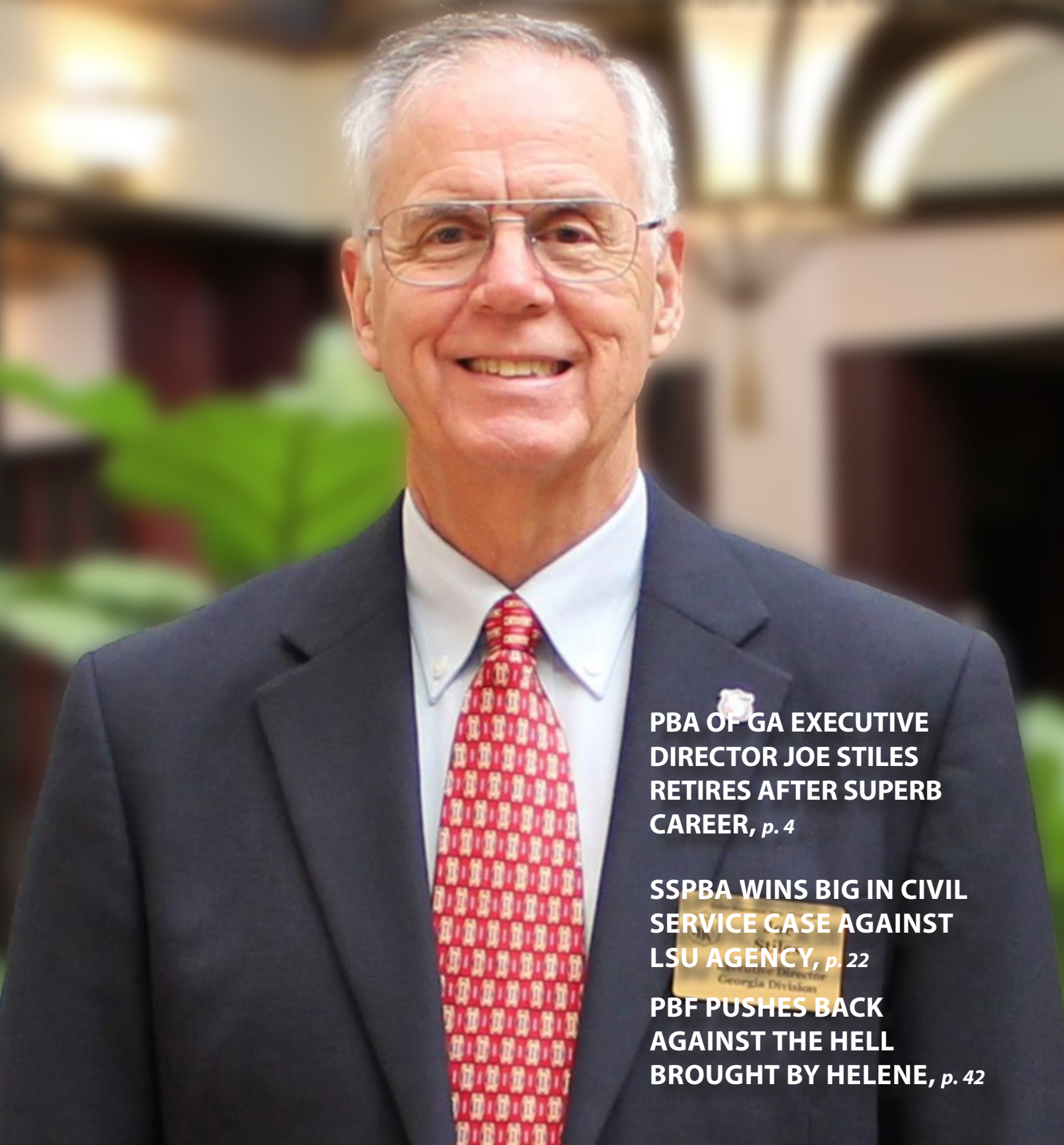




A publication of the Southern States PBA

BLUE REVIEW

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE PBA, ISSUE 18



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A SHOOTING OR AN ACCIDENT...
NO ONE LIKES TO THINK ABOUT IT!

CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS

IF IT HAPPENS TO YOU:

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- Don't rush into making a statement.
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- The PBA will provide you with an attorney prior to making a statement - either on the scene or wherever needed.
- Wait until you talk to a PBA attorney before making any statements, oral or written, unless you have been given a direct order to do so.

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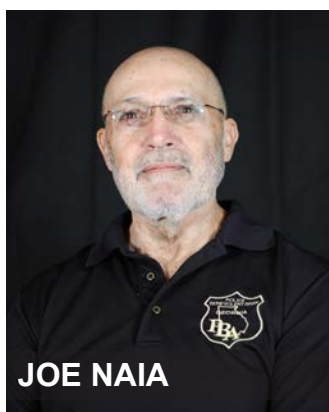
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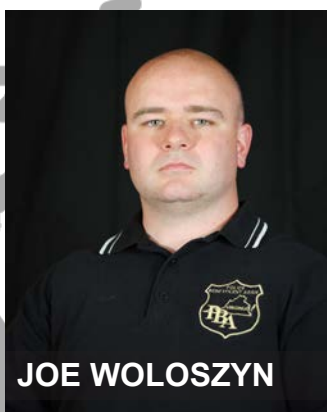
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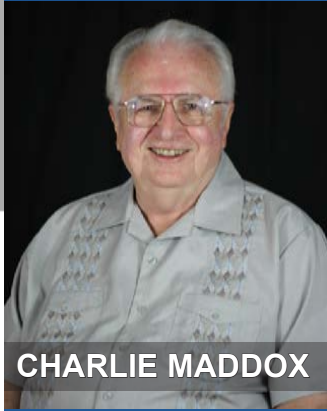
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RENEÉ DIXON: SSPBA CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Reneé leads, guides, and directs daily operations of the SSPBA and this year will have 38 years of service. Her ability to lead by example and challenge our team to always remain focused on providing the men and women of law enforcement the level of service they deserve is contagious and is a vision shared by our amazing staff. This, one of her many core competencies, was developed and is still being implemented from her first-hand experience working directly for SSPBA CEO Jack Roberts.

“I am sincerely thankful for the opportunity to oversee the daily operations of the SSPBA and the implementation of benefits that impact the lives of our valuable membership of 73,000 law enforcement officers and their families. It is our pleasure to be able to answer the calls for service from those who bravely serve their communities. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (800)-233-3506.”



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PBAGA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR STILES RETIRES AFTER SUPERB CAREER

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

Dedication. Wisdom. Leadership.
Integrity. Guidance. Mentor. Knowledge.
Respect. Commitment. Inspiration.
Legacy.

These are the words that his colleagues immediately listed when asked about Joe Stiles, as he retired as executive director of the Georgia Division of SSPBA.

Joe began his law enforcement career with Macon PD, the only agency he served with over the course of his 26 years as an officer. The city jail and patrol division were his first assignments. He then moved on to robbery stakeout, which worked out of the detective division. Investigative assignments in property crimes, sex crimes and internal affairs came next. In addition, he served in various supervisory positions in the administrative, patrol and services divisions over the span of his career.

During his time with the Macon PD, Stiles was given several distinguished assignments and training opportunities that allowed him time to work with city and county elected officials, the city manager and assistant manager, other city and county department heads and high-ranking law enforcement personnel in MPD, middle Georgia and around the state. He also built key contacts, primarily in the U.S., as well as a few internationally, because of his graduation from the prestigious FBI National Academy.

Over the course of his career with Macon PD, Stiles earned more than 3,000 hours of in-service training. He also holds a bachelor's degree from Brenau College and a master's degree from Columbus State University. He also graduated from Georgia Law Enforcement Command College.

Stiles said his favorite part of serving was, "helping further grow and professionalize the department."
"Helping those in need, troubled and victimized by criminals," he continued.

"Taking bad guys off the street and successfully helping to prosecute them." Stiles remembered his years serving as a law enforcement officer fondly.

"Too many people work somewhere because they figure they have to work somewhere, so they march in place and go home," he said. "I thoroughly enjoyed and grew as a person and officer in every assignment I had, even the bad ones." When the PBAGA first came to Macon-Bibb County, Stiles did not originally join because he thought it would be a conflict of interest.

"I had a false belief that law enforcement officers should not be involved in politics," he said. "I was asked to join the PBA several times by fellow officers and friends, Charlie Grant and Lester Rooney.

"As I watched and learned more, I was excited by the way the PBA screened and endorsed political candidates. Like most officers, the legal and death benefits were appealing."

After thinking through these considerations, he signed up in 1990. Not too long after he joined, Stiles went a step further than just being a member and began actively participating by serving on his chapter board.

"I like to be involved in whatever I do and soon became the senior VP, then president of the Middle GA PBA, all within a year's time," he said. "Our chapter was highly involved in political activity and had a handful of active board members."

Stiles remembered that he and his chapter board got creative with efforts to inform voters on political matters that were important to the law enforcement community. "At this time, PBA had a call center in Macon, and the chapter used those phones to call voters on behalf of our endorsed candidates when the center was closed," he said. "We also got chapter members and spouses out on street corners, primarily when citizens were driving to and from work, waving while

holding candidates' signs.

"I also had a large sheet of plywood painted with Police Benevolent Association and the Georgia PBA logo made by one of the chapter member's family sign businesses," continued Stiles. "I had this mounted on the back of my pick-up truck, which I parked with our group activity, so citizens would know we were more than just the candidates' crew. I had a lot of feedback from citizens that their vote came primarily because cops supported the candidates."

When it came to his involvement at the PBA's state board level, Stiles said he initially focused solely on his chapter president role.

"After seeing a wrong person get elected who was doing it for strictly personal gain, I vowed to run for the next term," he said. "As state president, I worked with the two Georgia executive directors in office during my terms to build the chapters, expand political screenings, attend political fundraisers and social events, and work the Capitol during the legislative session -- sometimes as a group of Georgia members and more often with the executive director."

Stiles was hired by the SSPBA in 2000 as executive director for PBAGA after retiring from Macon PD. From a legislative standpoint, his responsibilities in his new role with PBAGA were not unlike those in his position as the state and chapter president. The biggest difference he found was the time he was spending at the Georgia Capitol when the legislature was in session, about three to four days of every week.

As ED, there were some unexpected lessons Stiles learned about the legislative process.

"You can work very hard to get a bill introduced and moved through committees and floor votes, when suddenly your bill gets stuck," he said. "None of your legislative friends may be able to give you an answer. You're baffled. You may or may not ever know what happened.



Joe and Jane Stiles

"Once I learned a governor had killed our bill by ensuring an extremely high fiscal note was attached," continued Stiles. "Over the years, we had bills fail to get called for a floor vote on the last few days of the session in both the House and Senate. Sometimes, time just runs out. In the past, more than one of these instances was due to personal issues with a member of the majority leadership in one chamber or the other. You just never know what might pop up as roadblock. I learned to know and appreciate our elected friends but keep an eye on the unfriendly, too."

As for his favorite part about being an executive director with PBA for the past 24 years, Stiles said it was travel and fellowship. "Traveling to chapter, division and SSPBA meetings to take care of business and learning what is going on with PBA members and staff at each level," he said. "SSPBA is a great place to work. You are helping law enforcement officers in a variety of issues impacting them both professionally and, often, personally. You have great leadership at the very top in Jack Roberts and René Dixon. Leadership and staff across every SSPBA department are

focused on serving the membership and working as a team to that end. It has been a wonderful honor to serve with such a dedicated group."

