team on progress toward a new contract.)



You know, Howard sometimes drove us nuts because he was so super cautious. He'd never cross the lanes unless he was certain they were absolutely clear. Even if that meant he was late getting back to his booth.

That day, Howard was coming back from the last break of the day; he only had another hour and a half left on the shift. He left the break building and was walking across the lanes to his booth. There was this van just veering around fast looking for a clear automatic coin lane where there wouldn't be any waiting. Howard had just crossed the lane and stepped onto the curb of a booth island, when there came that van, careening out of nowhere.

The side view mirror caught him and pulled him in. It was like hydroplaning. Howard was a big guy; he weighed over 300 pounds. But the van just spun him around and he was airborne, landing around 200 feet away.

I ran over to him. He was nearly naked. All his clothes had been torn off. All he had on were his socks and underwear. There was no blood; his injuries were all internal. I knew right away that he was gone. About all I could do was take off my jacket and cover his face.

Howard Collier was 47 years old. As a Toll Collector, he risked his life on his job every day, and died without the acknowledgement of the alternative pension formula.



April 9, 2008. Jim Wirth is still fighting. He and his co-workers traveled to Springfield to lobby for HB 1702, which would grant alternative pension formula to high-risk Tollway personnel. The memory of Howard Collier's death keeps him going, he says, despite how long it has taken to finally achieve pension justice for Toll Road employees.