

# North Carolina Trooper Credited With Saving Woman

Updated: January 29th, 2008 04:03 PM PDT

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*The News & Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina)*

CLAYTON -- It's been touch and go for Elgia Mae Hinton, a day care owner who has been in a coma since last week when she was severely injured in an auto crash near Clayton.

But Hinton, 46, of Middlesex, survived the accident thanks to a state trooper who went into law enforcement last summer to honor his mother, a former Wake County sheriff's deputy.

State Highway Patrol Trooper J.L. Thorpe was about halfway through his shift just before 6:15 p.m. Wednesday and traveling on U.S. 70 West when he saw a 2000 Ford Windstar run off the road and clip a wooden post in the eastbound lane. The van rolled about 130 feet and struck a light pole, which went flying into the air.

"It hit it pretty good," Thorpe said Monday.

The Ford rolled another 100 feet before it came to a stop in a grassy area between a Kangaroo convenience store and a used car lot.

After the crash Thorpe was confronted by the injured woman's frantic, 12-year-old niece, Brittany McLaurin, who ran to his vehicle and jumped up and down on the hood of the vehicle, crying for help.

Thorpe did not realize at first how young the child was and assumed she was the driver. When he realized what the child was saying, it took him about 10 seconds to jump out of his cruiser and run to the wrecked vehicle. Thorpe got to the van and looked inside. Hinton was in the driver's seat, keeled over to one side. Her eyes were dilated. Thorpe did not feel a pulse as he pulled Hinton from the van. He and another motorist who stopped for the crash started performing CPR on Hinton, who was unconscious.

The woman told Thorpe she was a former emergency medical technician.

"I wish I had got her name," he said.

For the next five minutes Thorpe and the Good Samaritan performed CPR on Hinton before the ambulance arrived. When the ambulance arrived, Thorpe looked at the heart monitor.

"Her heart was all over the place," he said.

Emergency technicians used defibrillation to jump start Hinton's faltering heart, finally getting a more normal reading. Emergency workers rushed Hinton to Johnston Memorial Hospital. Later that evening, she was airlifted to Duke University Medical Center.

Investigating officer B.R. Temple with the Clayton Police Department later learned that the van ran off the road after Hinton passed out at the wheel.

The Highway Patrol reported Monday that Dr. Steven Burkholtz, a Johnston Memorial Hospital physician, credited Thorpe with saving Hinton's life.

"The patrol commends Trooper Thorpe for his quick actions," patrol spokesman Lt. Everett Clendenin said Monday.

Hinton's family said they are grateful for Thorpe's swift action. Hinton, the owner of Little People Development and Learning Center in Selma, has been up and down since the wreck.

Thorpe, a former U.S. Navy air controller and volunteer fireman, brushed aside the praise Monday, saying any one of his fellow troopers would have done the same thing.

"I happened to be at that one place at that one time," he said.

Thorpe instead credited his mother, Sonia Thorpe, who died of cancer in May 2003. He said she was the reason he went into law enforcement. Sonia Thorpe served as a sheriff's deputy with the Sheriff's Department in Gilpin County, Colo., for 18 years before moving to Wake County in 2001. Here in Wake County, at the age of 61, Sonia Thorpe joined the Wake County Sheriff's Office as a detention officer after completing the department's detention academy.

"She was a tough woman and she was very respected," Thorpe said.

Thorpe arrived at a crossroads in his professional career and joined the Highway Patrol in June. He realized that law enforcement was not only her calling, but also his.

"She was always the one who inspired me to get into this career," he said.