PBAGA president Joe Naia has worked closely with Stiles for some time. He has nothing but praise for the outgoing ED. "On behalf of the entire PBA of GA, I want to express our deepest gratitude to Joe Stiles for his unwavering dedication and exceptional leadership over the years," Naia said. "Joe has been an incredible force in advancing the interests of law enforcement professionals across Georgia, and his impact on our organization and the law enforcement community as a whole is immeasurable."

"His integrity, knowledge, and commitment to service have set a standard that will resonate for years to come," continued Naia. "We have all been fortunate to benefit from his guidance, and I personally consider it an honor to have worked alongside him. As Joe embarks on this well-deserved retirement, we wish him nothing but the best. His legacy will forever be a cornerstone of the PBA of GA, and we are committed to carrying that torch

forward with pride and respect." Working in law enforcement and with the SSPBA for 50 years, Stiles had a front row seat to witness many changes. He views one as the most significant.

"One of the biggest changes to me has been the impact of social media on officers," said Stiles. "At the very least, it blurred the line of freedom of speech with some serious consequences for the officers. In many of these cases, it was strictly personal comments that had nothing to do with their performance as a law enforcement officer, but their words or deeds tarnished their professional image and negatively impacted the public's perception of them and their agency."

Stiles encouraged those who may be considering a career in law enforcement to think carefully about why.

"It can be a very rewarding experience, but it can come with unexpected obstacles you will have to overcome," he said. "If you just want to help people, other public service jobs are out there. Law enforcement officers are under a microscope, doing your job often means going to Internal Affairs -- it is just another part of the job. Be prepared, be safe, treat people professionally and stay true to your oath of office."

On this side of his career, Stiles anticipates a slower pace so that he can spend quality time with his "little bride" and visit historic sites, interesting parks and nature trails. The couple has two adult sons and daughters-in-law and four granddaughters, so more family time is likely on his schedule as well.

New ED Patrick Cullinan worked closely with Stiles over the years and summed up a common sentiment about Stiles.

"Joe Stiles has been the finest leader I've ever worked with during my nine years under his guidance," said Cullinan. "His deep knowledge, integrity and the immense respect he's earned throughout the law enforcement community have shaped not just the PBA of GA, but all of us fortunate enough to work alongside him. Joe has been a mentor and an inspiration, and I am grateful for everything I've learned from him."

FAITH, FAMILY, PBA HELPED MS LEO SURVIVE LEGAL NIGHTMARE

By Francis Springer
Springer Law Firm PLLC

Update by Cindy Baugher, PBA
Communications Project Coordinator

(Editor's note: This article was originally published on our SSPBA website and via social media Feb. 22, 2024. The article includes an update.)

PBA member Anthony Fox is finally free following the reversal of his unjust conviction for the death of a Jackson, Miss., man in January 2019. The PBA provided legal coverage from the start of this ordeal.

Fox and two fellow Jackson PD officers and PBA members, Desmond Barney and Lincoln Lampley, were indicted for second degree murder following the arrest of George Robinson, a convicted felon.

Early on Sunday, Jan. 13, 2019, a pastor was robbed and killed at his church in Jackson. Fox and the other officers were called out to help find this murderer. Detective Fox received a tip of where the suspect was. The officers went to the area to investigate.

When in the area, Fox immediately noticed a hand-to-hand drug transaction between a driver of a sedan and an unknown woman. Fox ordered the driver, Robinson, to show his hands. The suspect then reached between the seats. Fearing he was reaching for a weapon, Fox and Lampley got Robinson out of the vehicle. Robinson scraped his forehead on the asphalt and was arrested without further incident.

Due to the scrape, Fox had EMS check Robinson. Robinson refused medical treatment and refused to be transported to the hospital. Robinson was then released with two citations and drove away.

Later that evening, Robinson was transported by ambulance from a local motel where he was living, to the hospital. His girlfriend reported that he had begun convulsing, so she called 911.



Fox surrounded by the bastion of attorneys who freed him from jail

Robinson died a few days later due to complications of a subdural hematoma. The next day, Fox and the two other officers were placed on administrative leave with pay. This is when PBA became involved.

Due to local political problems between the mayor of Jackson and the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation, the only agency who investigated Robinson's death was the FBI. This had been requested by then Hinds County DA Robert Smith. The FBI found no wrongdoing. A civil lawsuit was also filed against the officers. U.S. District Judge Carlton Reeves dismissed the federal claims, finding the officers were entitled to qualified immunity. However, a grand jury indicted Fox, Lampley and Barney.

Lampley and Barney were assigned to the same courtroom and were tried together. Judge Faye Peterson dismissed their charges, finding the State had proven nothing it alleged. Fox's case was assigned to a different judge, Adrienne Wooten, who would not allow Fox's case to be merged with the others.

After a "make-believe" trial, Fox was found guilty of culpable negligence manslaughter, a lesser-included offense of second-degree murder. The judge immediately ordered Fox into custody and sentenced him to 20 years with 15 suspended -- he would have to serve five years. Special thanks to Sheriff Randy Tucker and Chief Deputy Jeremy Williams for arranging for Fox to serve his time in their facility.

Prosecutors tried to say that Fox had pulled Robinson from the car and body-slammed him, ultimately causing his death. The State produced two biased witnesses. One witness was serving a sentence in federal custody for a drug crime Fox was involved with investigating. Yes, read that again. There was one big problem with that story: Robinson did not have injuries consistent with any beating or body-slamming. Four doctors, one from the State and three from the defense, testified they could not conclusively say anything Fox did led to Robinson's death. However, the jury found him guilty. Yes, something is fishy.

After Fox spent 552 days in jail, the Mississippi Court of Appeals concluded that the verdict was wrong. The majority of the appeals court concluded that prosecutors had not proven that Fox “acted in a grossly negligent manner,” nor that Robinson’s death “was reasonably foreseeable under the circumstances.” The court also declared, “The evidence does not support a finding, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Fox should have known that Robinson’s death was a probable result that he should have reasonably anticipated.”

The appeals court also noted that jury instructions were improper and impeded Fox’s right to a fair trial.

There is evidence that suggests some struggle took place in the hotel room where Robinson was that evening. However, due to an inept mayor and the lack of an investigation, we will never know. After Fox’s release, one of his attorneys, Francis Springer, said to Darkhorse Press, “Did something happen to Mr. Robinson that shouldn’t have? It’s quite possible, but because there was no investigation done properly, we’ll never know.” Springer continued, “Something happened in that hotel room...but because there was such a push to put a cop in jail, a lot of that was overlooked.”

The conviction was reversed Jan. 30, 2024, and Fox was released from prison Feb. 7, 2024. One day after his release, he was reinstated to the Clinton Police Department as a narcotics detective. In announcing Fox’s return, Clinton Mayor Phil Fisher said, “How much more incompetent and mean-spirited can a judge be than to give improper jury instructions to a jury when a person’s future is at stake? How much stronger could the higher court rebuke any judge’s skills?”

Clinton police Chief Ford Hayman said about Fox, “He’s the engine that seems to drive us and move us forward in so many different ways. When he’s around, everyone’s performing a little bit better. The impact started the day he didn’t come back to this department, and the hole that it created within this department, our service is not as good to this community without Detective Fox.

Now we have a chance for Fox to come back, we’ll fill that hole up and get back to work.”

In a legal case that spanned over five years, multiple court appearances and 552 days behind bars, the no cap/no limit legal services that come with the cost of a PBA membership proved priceless to Fox. PBA’s extensive legal team has been paramount to Fox’s release. Attorneys Paul Luckett, Michael Cory and Francis Springer tried the case. Attorneys Carlos Tanner, Merrida Coxwell, Courtney Sanders and Francis Springer handled the appeal.

Update – Feb. 28, 2025

“When I found out I was being released,” Fox said, “I immediately dropped to my knees and began to cry and praise God. It was nobody but God. He knew my innocence, and He was there with me throughout the entire situation. I never once felt that He abandoned me, and I always kept the faith. I felt like He chose me to go through this storm in order to reveal what needed to be revealed on other levels. The way I and my family felt the day I was released can be described as joyful, cheerfully ecstatic, emotionally exhilarating, blessed and thankful that this nightmare had finally ended. It was just an overload of emotions. After I was released, I was met outside of the jail by an overwhelming number of people from family to law enforcement to supporters that followed my story (many of whom I had never met until that day). We left there and went to my parents’ home where family and friends celebrated, almost until the sun rose.”

Clearly, the emotions of Anthony Fox ran high upon his release. It had been an extremely long, hard ordeal for Fox and his family. Yet, once the celebration ended, he jumped right back into police work with the Clinton Police Department, where he’d been employed since leaving the Jackson Police Department after the incident in question and up until the conviction.

Clinton PD was excited to welcome Fox back. He is working as a vice and narcotics K9 investigator with the criminal investigation division and is a member of the Hinds Metro SWAT team.



Fox with his supportive parents, Mary and Joseph Fox

As a member of SWAT, he is a part of a highly trained unit that handles high-risk situations such as hostage situations, counterterrorism operations, high-risk warrants, armed or barricaded suspects and dignitary protection details. As a narcotics investigator, he works with his 7-year-old German shepherd, Annika, who is trained to detect the odors of methamphetamine, marijuana, ecstasy, heroin and cocaine. The pair investigate crimes pertaining to the illegal use or sale of narcotics, overdoses and illegal prescription fraud cases.

Not only has he returned to the career that he loves, but Fox’s record from the incident has been expunged. He said, “The Honorable Attorney General Lynn Fitch and the amazing attorneys that work in her office responded to an appeal brief that was placed into the Mississippi Court of Appeals by some of the most talented attorneys in Mississippi that I was fortunate to have as I navigated through the court system. The brief that we put in and the response from the Attorney General’s Office was the determining factor in me being released. The AG’s office stood fast and was adamant that this case should never have gone to trial and that I should not



Fox back at work

have been put in jail. The strong words in the AG's office response were a vivid picture of the miscarriage of justice that I received during the initial and ensuing process. After the Court of Appeals reviewed all the documentations, including the initial court proceedings, on Jan. 30, 2024, after 552 days of incarceration, they came back with the majority decision that this case would be reversed and rendered. This meant that the guilty verdict was reversed with prejudice, meaning it could not go back to trial. At this point I was now a free man. This was the happiest day of my life next to witnessing the birth of my son."

As one would imagine, Fox feels like a changed man for having endured such a terrible ordeal. For the duration of it all, the support of his family was vital. His wife, Gabrielle Smith Fox, sons Coryeille Lewis Fox, 14, and Chaseton Anthony Fox, 13, parents Mary Fox and Joseph L

Fox, brother Joseph M. Fox and nephew Jermain Fox all helped him to withstand what he was facing. Also instrumental was his deep faith.

"This situation changed me in that it showed me the power of prayer and that keeping the faith, no matter what it looks like, is key to perseverance," he said. "I humbly say that it also showed me just how strong I could be despite the odds that were against me -- the true definition of fortitude. There were times I felt like I was at my lowest low but then, in the midst of it all, I would remind myself that I'm not alone in this fight. The support system that I had throughout was immeasurable.

"Someone made the statement to me once that though what happened was unjust in so many ways, that this firsthand experience could make me an even better officer because now I would

be able to fully understand what being incarcerated means from both sides of the law," continued Fox. "That may be true and, while I agree in theory, I wouldn't wish this 'firsthand' knowledge of it on any of my fellow LEOs when they are innocent of a crime they didn't commit."

