Happy Mother’s Day! All of us know the power of a Mom. Whether it is encouraging us to do our best or warning us against some potential problem, Mom’s have a way of guiding us, even when they are not around. Ever feel like she is looking over your shoulder?

Mom’s may not move mountains, but they have the power to move us to do awesome things. I am grateful for my Mom and the other mothers who have inspired me personally and professionally. Today, while we celebrate and appreciate the importance of caring, nurturing and guidance in the family, also reflect on how you have been inspired by a mother in your life.

As I leave for work in the morning, I see many young mothers walking their children to the neighborhood school. I can remember, way back when, my Mom walked me to elementary school. Though it really wasn’t very far, it seemed like a long way when you have little legs. After being sure I would not get lost, she finally let me walk on my own. Little did I know, she was following me to be sure I was safely at school. I gained confidence and a sense of independence. (Maybe that is where it started?)

Today, Mom’s are still concerned about safety, even more so when bad news is broadcast every day. According to a 1992 Florida Department of Transportation study, only 1 of 6 children walk or ride a bike to school. Most children are dropped off at school, creating long traffic lines.

Our communities have become so dependent on vehicles that it is affecting our health and our sense of community. Youth are often dependent on parents for transportation, creating family scheduling challenges. And, they are missing out on much needed exercise. Alternative public transportation routes are expanding, but are still not available in many areas.

Many neighborhoods are not planned to facilitate easy walking or biking access from one area to another. Gated communities limit access for safety reasons, but impede community connectivity so children in one neighborhood cannot easily walk to a friend’s house. Both convenience and safety issues determine how we organize our lives.

Mom’s around the world have taken action providing "Safe Ways to School". Instead of just getting their own children off to school, they walk or ride along with other neighborhood children. The group grows along the way as children join the group and safely get to school on the "walking bus" or "bicycle bus" route. Moms and other family members who get involved also help adjust helmets, provide encouragement and get exercise.

Bicycle safety is important and University of Florida has provided many opportunities for networking and idea sharing through their teacher and community leader training sessions sponsored by the Florida Traffic and Bicycle Safety Education Program, part of UF’s Department of Urban & Regional Planning.

They have an on online toolkit to help parents, teachers, planners and local businesses organize a Safe Way to Schools Program. They also offer excellent training for planners, elected officials and businesses interested in making their community more bike friendly. Check out the variety of links to other bike information at Florida Traffic and Bicycle Safety Education Program.

Results of a study on Duval County, Jacksonville Florida elementary schools participating in their educational programs from 1996 through 1998 showed amazing results. There was a significant increase in use of helmets, as well as an 80 percent decrease in bicycle related deaths and a 68 percent decrease in bike related injury. These programs really makes a difference.

May is National Bike Month. You could buy Mom a bike or spend Mother’s Day cycling. Enjoy some time together and get some exercise but for your own safety, don’t tell her she needs it!

Metroplan, Florida Freewheelers and local bike shops are sponsoring many activities to bring awareness to cycling
for pleasure and exercise. Check out the calendar of National Bike Month activities going on around the central Florida area at [http://www.bikeorlando.org/](http://www.bikeorlando.org/). Print a brochure which includes the calendar as well as info on bike safety and bike laws.

Think ahead and cycle to work. May 20th is Bike to Work Day so join thousands of cyclists across the nation who use bikes for transportation as well as recreation.

Osceola County Greenways and Trails Planning Team is organizing Stroll, Roll and Paddle to celebrate National Trails Day, Saturday, June 4th. Cyclists, paddlers, walkers and runners will travel different paths and meet at the Kissimmee Lakefront Park. Mark your calendar and call Osceola County Parks and Recreation Department for details on times and meeting locations, 407-343-7173.

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