Now that he's on the other side of it all, Fox can offer advice about what he's learned. To his fellow LEOs especially, he said, "If you are innocent, no matter what, you fight for your innocence. I was offered four to five plea deals by the Hinds County District Attorney and his office, all of which came with no jail time. I could've taken a plea deal and avoided being incarcerated, but that would have meant now being a convicted felon without my career that I love so much in law enforcement. I never wavered in my innocence and those who believe in truth and justice stood with me from the very beginning to the very end of this ordeal. Though I was put in a very uncomfortable situation, I never lost faith knowing that God would see me through and that's exactly what He did. To my LEOs, if you have bodycams, wear them and make certain they are turned on. This can save you from the possibility of being accused merely from hearsay. If the city I was working for had them at the time of the incident, people would not have been able to fabricate a story to fit a certain narrative because everything would have been documented. A side note to this is, after our situation occurred and they used it as a selling point, that city now has bodycams for every officer.

"Without SSPBA, there is no way I or my family would have been able to afford the legal representation that was needed to ensure I received justice. To any LEO out there, if you are not already a member, I implore you to become one. In our profession, you never know when or if their services will be needed. But if ever they are, such as with the situation I found myself in, trust me when I say you will be glad you did."

One of the attorneys on the case, Michael Cory, emphasized the pivotal role of the PBA in securing Fox's release.

"Fox should never have faced charges, but it's his PBA membership that ensured

his freedom today,” said Cory. “The PBA assembled an experienced legal team and provided the financial backing necessary to mount a formidable defense from the trial all the way through the appeal. We hired world-class experts — an orthopedic trauma surgeon, toxicologist, forensic pathologist, neurosurgeon, and interventional radiologist — whose insights and testimony were critical in overturning the verdict. This type of top-tier defense would be beyond the reach of most officers without the PBA’s support and resources.”

With all the legal troubles and jail time behind him now, Fox has much to share when it comes to SSPBA membership.

“I can truly write a book on Southern States Police Benevolent Association,” he said. “To any law enforcement person that is not a part of SSPBA, take it from a person that would have been completely lost and would not have known how I was going to afford the legal representation that I acquired if it wasn’t for PBA.

“Dale Preiser at the Atlanta, Ga., office was instrumental in facilitating the needs for me throughout this process and I’m forever grateful to him,” continued Fox. “Francis Springer, who represents PBA here in Mississippi, has been a great asset to the organization. Anytime there is a LEO critical incident that occurs in Mississippi, Springer is on it. He also helped me navigate through my situation

and was there from day one. I am glad to call him friend. I’m truly thankful to the PBA for everything they have done and will continue to do. Without them, the burden that we would feel as LEOs would be a million times greater. I love paying my dues, it’s well worth it.

“When SSPBA took on this case, there were three officers falsely accused of a crime they didn’t commit which led to two separate trials, a boatload of experts, multiple hired attorneys and a pile of fees on top of fees. After reviewing the facts of this case, PBA said, ‘No cap on funding, get it done!’ And that’s just what they did. So, as I said before, forever grateful would be an understatement to PBA and all involved with bringing me back home to my family.

“Thanks to SSPBA, Coxwell and Associates, Tanner and Associates, Springer Law Firm, Danks, Miller, and Cory Law Firm and Attorney Paul Lockett for working so diligently on my case and for restoring a little bit of faith back into the judicial system that I lost for a while,” Fox concluded.

Springer, the attorney-turned-friend, is as emphatic as Fox in his endorsement of SSPBA membership.

“I can’t say enough about SSPBA’s mission to protect its members,” Springer said. “SSPBA knew Fox was innocent and backed him all the way to the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, we have other



A triumphant Fox

members facing similar prosecutions in the same county. They are very lucky to have been members when their incidents occurred. They have great defenses, but they will not be cheap. Anyone in law enforcement who is not a member of SSPBA is putting themselves and their families and loved ones in a dangerous situation, should they need a legal defense. There is no reason every LEO should not be a member.”

Also like Fox, Springer had a list of attorneys that deserve recognition for their work on Fox’s case -- Christian Medina, Carlos Tanner, Merrida “Buddy” Coxwell, Courtney Sanders and Chuck Mullins were all “instrumental” with their work on Fox’s successful appeal.



Fox and his K-9, Annika, return to work for Clinton Police Department

SCPBA MEMBER COKER HONORED WITH SENATE RESOLUTION

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

For 29 years, Sgt. Robbie Coker of the McCormick County Sheriff's Office has proudly served in law enforcement. In May 2024, he was recognized with a Senate Resolution in the South Carolina General Assembly for his actions in June 2023.

The resolution reads as follows: "To recognize and honor Sgt. John Robert Coker of the McCormick County Sheriff's Office for decisively and courageously taking action that potentially saved the lives of innocent residents while putting himself in harm's way on June 18, 2023, and to express the deepest gratitude of the South Carolina Senate for Sgt. Coker's selfless service." The incident for which he was honored began with Coker and a fellow officer dispatched to an armed robbery with the suspect carrying two bags, one of which held a rifle. Coker found the suspect about 35 minutes later and confronted him.

Coker was able to talk the suspect into setting his bag down and moving away from it after reassuring him that he only wanted to talk with him. However, the suspect pulled a Taurus .357 revolver out of his pocket and pointed it at Coker. Coker then grabbed the suspect's revolver, but the suspect pulled away from the officer. Coker drew his service weapon, and the suspect fired a shot, which struck the knuckle of Coker's ring finger, causing extensive damage.

According to the Senate Resolution: "The bullet traveled through his hand, exiting at the palm area and into his right upper chest area, just above the Kevlar panel of his body armor. Sgt. Coker fired three shots at the suspect, striking the suspect in the left elbow, left chest and neck area ... the exchange of gunfire lasted less than three seconds." Sgt. Coker moved behind the patrol vehicle, alongside his fellow officer, for additional protection. His partner began medical aid to Coker while a McCormick Police Department officer



Coker with his S.C. Senate Resolution

was called to secure the suspect, whose blood was later found to have contained methamphetamine and amphetamine. Coker was taken to Augusta University Medical Center in Augusta, Ga.

After working in law enforcement for almost three decades, Coker said his favorite aspect of the job is being able to help people through tough times in their lives. He oversees the uniform patrol division, but he has also served as a bloodhound handler, a field training officer and a driving instructor at the criminal justice academy in Columbia, S.C., where he attended rookie school.

Coker is modest when describing the actions that led to him being honored with the Senate Resolution. "(It was) an officer involved shooting where I was shot and I returned fire," he said. His handling of this event is like his guiding outlook on life, "Keep your head up and keep moving forward. It is what it is."

Growing up in Ware Shoals, S.C.,

which Coker called a "small town where everyone knew each other," he said he always had the support of a family that stood behind him throughout his whole career. After working with five different sheriffs, he said Sheriff Clarke Stearns has had the greatest influence on him.

Coker had some advice for people with an interest in a law enforcement career. "It's a dangerous job but very rewarding when you are able to help people," he said. "Your mind has to be in the right place when doing this job. I'm not as hard-core as I seem. I have a soft spot that I don't reveal much."

His family, including his three adult sons, Justin, Matthew and Andrew, and his wife, Kasey, are familiar with that side of Coker. In addition to hunting and fishing, Coker said his favorite way to spend time is with his family.

Riding dirt bikes is another pastime he enjoys, a carryover from his younger days when the hobby "kept me off the street."

AR POLICE OFFICER GRATEFUL FOR SUPPORT AFTER CRASH

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

The call that Pine Bluff, Ark., Patrol Officer Tiffany Wood received Oct. 29, 2023, is not one she'll soon forget.

As she made her way to a nightclub to respond to a fight in progress, she was hit head-on by a reckless driver who crossed the center line after pulling out from the nightclub parking lot. He nearly ran into the ditch before straightening back out onto the road. He appeared to be moving into the center lane on the southbound side as Wood was driving in the center lane of the northbound side. But suddenly, his vehicle entered her lane.

Wood described the events of the night. "I hit my brakes and realized too late that he was going to hit me," she said. "I went unconscious during the impact. I was within a block of my destination, so my seat belt was not on, and the airbags did not deploy. I struck the front windshield and mirror with my head and arm. This impact caused lacerations and a concussion.

"The steering wheel made contact with my chest and abdomen, which caused multiple broken ribs, a tear in my aorta and a tear in my lung," Wood continued. "My knee hit the dashboard, breaking it, and causing ligament damage. My femur was broken by the steering wheel."

The recovery process for Wood was long and arduous. Even sleeping proved painful for her due to her broken ribs preventing her from being comfortable enough to rest well. Just sitting up in the morning after waking was painful. One of the most difficult facets of her recovery was that she had to rely on others for help doing almost anything because, as she readily acknowledges, "I prefer doing it for myself."

The new norm for Wood following her accident included multiple doctor's appointments. She had to re-learn how to walk and run and had to regain mobility in her knee as well as strength in her leg. She accomplished all these things, but



Officer Wood and son Chevy

it took nine months, many doctor visits and over 90 physical therapy sessions to do so.

Of her progress, Wood said, "I can run, but I have a limp, and I run slow."

"I am not graceful moving up and down steps, nor speedy," she continued. "I can squat but I struggle standing up without assistance or relying on my other leg. I can feel which ribs were broken while doing sit-ups. I have not been able to put weight onto my knee directly."

Wood said despite her debilitating injuries, recovery is possible but time-consuming. "Pain is hard to work through, but it is possible to recover," said Wood. "Take it slow. Push yourself a little every day. Listen to your body and listen to the doctors. If you can go through physical therapy, do it. Seek therapy for any traumatic injury or event."

On a personal level, Wood found that when dealing with the stressors of a law enforcement career or traumatic event, it was important to recognize that she was not OK. She offers the same insight to others facing similar trauma.

"Do not be embarrassed to seek help," Wood said. "Speak with a therapist, doctor, friends, coworkers or even a

stranger. Do not bottle up your feelings and do not fight it alone. Find self-love and find a reason to live. Remember that time changes so much and it heals. Do not take everything personally in life, and be realistic about what you physically can do. If you make a mistake, learn from it."

Wood found that strong support systems and strong mental dedication were vital to her recovery. "It is important to desire healing and recovery because the pain can be excruciating," she said. "Believing in yourself is important."

During her short career, Wood has already been honored with two awards.

"I've received a lifesaving award and the Catherine Whiteside Award from my department," she said. "Ms. Whiteside was a strong woman who worked for Pine Bluff Police Department while battling multiple rounds of cancer until the cancer won the battle. My recovery from my car wreck was long and hard, and the department recognized my hard work and dedication to recovering by awarding me the Catherine Whiteside Award."

As a single mother to her 8-year-old son, Chevy, Wood certainly was motivated to make a complete recovery. She enjoyed watching her son learn and play sports. He's been active in baseball for several years now and tried football and basketball for the first time this year. Wood also enjoyed taking on home improvement projects such as cleaning and landscaping. Mud riding, horseback riding and spending time with friends and family are also high on her list of things to do in her spare time, now that she's able. She has not yet returned to jiu jitsu, which she had been taking for several months prior to her accident.

As one would expect, the injuries Wood sustained were extensive and extremely painful. As a result, she was not conscious for some time after the accident. Even so, she clearly recalled the support shown by her supervisor, Sabrina Washington, whom she calls the biggest influence in her law enforcement career.

She remembered that Washington was with her, holding her hand until she was removed from the car after her wreck. During her recovery, Washington checked on Wood often. She also ensured that Wood and her family had everything they needed.

The support didn't stop there. Washington, along with another supervisor, Shanae Jackson, gifted her son with a Nintendo Switch at Christmas. Another helping hand was extended by Lt. C. Briggs, who, Wood said, "checked on me regularly, arranged support from the police department and visited me after my wreck. (Washington, Jackson and Briggs) ...made sure I was taken care of and had everything I needed."

Even though she has lived in the Pine Bluff area all her life, and maybe shouldn't have been surprised with how her hometown rose to the occasion, Wood was overwhelmed with the amount of support from her family and community throughout her recovery. Her thank-you list is extensive, which just points out how much care the town has showered on her.

"I want to say, thank you to my mother, Tammy Wood, father Andrew Wood and siblings Elizabeth Woodell, Kassie Squires and Shelton Wood for taking care of me," she said. "I also want to appreciate all my family members, friends, coworkers and associates that reached out or helped me directly or my mom and sister while I was recovering. I want to thank everyone who gave financial assistance during that time. I want to thank the Pine Bluff Police Department for making sure my son and I were taken care of. I also want to thank my worker's compensation agent, Lee, for making the process so smooth and seeking the best treatment and care. I appreciate my physical therapist, Cathy, for getting me back to a physical condition that allows me to be back on patrol. I want to thank EASI personnel and administration for transportation arrangements to and from the hospitals. I also want to give a shout out to EASI, Pine Bluff Police Department, Jefferson County Sheriff



Officer Wood using walker to cook



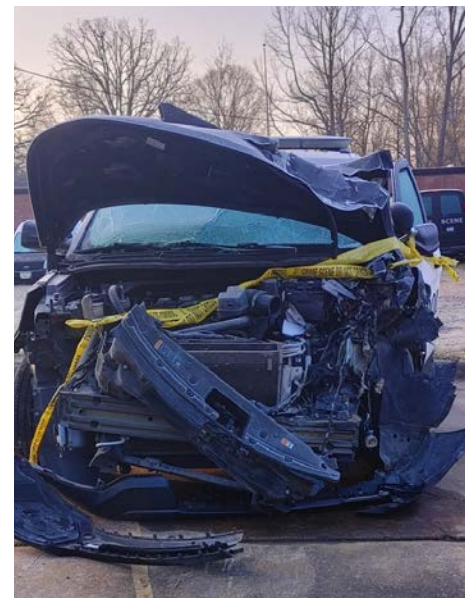
Officer Wood starts long road to recovery from hospital bed

Department, Arkansas State Police, Hwy 15 Volunteer Fire Department, Little Rock Police Department, Pulaski County Sheriff's Department, Redfield Police Department, White Hall Police Department, family members, coworkers and friends who escorted me home with a beautiful display of lights and support all the way from UAMS to Woodlawn school district."

Wood was moved by the display of lights and people who came out to support her as she was escorted home, noting that



Officer Wood with an EMT



Officer Wood's patrol car

many officers are not alive during such a roadside display. She was notably happy to get to experience it firsthand. She remains encouraging of anyone seeking a career in law enforcement, despite her injuries and recovery.

"If you are interested, then go for it," said Wood. "Bravery is not the lack of fear but facing your fear head on. As law enforcement officers, we deal with terrifying things on a regular basis. To others, we seem fearless, but truth is, we face our fears. It's OK to be afraid, it's not OK to let that fear ruin a great experience. Being a law enforcement officer is so rewarding mentally, physically and socially."

In 2024, 147 law enforcement officers made the ultimate sacrifice in service to communities throughout the United States. The SSPBA and PBF want to pay our respects to the nine members who were part of this number. We were proud to have you as members, and we were deeply saddened to lose you. May God continue to comfort those that you left behind. May He bring them peace and strength to continue on their journey.



Deputy Sheriff Eric Anthony Minix
Coweta County Sheriff's Office, GA
EOW - January 4, 2024



Trooper Jimmy Cenescar
Georgia State Patrol, GA
EOW - January 28, 2024



Deputy Sheriff Christopher Johnson
Harnett County Sheriff's Office, NC
EOW - February 6, 2024



Deputy Sheriff Greg McCowan
Blount County Sheriff's Office, TN
EOW - February 8, 2024



Deputy Sheriff Robert John Leonard
Meigs County Sheriff's Office, TN
EOW - February 15, 2024



**Deputy Sheriff Jermyius
O'Marian-D'Nazhray Young**
Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, AL
EOW - April 5, 2024



Investigator William Alden Elliott
North Carolina Department of Adult
Correction, NC
EOW - April 29, 2024



Patrolman Troy Floyd
Summit Police Department, MS
EOW - August 8, 2024



Deputy Sheriff Hunter Reedy
Smyth County Sheriff's Office, VA
EOW - August 9, 2024

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13

ALPBA NAMES DEDICATED OFFICER 2024 MEMBER OF THE YEAR

By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

Alicia Cash first learned about PBA almost 20 years ago as a fresh cadet in the police academy.

“PBA came into a class while I was in police academy,” she said. “They made a strong case for how important it is to be protected due to the seriousness of this position. I like to be active due to seeing officers needing help and having someone they can call and trust.

“I also enjoy meeting officers from other agencies, and being active with PBA provides the ability to do that,” continued Cash.

Cash, a senior officer at the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles, was rewarded last year for her dedication and loyalty by being named 2024 Member of the Year by the ALPBA.

She was nominated by Jon Riley, senior vice president of the Alabama Division of PBA and member of Alabama State Law Enforcement Chapter. Cash is serving as the chapter’s senior vice president, is in her fourth term as a board member, and she was elected two terms as chapter secretary.

Riley spoke highly of Cash in his nomination letter. “I have personally observed her actively advocate for her fellow officers on numerous occasions,” he stated in his letter. “Alicia also regularly attends chapter meetings, bringing sound insight into matters such as political affairs, membership growth and membership service.”

Cash was raised in Bridgeport, Ala., a small rural gem of just over 2,000 people near the historic Trail of Tears, not far from the Tennessee-Alabama state line.

She graduated in 2007 from the University of Alabama with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and a minor in psychology. Cash interned with the Public Defenders Office in Tuscaloosa and was recommended to apply for the

position with PAP because she said she had a passion to help to others.

Riley noted her call to service in nominating her as Member of the Year.

“When fellow leaders call upon Alicia for assistance in representing Alabama PBA at training events sponsored by PBA, she has always made herself available to assist at these events in whatever capacity she is asked to serve,” he stated.

Cash has been married 10 years and has two sons, 8 and 6, and a bonus daughter, 23.

While other LEOs work the front end of arrests, Cash gets to know those arrested after their case has been disposed of and

they have been sentenced. Under PAP guidelines, hopefully, probationers and parolees can put their pasts behind them.

“Seeing those that wouldn’t normally be offered second chances succeed,” Cash said of her favorite part of her job.

However, she also recognizes that not everyone succeeds. She doesn’t relish “having to make tough recommendations for those who are struggling knowing that they may not understand why.”

Cash is satisfied with her long career and serving alongside like-minded officers.

“I’d like to continue to work with great officers who care about and know how important their positions are,” she said.



Alicia Cash and her family, including their fur baby



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PBA PUSHES BACK IN GIGLIO ACTIONS ON MULTIPLE FRONTS

By Joni Fletcher Cawthon
SSPBA Director of Legal Services

PBA continues to be attuned to the increasing occurrence of Giglio matters pertaining to our members. As previously reported, we have been alarmed to see increases in the number of instances where prosecutors are labeling PBA members as dishonest.

Such a characterization typically dooms a law enforcement officer's career as he or she is deemed to no longer be useful as a witness.

While prosecutors have the discretion and authority to call witnesses of their choosing when prosecuting cases and have the responsibility to disclose evidence to criminal defendants that could be used to impeach witnesses whose credibility may be determinative of a defendant's guilt or innocence, the application of this authority and responsibility for prosecutors has broadened in recent years.

"Giglio letters" have been issued not only in instances where an investigation has concluded that there has been an instance of dishonesty by an officer but also for such occurrences as an assault charge against an officer and even where officers have been cleared of wrongdoing by independent investigations.

Clearly, the abuse of the use of Giglio letters has jeopardized the rights of PBA members. But there is hope, and PBA has been actively involved in some successful developments regarding Giglio matters over the past year.

In North Carolina, a lawsuit filed against a district attorney on behalf of a PBA member has survived summary judgment and is headed to trial. Member Anthony Sorangelo, formerly of Asheville PD, commenced a lawsuit in 2022 against the City of Asheville, the chief of police and District Attorney Todd Williams arising from a Giglio letter concerning an alleged excessive use of force by Mr. Sorangelo.



Attorney Jeff Warren

Mr. Sorangelo was later exonerated, but the Giglio letter caused his termination.

The PBA authorized the first ever constitutional challenge to a Giglio letter. Mr. Sorangelo alleged that the Giglio letter violated his right to procedural due process and his right to earn a living.

In January 2025, the Buncombe County Superior Court denied District Attorney Williams's motion for summary judgment. This marks the first time that a Giglio claim against a district attorney will go to trial in the state of North Carolina.

In a separate case in North Carolina brought on behalf of another PBA member, the defendant district attorney agreed to settle the case and withdraw the underlying Giglio letter, and the State of North Carolina agreed to remove the PBA member from North Carolina's new statewide Giglio database.

To the PBA's knowledge, this is the first instance an officer has been removed from the database.

Another North Carolina lawsuit is on appeal at the North Carolina Court of Appeals. In that case, District Attorney



Attorney Keith Barber

Michael Waters issued a Giglio letter to PBA member SeanPatrick Leech after alleged mishandling of evidence at a crime scene — even though Mr. Leech was never accused of dishonesty.

Mr. Leech was cleared of wrongdoing by Criminal Justice Education & Training Standards, but District Attorney Waters refused to withdraw the Giglio letter, causing Mr. Leech to remain in North Carolina's statewide Giglio database for no supported reason.

PBA authorized a challenge to the constitutionality of North Carolina's Giglio statute (N.C. Gen. Stat. § 17C-16), and the case is pending before the Court of Appeals.

Lastly, yet another North Carolina member contacted the PBA after his department accused him of dishonesty on his F5(b) separation notice. In that instance, the PBA member arranged a hearing with District Attorney Jeffrey Marsigli to discuss the underlying allegations.

District Attorney Marsigli invited the member and his attorney to meet with the district attorney's "Giglio committee" to present information in the member's

defense.

After hearing from the member and his counsel, the Giglio committee unanimously voted to take no action against him, and the member did not receive a Giglio letter. District Attorney Marsigli's process could well serve as a model for other prosecutorial districts in North Carolina and other states.

The PBA members in each of these Giglio cases were represented by attorney Jeffrey S. Warren of Ellis & Winters LLP in Raleigh. He has become quite possibly the foremost legal expert on Giglio matters over the past five years.

As Mr. Warren has stated, "Law enforcement officers are not entitled to a watered down version of constitutional rights. Giglio v. United States does not eliminate the right of innocent officers to explain why they should not be Giglio-impaired."

While the vast majority of Giglio issues for PBA members have arisen in North Carolina, we are tracking developments closely and have now seen cases arise in Georgia, Virginia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Alabama and South Carolina.

As a result of growing concerns, PBA has been involved in drafting legislation in Georgia and Mississippi to help provide

rights for law enforcement officers during a Giglio process.

Specifically, the Georgia bill provides for notice to an officer of a prosecutor's intent to place the officer on a Giglio list. Such notice would include the basis for the prosecutor's decision, the right for the officer to request relevant materials from the district attorney, the right to provide supplemental information and the right to request reconsideration of such a placement on the Giglio list.

The bill also addresses the role of the Georgia Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission when prosecutors state their intent to place officers on the Giglio list.

PBA attorney Keith Barber represents three PBA members with pending Giglio issues. He provided valuable insight during PBA's efforts to assist with drafting the Giglio bill, which is now law. "It has been my distinct honor and pleasure to serve the PBA and all the officers of the state of Georgia on this Giglio bill issue," Barber said. "We have enjoyed solid support from people of all walks of life in an effort to get this Giglio bill passed.


"Georgia officers have never had any recourse whatsoever on being 'Gigiloed,'" continued Barber. "Up until now, if a

district attorney or assistant district attorney felt that an officer had been untruthful regarding a case, it would undoubtedly lead to the officer being terminated.

"Usually, an officer did not even know that they had been 'Gigiloed' by a prosecutor until they heard about it by word of mouth," he said. "We have had officers called in by their chief and terminated just because a prosecutor called the chief and relayed that they felt like the officer was not being truthful in a case, with the officer having no say whatsoever in the situation. This scenario is totally unfair on many different levels. As any person would understand, just being 'Gigiloed' is a kiss of death for an officer's career.

"I have even had cases where the officer had not even been given the courtesy of a phone call from the prosecutor letting them know that they were going to 'Giglio' them or even the reason why. Hopefully, this new law will rectify this situation," Barber added. "Officers have truly needed these basic due process protections outlined in this bill for a long time."

As developments continue regarding Giglio issues for PBA members, we will continue to look for efforts to combat the issue legally, legislatively and politically.



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TNPBA MEMBER TOOK FIRST STEPS TOWARD POLICING AS A TOT



Brentwood police Officer Lapolla

**By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor**

More than 20 years ago, a police officer saved baby Maggie Lapolla from possible poverty, illness or even death, after finding her in a cardboard box at a school in China.

Fast forward to 2024 and a regional leap from New Jersey to Brentwood, Tenn., and Lapolla opted into a career of her own in law enforcement. Her story is compelling.

"I am a survivor of China's 'one child policy,' which was a population control measure that was still active in the early 2000s," she said. "Culturally, boys were favored over girls, and oftentimes, newborn girls were killed or abandoned by their birth parents."

Her parents gave her up shortly after birth, leaving her in a school. "I was eventually found at the school in a cardboard box by a Chinese police officer who brought me to the orphanage," she said. "The orphanage was not a quality living environment, as there were four children sharing one crib and the

necessities for proper growth and care were scarce."

Enter Mike and Sue Lapolla of Westfield, N.J., and their older son, also named Mike. The elder Lapolla is a town manager and a former prosecutor. Sue Lapolla is a Municipal Court judge.

The family adopted her at 14-months-old, so Lapolla grew up in a law-filled home.

"From a young age, I was deeply interested in law enforcement, a passion shaped by my parents' careers in the prosecutor's office," she said. "Growing up, my mom would read my favorite Dr. Seuss book, 'Green Eggs and Ham,' before bed and would oftentimes have to stop reading to approve restraining orders as a judge.

"To say the least, bedtime stories were always interesting," continued Lapolla. "Learning about my adoption and the heroic actions of the Chinese police officer who saved me brought my journey full circle.

"I am eternally grateful for their bravery and the second chance at life they gave me, inspiring my own commitment to making a difference in others' lives through service and justice."

Lapolla was also influenced by her uncle,

who retired as a captain from the Union County Sheriff's Office in Elizabeth, N.J., in 2020 after 25 years of service.

She said she remembers nothing of China and feels her roots are in Jersey. The family are fervent baseball fans but live in a divided house.

"I have a 14-year-old white West Highland Terrier," she said. "My mom named him 'Babe' after Babe Ruth as she is a New York Yankees fan. My dad and I are die-hard New York Mets fans and still don't approve of his name 14 years later. He lives with my parents in New Jersey and gets lots of treats."

During her free time, she heads to New York for a Mets game, especially during the summer.

"It's a little bit harder now that I live in Tennessee, but when the MLB season starts, Mets games are constantly on my TV or phone. Let's go, Mets."

Lapolla excelled in athletics and academics in high school and college. She was an eight-time varsity letterman for women's tennis and lacrosse and captain of her lacrosse team during the 2020 season.

"I was the first ever Division I girls' lacrosse commit in school history," said Lapolla. "I played Division I lacrosse for a



Officer Lapolla on the slopes



Officer Lapolla and a fellow Brentwood police officer

short time at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.”

She attended the University of Maryland Baltimore County on a Division I lacrosse scholarship for her freshman year during 2020.

“After my freshman year, I transferred to Rowan University located in Glassboro, N.J.,” she said. “I received my bachelor's degree in criminal justice studies and graduated cum laude.”

Lapolla has stayed active post-college. “Snowboarding is my main passion during the winter,” she said. “I have traveled across the country to snowboard, with Mont Blanc in Canada standing out as my favorite destination. I also enjoy building LEGOs, exploring new places with friends and traveling.” She graduated from Tennessee Police Academy and was sworn into the department as a certified police officer last summer.

“I am a highly motivated, disciplined and a dedicated individual, driven by a strong passion to achieve my goals,” she said. “In January 2023, after visiting Nashville for the first time, I fell in love with the city and decided I wanted to move here. Nine months later, I moved to Nashville and began my career with the Brentwood Police Department.”

As a rookie, Lapolla continues to learn and explore the intricacies of her

profession. She hopes to achieve the rank of detective.

“I aspire to serve as a detective and solve cases, investigate crime scenes,” she said. “For now, my focus is on excelling as a patrol officer, continually improving my skills, and growing both personally and professionally within the field. For people seeking law enforcement or interested in the career, I would tell them this job isn't about recognition or awards.

“It's important to understand the impact we have as officers no matter how big or small the encounters, gestures or call for service is,” continued Lapolla. “Fighting

crime and catching bad guys is cool, but I believe it's our actions, kindness and compassion towards people that leave the biggest impacts.”

Lapolla said she doesn't have curiosity about her birth details and family. “Growing up, I always sensed I was different from my family and friends,” she said. “It wasn't until high school that I learned more about the details of my adoption. As a child, I never felt the need to ask my parents about my birth parents because my family has always been my true family.

“When I discovered I was abandoned at birth, it didn't come as a surprise,” continued Lapolla. “I understood there must have been reasons my birth parents couldn't raise me, and their decision to give me up ultimately became the greatest gift of my life.”

She recognized how being saved by a police officer directed her toward her career and hopes to set an example for others seeking a similar profession.

“When I found out about the Chinese officer who saved me and gave me a second chance at life, it had a huge impact on me. Although I don't know the officer's name, I am eternally grateful for the impact they had on my life. I hope to have the same kind of impact on many others.”



Officer Lapolla with her parents, Sue and Mike, and brother Mike

VAPBA VETERAN SAVES FAMILY OF THREE FROM HOLIDAY BLAZE

By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

Gate City police Sgt. Cody Johnson was on regular patrol when he got a dispatch call about smoke coming from a house about 10 a.m. Dec. 23, 2024.

Worse yet, he had reason to believe there were people inside that he could not rouse.

"I went around the house knocking on doors and windows but got no response," he said. "Due to a vehicle being in the backyard and the exigent circumstances, I decided to force entry into the residence."

Johnson, a 14-year veteran and married father of two, may have been expecting the worst but hoping for the best as he entered the home. Instead, he found parents and a child sound asleep in a bedroom.

"They had not heard me, nor the smoke alarm going off," said Johnson. "I was able to awaken the couple and their small child and lead them out the back door to safety. This event is certainly a career highlight of mine, and I am blessed I was in the right place at the right time."

The family, prepared for the upcoming Christmas, lost everything for the holiday but were alive.

"The family lost all of their Christmas presents for their child," Johnson said, "and I along with first responders, and members of the community came together to make sure that the parents and child had a special Christmas, even during this difficult time."

Johnson developed an interest in law enforcement out of a calling to help others. This was his first lifesaving rescue.

He was raised in Washington County in southwest Virginia and graduated from Patrick Henry High School. He competed at Virginia Skills USA, taking



Gate City, Va., police Sgt. Cody Johnson

first place in Virginia Law Enforcement Category.

Johnson then earned an associate's degree from Virginia Highlands Community College and a bachelor's degree from King University. He's working on getting his Master of Public Administration degree at Liberty University.

Previously employed at Abingdon Police Department, Johnson has served with Gate City for three years. He and wife Miranda have two children, Landen and Cora.

Since the fire rescue, Johnson has been lauded with awards for his lifesaving efforts, including by a local television station. "I was recognized as WJHL's

Hero of the Week and I was recognized by the Town of Gate City with a lifesaving award, and a resolution was created and placed in Gate City official records in regard to the event," he said.

Johnson includes among his hobbies the foundation of a nonprofit organization assisting officers and first responders in difficult times. Information on First Responder Outreach Foundation can be found at www.firstresponderoutreachfoundation.org.

Johnson has his career goals in order and plans to stay the course in law enforcement. "I plan on maintaining a professional law enforcement demeanor, while continuing my education and assisting up and coming officers to strive for excellence every day," he said.

MEDICAL SETBACK INSPIRES LEO CAREER FOR HONORED OFFICER

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

Riley Landry is honored to have been named Officer of the Year twice already in his three-year career in law enforcement. A local Moose Lodge named him Officer of the Year in 2022, and he was selected in 2024 for Officer of the Year by the American Legion Post 45.

Landry serves with the Holly Springs, Ga., Police Department, where he started his career after graduating from Valdosta State University in 2021 with a degree in criminal justice. While at VSU, he completed a summer internship with St. Mary's PD in South Georgia. He completed rookie school in Pickens County through the Georgia Police Safety Training Center.

Landry is not a legacy officer, like some in law enforcement. His father works in the corporate world and his mother is a schoolteacher. He grew up in a small town north of Atlanta. "You have a strong chance of running into someone you know while shopping at the grocery store," he said of his hometown. "The community as a whole is very active and tightknit."

Landry was active in almost all sports when he was younger but primarily focused on basketball in high school. However, after one too many major concussions, he decided it was best to quit playing sports. He found that he didn't miss sports too much because it freed up time for him to hunt and fish, which is what he enjoys the most.

"My grandfather taught me a lot about duck hunting growing up and took me every chance he and I had," said Landry. "Now that he has gotten older, I am the one taking him hunting and making sure he is set up in good spots. My cousins and I share a lot of joy in being able to tend to our grandfather while hunting due to him tending to us when we were growing up and learning the ropes."

The concussion that caused him to leave



Officer Landry and his wife

sports behind and focus on hunting and fishing was not the only health related issue that Landry faced.

"My senior year in high school I had a surgery mishap that really put how quickly life can change into perspective for me," he said. "A very routine outpatient surgery turned into around seven days in the hospital. After waking up from surgery, I did not have any use of my arms, hands and legs and could not speak without a very strong stutter. Within three days I regained use of my arms. By day seven, I had re-learned how to walk. After months of physical and speech therapy, I was back to 100%."

As it turned out, his medical crisis would become the impetus for him to pursue a career in law enforcement. Landry's recovery experience had made a significant impact on him, providing first-hand experience with how important a role those in helping professions play in society.

"Due to this incident, I knew I wanted to

do something that was larger than myself and involved helping others," he said. "I knew the military wouldn't allow me in, due to medical history, so I decided law enforcement was the next best thing." Landry has enjoyed working alongside the other officers in his department and said there are other officers he feels are more deserving of the recognition that he received. He said the first sergeant he worked under at Holly Springs PD impacted him as he was learning the ropes.

"He was someone you wanted by your side if things went south because you knew he would have your back," said Landry. "He also took time to continuously train and educate young officers like myself even once they're out of field training."

Landry's decision to become a PBA member came about in the early days of his career when he heard a PBA representative speak. "I saw the importance and value in the services provided by the PBA to police officers," he said.

As for his success in the policing business, he pointed to his faith as being essential. "I am a big believer in God," Landry said. "He has led me and guided me my whole life. Through the highs and lows of my life, he has remained consistent and by my side. I believe every night when I go to work, He watches over our shift. He keeps me grounded and allows me to police with my heart, which I believe is a very important aspect in having a successful career and making an impact on the community you police for."

When he's not busy patrolling Holly Springs, Landry enjoys following the Georgia Bulldogs and calls himself a diehard fan. He has been married for a few years now. His wife is also in a community service role as a teacher. He said she is successful in her profession.

"Day in and day out she is providing a very safe, engaging and impactful learning environment for her students," he said.

SSPBA WINS BIG IN CIVIL SERVICE CASE AGAINST LSU AGENCY

By Jordan Mitten
PBA staff legal assistant

On Dec. 4, 2024, an opinion was issued from the Louisiana Civil Service Commission, ruling entirely in favor of PBA member William Mattox.

The opinion ruled in favor of Mattox's appeal against his termination by the Louisiana State University Police Department in Alexandria. "Despite various setbacks, we have prevailed on every aspect of each case brought against Mr. Mattox," said attorney Thomas Davenport Jr.

The beginning of Mattox's case occurred back in October 2018. Mattox was informed by his command staff at LSUA that he was under investigation, but the reasons or allegations would not be disclosed.

The only information shared with Mattox at the time was that he would be contacted later with a warrant for his arrest. Due to a previously established relationship, Mattox requested Davenport's assignment of the PBA.

Davenport sprang into action and was able to assist in ascertaining why Mattox was under this investigation and what the allegations were against him. The LSUA Police Department alleged that Mattox violated LRS 14:134 (malfeasance in office). LSUA contended that Mattox was misusing their Kologik program in order to conduct National Crime Information Center (NCIC) searches.

LSUA held to these allegations to the extent that in December 2018, the department informed Mattox of their intention to terminate him. On top of the allegation regarding LRS 14:134, LSUA also asserted that Mattox was in violation of their own General Order 395: Security of Police Records.

Davenport was approved by the PBA to represent Mattox and assist him with criminal and administrative cases.

With regards to the criminal charges



Attorney Thomas Davenport Jr.

brought against Mattox, Davenport argued that the warrant was deficient and more a supposition, without providing any supporting facts into the allegations. In opposition, Davenport was able to provide evidence that Officer Mattox's use of the Kologik program was well within his designated duties as a TAC officer with LSUA, including in such an instance where Mattox was ordered to run a fellow officer to get him set up in their system.

Davenport was able to report to the PBA in early 2021 that Mattox was not to be prosecuted by the district attorney and that the charges were dismissed.

One front was now closed, but the other would not be so easily won.

Mattox's termination appeal, organized and presented to the Louisiana Civil Service Commission, was based upon Mattox's rights under Louisiana R.S. 40:2531 – otherwise known as the "Police Officers' Bill of Rights."

This state law establishes the rights of Louisiana POST certified officers – whether employed as probation and parole officers under the Department of Public Safety and Corrections, as law enforcement officers by any municipality or as campus police at any state-supported college or university – while "under investigation with a view to



LAPBA member William Mattox

possible disciplinary action, demotion or dismissal."

Had LSUA adhered to the provisions of this law, their investigation would have been completed within 75 days. Mattox was provided with the first written notice of investigation Oct. 26, 2018. From then to the date Mattox received his notice of termination – May 23, 2019 – totaled 210 days. Despite this argument, however, Davenport reported to the PBA that the Louisiana Civil Service Commission ruled it is not bound to follow the Police Officers' Bill of Rights and was preventing Mattox from admitting any evidence.

In response, Davenport filed a petition for declaratory judgment and injunctive relief to the Ninth Judicial District Court in Rapides Parish. This petition was to make Mattox's hearing rights under the Police Officers' Bill of Rights heard and to enforce those rights.

A judge ultimately ruled in LSUA's favor in this civil case, determining that the courts had no subject matter jurisdiction in deciding whether Mattox should be reinstated under the POBOR. After that ruling, Mattox's Civil Service Commission appeal was the only battle left to be fought.

As Mattox's civil service case progressed, the assignment of attorney Floyd Dupre

as co-counsel was also approved by the PBA.

The “dynamic duo” of Davenport and Dupre dug in their heels as they built Mattox’s case for his appeal. The POBOR remained as the foundation of their case, despite the Commission’s continued arguments against the law’s application and constitutionality.

Along with the POBOR arguments, Davenport and Dupre also implemented precedents established by both the U.S. Supreme Court and Louisiana Supreme Court – both of which were directly relevant to Mattox’s duties with LSUA and the Commission’s arguments against the basis of his appeal.

Hearings were held before a referee of the Civil Service Commission through as late as June 2023, until a decision

was made by the referee that Mattox’s appeal was denied. However, Mattox was still capable of filing an application for review of the referee’s decision to the full Civil Service Commission. He, Davenport and Dupre proceeded as such, and it was decided by the Commission in September 2023 that the referee’s decision was to be set aside, and a new hearing would be held.

Proceedings continued before the Civil Service Commission regarding Mattox’s appeal, and Davenport was able to provide the PBA with the Commission’s final decision in December 2024, ruling in Mattox’s favor. The Commission’s final ruling stated that LSUA “(bore) the burden of proving their claims by a preponderance of the evidence,” yet they “failed to meet its burden of proof.”

The Commission ruled further that

Mattox was to be reinstated to his position and be made whole – including payment of back wages and the expungement of his personnel record of all documents related to the termination.

“I extend my deepest gratitude to Mr. Thomas Davenport, Mr. Floyd Dupre and SSPBA for their unwavering support, expertise and commitment to justice. Their efforts have allowed me to move forward with my head held high, knowing that truth and fairness prevailed,” stated Mr. Mattox.

The PBA is proud to be an organization that, as stated by Davenport, “not only talks the talk but walks the walk” for our members, and we are ever grateful for attorneys such as him and Dupre for their continued assistance.

Check out our foundation’s site: pbfi.org



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TNPBA MEMBER MAKING REMARKABLE RECOVERY AFTER CRASH

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

East Ridge police Officer Alan Resendiz, a traffic investigator and hostage negotiator team member, spends most days working accidents and enforcing traffic laws to keep the roads safe. He enjoys being an officer and said his favorite part of being a police officer is “meeting new people every day and helping out people on their worst day.”

He’s so positive and upbeat that his nickname in the department is “Smiley.” East Ridge, Tenn., is southeast of Chattanooga, near the Tennessee-Georgia state line.

Resendiz has been in law enforcement for five years. He started his career at the Bradley County Sheriff’s Office as a correctional officer for two years. He worked with Georgia’s Catoosa County Sheriff’s Office as a detention officer before moving on to East Ridge for the past two years.

He’s a respected member of his department, where he became the officer in charge of the night shift. While serving with the Bradley County Sheriff’s Office he was honored with an Officer of the Month Award.

Resendiz said his guiding outlook on life is “Live today like it’s your last because tomorrow is never promised.” With the benefit of hindsight, he can attest firsthand to just how accurate those words are after surviving a line of duty crash in July 2024.

“On this day I was coming back from the jail,” he said. “My plan was to grab something to eat before the night got busy. Dispatch came on the radio advising us of a stolen vehicle pursuit that was heading toward my jurisdiction. Without hesitation, I quickly headed to I-75 south to attempt to deploy spike strips to stop the fleeing vehicle. As I got in position to deploy the spike strips, I saw the fleeing vehicle heading south in the first lane when he immediately began to cut all lanes of traffic at a high rate of speed, and



Fort Oglethorpe police Officer Dylan Lanham (l) and Officer Almeida visit

that’s when I noticed that he was headed towards my direction.

“Everything happened so quickly that I didn’t even have the time or the chance to try to run to avoid what was to come,” said Resendiz. “I was hit at 107 mph and was thrown 70 feet from where the impact happened.”

Resendiz said he suffered a broken pelvis, which required a seven- or eight-hour surgery; two broken fingers; a broken right clavicle, which was a two-hour surgery; seven broken ribs; a collapsed lung; fractured discs L3, L4 and L5; a ruptured bladder; and a cut to his right arm.

Because of the extent of his injuries, Resendiz’s recovery has proven to be slow and painful.

“The first two months were the most brutal months of my entire life,” he said. “The excruciating pain I had to deal with

every day is a pain I will never forget and a pain I never wish on anybody. I felt useless.

“I couldn’t do anything on my own,” continued Resendiz. “I had to rely on my wife for everything, from help using the restroom, taking a shower, getting from point A to point B and the list goes on. It’s been tough having to relearn how to do everything without relying on others’ help. Small, simple things I was able to do before have been a challenge.”

Resendiz grew up in the small town of Henderson, N.C. Both parents worked almost every day to provide a good life for their children. But he has clear memories of the family being criminally victimized, impacting his decision to become a law enforcement officer.

“Growing up, I remember our house always getting broken into,” he said. “To this day, I can still clearly remember

when they robbed my dad at gunpoint.”

Resendiz played the trumpet in the school band and participated in JROTC during his high school years. He graduated in 2017 and headed into police work. Once he became a law enforcement officer, his coworkers encouraged him to join SSPBA.

“I would tell anyone joining law enforcement to join PBA,” he said.

Following his injuries, social media fundraising campaigns have been established to help Resendiz with medical bills. An area gas station sponsored a fundraiser, collecting a percentage of sales in his name. The law enforcement community has also shown its support throughout his recovery.

Resendiz said Lt. Duane Neal of the Catoosa County Sheriff's Office is the biggest influence in his career.

“(Neal) has always been a person who motivates me to be better,” he said. “He’s one of those officers who is sure to leave a big impact on your life. To this day, he has helped me overcome this injury. He is a person I look up to as a father figure.”

Resendiz is married, and his wife is a stay-at-home mom. They have a 13-year-old son and two daughters, ages 10 and 2. He enjoys spending time with them when he’s not working. He also likes hiking, fishing and exploring new places with his family.

Getting back to those favorite family activities is surely in the forefront of his mind as he puts all his energy into his recovery.

“Slowly but surely, I am working every day to get back on my feet and be able to walk again and live a normal life,” he said. “My biggest motivation throughout this has been my kids. I want to show them that they can overcome any obstacle that life throws at them. My wife has been my biggest supporter, she always pushes me to give it my all and doesn’t let me quit, even on my lowest days.”

As for the man who swerved into Resendiz and hit him while fleeing police, he



Resendiz with his wife, Nancy, at the hospital July 2, 2024, after surgery



Resendiz on duty

pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Resendiz has no animosity towards the man.

"I'm not mad at him, you know, I forgive him," he said. "I don't even know who he is. I've heard his name, but hopefully, he gets humbled, and he gets with God."

Resendiz's attitude throughout his ordeal is admirable but not surprising, considering he is well-known for his positivity and "smiley" demeanor. His focus is on healing so he can get back to his routine of working with the East Ridge PD and seeking new adventures with his family.

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KY MEMBER WRITES BOOK ON CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

KYPBA member Travis Tennill's journey to authoring a book started with his own critical incident that occurred over 20 years ago.

"When I realized that 20 years had passed and nothing had changed, I was angry," Tennill said.

"The Weight of the Badge: Critical Incident Response for Law Enforcement" is available on Amazon, and its message, said Tennill, is simple: "The job causes us harm, and we need to mitigate that harm holistically, intentionally and purposely."

Tennill is the assistant director of enforcement for a state agency, where he oversees the daily enforcement efforts of alcohol and tobacco related laws and regulations for the state. He started his career as a Kentucky state trooper in 1990.

After retiring from KSP, he embarked

on a second career teaching at the Department of Criminal Justice Training, which trains officers across Kentucky. He worked at DOCJT for more than eight years before being promoted.

His retelling of the critical incident is the jumping-off point of the book, as he explains in the introduction.

"Chapter one is a look at my critical incident so that others may have more perspective on what it is like to experience a life-and-death situation," stated the introduction. "No amount of training will prepare you, only the insight of those who have experienced it firsthand. The more we understand the reality of these events, the better we understand what we see and hear as law enforcement leaders during and after these events."

After his own critical incident, Tennill said he struggled. "I was pissed off that law enforcement could not or would not fix the issue of recognizing mental health as a vital aspect of officer safety," he said.

Tennill went through the motions and "did what everyone else does – the best that I could on my own." He attended every training and conference possible, but felt like everyone only spoke about the topic in generalities and the meetings lacked specifics. Tennill thought the resounding mindset seemed to be, "We have a problem, but good luck fixing it."

Understandably, Tennill is passionate about the need to help the law enforcement community deal with issues that a critical incident can cause.

"I can talk about this topic for hours and still not say everything I want to say," he said. "I do not have a background in counseling, psychology, etc. God gave me this to carry. I still feel like there is so much to do, but I struggle with how to move forward, how to get others to see my vision and accept it as their own. I freely discuss what needs to be done, hoping someone will grab the baton and run the next relay, but it hasn't happened yet."

Tennill grew up in Springfield, Ky., with parents who instilled in him a deep sense of empathy and a strong work ethic. His idyllic small-town life fostered a close-knit and diverse group of friends who "helped form who I am today."

An outstanding athlete in high school, he excelled in both baseball and football and was always being ready for a game of pick-up basketball or volleyball, just to pass the time.

In November 1985, during his senior year of high school, Tennill joined the National Guard. He completed basic training at Fort Dix, N.J., following graduation.

After completing Advanced Individual Training with the Army, he went to college for three semesters before deciding to work full-time with his National Guard unit as a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter mechanic and crew chief.



Tennill with his book

He was an active Guard member for about a year prior to applying and being selected for the Kentucky State Police Academy. The Academy is, said Tennill, “a high stress academy.” He found it quite similar to basic training in the Army, which made it a perfect fit since he loves physical fitness and learning new things.

Tennill discovered that he loved working the road once he was busy as a trooper. Initially, he was assigned to the Special Response Team. Over the years, he also served as a general detective, street-level narcotics detective, DARE officer, adjunct academy instructor and served with primary auto theft and sexual abuse units.

Tennill was named Trooper of the Year for the state in 1999, received a Commissioner’s Commendation for capturing a robbery suspect and received a bravery award for a fatal shooting he was involved in, which inspired to writing his book.

Half of Tennill’s career was spent at KSP serving as a field sergeant, administrative sergeant and executive security officer. He retired while working at the governor’s mansion as the assistant commander of the executive security detail – bodyguard work with the governor and lieutenant governor and their staff and families.

At the academy, he taught everything from cultural awareness to tactics since his KSP career had given him an opportunity to experience just about everything there was to do as police officer, detective and investigator. He was assigned as a physical fitness and defensive tactics instructor and led the Kentucky initiative to create a Post Critical Incident Seminar like one he discovered in South Carolina.

“The PCIS has been a huge success in Kentucky, saving careers, marriages and lives since 2017,” he said. “This is my greatest professional accomplishment.”

Tennill finished his undergraduate degree as a non-traditional student after retiring from the Kentucky State Police. He earned a police studies degree

from Eastern Kentucky University and a master’s degree in criminal justice administration from the University of the Cumberlands.

Calling himself “an introvert by nature,” Tennill said that working in law enforcement has given him the opportunity to help others in need, help maintain order in society and be a positive reflection of government. All these things help him exercise his extroverted side, which is his favorite part of being in law enforcement.

The important personal influences that Tennill recalled from his policing career are those who led by example, such as a post commander he said who “would work road checks with us and stop and investigate vehicle crashes without calling a trooper to do it for him. I had several others that demonstrated how not to do the job, and they were equally important in forming my ‘style.’”

At this point in his career, when Tennill reflects on working in law enforcement, he notes that making his community a better place to live is a fulfilling career.

However, he adds that it is also stressful and can rob one of one’s identity if allowed. He advised beginning writers to write down thoughts or ideas as they arise or they are likely to be forgotten. “I began writing 10 years ago and didn’t have the self-confidence to continue,” said Tennill. “I reached out to a former colleague who had published a couple of books for direction and inspiration. He is the reason I wrote my book.”

He noted that the similarity between his law enforcement career and his book writing was all about fulfilling a need.

“(It’s) a need to serve my community as a law enforcement officer and then the need to serve my profession (as a writer),” he said.

Addressing PTSD and suicide prevention is a high priority to SSPBA, just as it is to Tennill.

“This is the million-dollar question that I address in the book,” he said. “As a profession, we must accept that PTSD in

law enforcement is very real and that the job causes us harm. Once the profession accepts that, we are now responsible for mitigating the impact of the job on our officers and ourselves. This impacts everything from our selection process of new hires to ensuring everyone in the profession, especially our leaders, receives continuing education on the topic so we can create access to resources.”

Working, writing or otherwise championing the cause of PTSD treatment and prevention keeps him busy. But in his downtime, Tennill enjoys strength training, CrossFit workouts, mountain biking, road biking and whatever else gets him moving.

Working out allows him to see results and motivates him to continue. Riding dirt bikes and gaming — which he said allow him to “completely disconnect from the stresses of the world” — are also favorite pastimes.

He and his wife have been married for 30 years, and Tennill said they love to vacation in Florida at least once a year for the water, warm weather and solitude. The couple has two daughters, Gracie and Addie. His marriage and family are his “greatest personal accomplishment.”

“Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers,” is a quote that resonates with Tennill. He said he has a few ideas that he continues to cultivate for the possibility of a second book, mostly about leadership.

“We have a new generation of law enforcement leaders that have not had the opportunity of mentorship,” he said. “I see some gaps, trends beginning to emerge that need to be addressed.”

Tennill’s ideas about leadership are just as strong as his feelings about PTSD.

“I would encourage everyone to read the book, regardless of rank,” he said. “If you are early in your career, use the book as a test for how your leaders handle critical incidents. If you are leader, your missteps cause a lot of harm, and you will be judged by your mistakes.”

LODD: REMEMBERING NCPBA MEMBER AND A LIFE WELL-LIVED

**By Randy Byrd, Director
Foundation and Media Relations**

For Justine Elliott, it was the worst kind of goodbye; the kind that shouldn't exist. It was Monday, April 29, 2024, and her husband, Alden, a N.C. Department of Adult Correction Special Operations investigator assigned to the Carolinas Regional Fugitive Task Force, told her it was going to be a range day and he should be home early.

A text later in the day between them would be their last communication before Alden and others tragically lost their lives in a hail of gunfire from a male suspect with outstanding felony warrants. As officers approached the house where the suspect lived, he began firing at them.

In the chaos that followed, eight officers were struck and four lost their lives. Three of the four slain officers were part of the task force. Return fire killed the suspect after he had jumped from the second floor of the house.

A fellow task force member came to pick up Justine after the shooting and took her to the hospital. She found out that Alden had passed during transport to the hospital an hour earlier.

"This shooting was the single deadliest attack on law enforcement in our city's history," said Charlotte-Mecklenburg police Chief Johnny Jennings.

For days, the city, state and nation reeled in the aftermath. Thoughts returned to Dallas, where five officers lost their lives in a similar shooting. Funerals were planned, eulogies were given and heroes were laid to rest. Those left behind suffered with inconsolable grief, left with only memories of Alden and his life.

Fellow task force members Sam Laws and Jamie Terry were with him on the scene that day. Laws met Alden when he joined the team in 2022.

"From the start, Alden took me under



Alden and Justine Elliott with their son, Theo

his wing and showed me the ropes," he said. "We quickly became friends and would go to training and the range together. I looked up to him like an older brother. He loved what he did and was one of the best at it."

Terry considered Alden a best friend, a teammate, and a brother in her heart.

"Alden was a teammate who I trusted with my life," she said. "I always knew

no matter what the situation was that he would have my back. He was what many of us strived to be."

Larry Lewis is a retired task force member who was working at the federal courthouse in Asheville as a court security officer when he got the call. He was supposed to work the next rotation, and he decided not to say anything for fear of breaking down. This was not to last, as word got around about the

incident, and the tears began to flow.

Lewis had met Alden right after the state formed the Special Operation and Intelligence Unit. Officers from all over the state worked in the same room. He noticed that Alden didn't say much but he had a presence about him that came from being former military.

"They have a certain way of carrying themselves," he said.

Lewis felt that there was something else about him that made you think he was more than the average veteran.

"If you stood in a room full of people, you would see folks talking and having a good time, but Alden would often sit back and observe everyone in the room," said Lewis. "I can only guess what he was thinking, but my thought would be he was taking in the room and the people in it. I think he was trying to understand his teammates, as if he knew something the rest of us didn't."

As they continued to work together, Alden reinforced Lewis' sense that he was no ordinary cop.

"He showed us what a great officer was," he said. "Commitment, integrity, accountability, loyalty and service before self. I had no doubt that he would be the first guy that would run into the fray."

These accounts exemplified how Alden lived his life, according to those who knew him. For his wife, Justine, their 12-year-old son, Theo, is Alden's legacy.

"Alden's most cherished role was being a dad," she said. "He mastered being a dad the second Theo was born. Alden taught Theo so much in their short time together. They played and laughed and had so much fun together. I see so much of Alden in Theo every single day. Theo is so considerate, so determined and has so much integrity. These were the values that Alden worked so hard to instill in him."

Alden was born and raised in Catawba County, N.C. He grew up in the small town of Newton and graduated from Newton Conover High School in 1995.



Elliott and Jamie Terry

He later attended Western Carolina University and graduated in 2000.

After graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served honorably from 2001 to 2006. His unit was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for his work during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Alden began his law enforcement career with the Overland Park Police Department in Overland Park, Kan.

He later became a probation/parole officer in North Carolina, where he served in specialty assignments to include the Special Operations Intelligence Unit, the DEA Task Force in Charlotte and the Carolinas Regional Fugitive Task Force as part of the U.S. Marshals Service. Alden loved baseball and was a diehard Dodgers fan. He was also a Star Wars fan, and he and Theo



Elliott and Larry Lewis

watched every movie in the franchise at least twice. It was common for him to have his favorite band, The Smashing Pumpkins, on his playlist. Finally, his love of shooting and going to the range knew no bounds.

Justine wants everyone to know that Alden deserves to be remembered and honored, not just because he sacrificed his life for his brothers, but because he truly was the best person that anyone could ever know. Genuine, humble, brave and generous are the accolades she wanted to pass along in her memories of him.

"Perhaps most importantly, he knew that his job was to protect those that deserved to be protected," she said. "Whether he was working or not, that was his sworn duty, and he took it very seriously."



Elliott with Sam Laws

PBA PREVAILS AT MISSISSIPPI SUPREME COURT FOR MEMBER



Jason Kirschberg

**By Jason Kirschberg
Reynolds | Kirschberg
Jackson, Miss.**

In December 2019, prisoners at Parchman State Penitentiary — Mississippi’s deadliest prison housing its most dangerous criminals — started a riot.

They fought each other and the corrections officers. They started fires. There were rapes. There were stabbings. There were murders. It was chaos and, according to Gov. Reeves, a “catastrophe.”

The corrections officers at Parchman, understaffed and outmanned, lost control. Some even quit rather than continue working in that deadly environment under those conditions.

The Mississippi Department of Corrections, desperate for more personnel to assist, made a statewide call for more officers — some with no prison training experience, like PBA member Tiffany McClure — to travel to Parchman to assist in attempting to control the riots.

Understandably, volunteers were in short supply. Thus, to incentivize participation, MDOC Commissioner Pelicia Hall told Officer McClure’s superiors that she was directing the “monetary payment of overtime” for those who worked the Parchman detail. Officer McClure’s superiors then told her she would be paid overtime wages for every hour worked on the Parchman detail, including travel time.

Officer McClure was not a corrections officer. She was a probation and parole officer. She had no corrections training or experience working in any prison, much less a maximum-security prison. Regardless, she was asked to travel four hours from her home in south Mississippi to Parchman in northern Mississippi to assist the state in regaining control over the prisoners.

She agreed, believing that the risk was worth it for the overtime pay. So, from January 2020 through March 2020, Officer McClure worked several shifts at Parchman, accumulating a total of 152 hours on Parchman detail, in addition to her normal work as a probation and parole officer. These were perhaps the hardest earned hours of her career.



Jeff Reynolds

Despite wading through flooded cells contaminated with blood, feces and other bodily fluids, and facing violent prisoners, MDOC provided Officer McClure with no special equipment, like gloves, boots or a stab-proof vest.

When it came time for MDOC to honor its part of the agreement and pay the overtime it promised, it balked, giving evolving and contradicting reasons for its refusal to pay the overtime wages it promised. Not only did MDOC fail to pay the promised overtime, it also refused to reimburse Officer McClure for meal expenses that, under law, it was required to cover.

Flabbergasted and frustrated, Officer McClure contacted PBA for assistance. The PBA immediately responded and contacted PBA panel attorneys Jeff Reynolds and Jason Kirschberg for assistance.

Attorneys Reynolds and Kirschberg quickly learned that, although MDOC had plainly violated its oral agreement to pay Officer McClure overtime wages for her Parchman work, existing Mississippi law left Officer McClure with no remedy. Mississippi law requires that state employees with claims against their

'MDOC essentially argued that it was entitled to stiff Officer McClure on her earned wages with impunity.'

employer must pursue their claim by filing a grievance with their employer. If the employer fails to act, state employees may then appeal to the Mississippi Employee Appeals Board. If the EAB fails to provide a remedy, only then may the state employee seek a judicial remedy.

However, Mississippi law has so narrowly restricted the list of “grievable issues” that a state employee may pursue that the failure to pay overtime wages or statutorily reimbursable expenses is — shockingly — not included.

Indeed, MDOC itself argued that Officer McClure’s claims were “non-grievable” and that she simply had no remedy at all. MDOC essentially argued that it was entitled to stiff Officer McClure on her earned wages with impunity.

Further, Officer McClure could not file a federal lawsuit alleging violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act as Mississippi has immunity and any such action would be swiftly dismissed by the federal court, as it has done previously in other cases where an employee pursued FLSA violations against a state agency.

Perhaps even worse, then-existing Mississippi case law held that state employees who lacked a grievable issue were barred from filing an original action in court. For example, the Mississippi Supreme Court had repeatedly held that the appeals procedure for the resolution of an employment-related grievance, filing with the employer, then EAB, then court, is a state employee’s exclusive remedy.

Mississippi case law further held that a state employee could not file an original

action in court, only an appeal from a grievance denied by EAB: “[F]or state law purposes the statutory method of administrative appeal and judicial review provided by the state civil service statute is the exclusive remedy for grievances related to state employment and may not be bypassed by filing an original action.” Wright, 693 So. 2d at 902.

Left with a “non-grievable” issue and no viable claim under the FLSA, Officer McClure had no remedy yet recognized by the Mississippi Supreme Court. So, her lawyers had to come up with one: they filed a civil action in Mississippi County Court for breach of an express oral employment contract and violations of the Mississippi Constitution’s prohibitions on indentured servitude (Miss. Const., Art III § 15), impairment of contracts (§16), rights to due process (Art. III, § 14), and open courts/remedy for injury (§ 24). Officer McClure also cited Art. 6, § 156, which states that breach of contract actions are to be heard by the circuit courts, which share concurrent jurisdiction with county courts.

The MDOC scoffed at Officer McClure’s claims, argued lack of jurisdiction and refused to engage in discovery, attempting to justify its position by arguing that the county court lacked subject matter jurisdiction to compel MDOC to do anything, including respond to discovery. Officer McClure thus moved for a declaratory judgment holding that the court possessed subject matter jurisdiction, arguing that there was a viable claim for breach of contract under the Mississippi Constitution, and under Mississippi case law holding that a party need not exhaust administrative remedies where no adequate administrative remedy exists — an exception to the so-called “exhaustion doctrine” instructing that a party may not file an original action in court until after the party has exhausted its administrative remedies.

In return, MDOC moved to dismiss based on alleged lack of subject matter jurisdiction under the exhaustion doctrine, stating that “[w]here an administrative agency regulates certain activity, an aggrieved party must first

seek relief from the administrative agency before seeking relief from the trial courts.” The county court then heard oral argument on all pending motions — Officer McClure’s Motion for Declaratory Judgment and a Motion to Compel Discovery Responses, and MDOC’s Motion to Dismiss. At the conclusion of oral argument, the county court found that it indeed possessed subject matter jurisdiction. MDOC remained defiant.

Undeterred, MDOC petitioned the Mississippi Supreme Court for permission to file an interlocutory appeal. Officer McClure agreed that interlocutory review was necessary to resolve whether a state employee with no grievable claim could file an original action in court for breach of express employment contract. The Mississippi Supreme Court granted MDOC’s petition, received full briefing on the issues, and held oral argument April 9, 2024.

Attorney Reynolds argued the case on behalf of Officer McClure before a panel of three justices. Reynolds, who as counsel for the appellee, presented his argument after MDOC’s, began with a simple and impactful statement to frame the case:

“The Department of Corrections just stood up here and argued that it can make express promises to pay its law enforcement officers overtime wages in exchange for extra work, receive the benefit of that extra work, refuse to pay the officers the promised and earned overtime wages for their extra work, and there’s not a thing the officers can do about it. That may be the law in a place

'That may be the law in a place like North Korea, but it is not, and never should be, the law in the United States, and certainly not in Mississippi.'

like North Korea, but it is not, and never should be, the law in the United States, and certainly not in Mississippi.”

Reynolds then made an impassioned argument to the Court emphasizing how law enforcement officers put their lives on the line daily, particularly when they go into deadly prisons and encounter rioting convicted murderers and rapists, and that any law prohibiting such officers from receiving the wages they were promised is fundamentally unjust, unconstitutional and should not be given the Court’s approval.

Based on the questions asked by the justices, Officer McClure’s lawyers were cautiously optimistic that the Court would rule in Officer McClure’s favor but tempered their expectations with the reality that existing law was not favorable to Officer McClure, particularly given their novel theory of liability.

On May 31, 2024, the Supreme Court issued its Opinion and Order. In a 9-0 decision, the Court affirmed the County Court, found that Officer McClure was not required to first seek a (futile) administrative remedy, noted that the Mississippi Constitution vests circuit courts with original jurisdiction over breach of contract claims (concurrently with county courts) and, alternatively, because the EAB could not provide an

adequate remedy for Officer McClure’s claims (since they were non-grievable), the exhaustion doctrine did not apply. It was a grand-slam home run for Officer McClure.

The Court noted that, although a state employee must normally exhaust the internal procedures for grievable issues and state agency actions before seeking a trial court’s review, Officer McClure’s claims stemmed from the MDOC’s breach of an oral employment contract, which existing law does not recognize as a grievable issue. The Court scoffed at MDOC’s argument, noting:

“[MDOC] boldly declares that any and every issue a state employee may have against her state agency employer is exclusively reserved for the State Personnel Board and the Employee Appeals Board for resolution, and if the issue does not fall within one of the narrow five categories listed in the Handbook, the employee simply has no avenue for relief whatsoever.”


The Court rejected MDOC’s argument and “agree[d] with McClure that the exhaustion doctrine does not apply, so she properly sought initial relief in the Hinds County Court.”

The Supreme Court affirmed and remanded the matter to the County

Court for further proceedings. Shortly thereafter, MDOC reached out to Officer McClure’s counsel requesting a settlement. Officer McClure ultimately settled her claims for 100% of the damages she sought in her complaint.

When asked about her case, Officer McClure responded as follows: “The journey to this landmark ruling has been exceedingly challenging. Every attorney involved in this case dedicated countless hours to meticulously researching relevant laws, policies, procedures, historical case precedents, and reviewing extensive documentation to ensure that the rights and protections of state employees are upheld both now and in the future. This ruling establishes a significant precedent and stands as a testament to the unwavering determination and perseverance of an amazing legal team.”

MSPBA Executive Director Tommy Simpson expressed the following about the importance of this case -- “For so many years, the state of Mississippi has trampled on the rights of its employees,” he said. “It is a huge success for Officer McClure and other state employees that PBA never backed down in this case and that the courts saw through MDOC’s arrogant arguments and issued a sensible judgment that will, hopefully, have long-lasting effects.”



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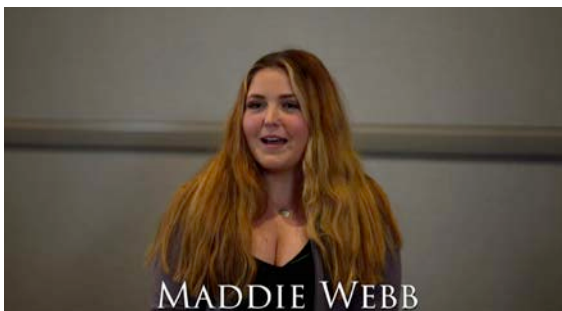


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ALPBA SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT HITS THE GROUND RUNNING

**By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor**

Maddie Cone is not afraid to get her hands dirty.

The Auburn University freshman is eager to show her certified love for the outside world with a degree in agricultural education. It is far afield from the profession rooted in her family – law enforcement.

“I chose this field to create change in the world through my love for agriculture and education,” she said. “I will be the first in my family to become academically involved in agriculture.”

Because her father is a LEO and a member of PBA, Maddie qualified to apply for the annual scholarships funded by the PBA’s Police Benevolent Foundation. She is one of about two dozen students to win the award this year. Her father, Ragland police Officer Scott A. Cone, has about 20 years of experience under his belt.

Maddie said the scholarship bolsters her own lifelong support of LEOs.

“Receiving this scholarship is a great honor,” she said. “Law enforcement runs deep in my family. This scholarship not only helps to alleviate the financial burdens of college, but it also shows the great support PBF has for the families of law enforcement. Receiving this scholarship as a daughter of a police officer empowers me to talk about the differences of being in a law enforcement family and growing support for all enforcement in general.”

Maddie got a small taste of her father’s work when she went on a ride along at 13.

“Seeing him in action gave me a new respect for what he does,” she said. “It wasn’t just about enforcing laws; it was about helping people in their worst moments. Our home was different too — safety and awareness were



Maddie Cone is active in FFA.



Maddie Cone with her proud dad, Officer Scott Cone

constant lessons. My dad's job taught me responsibility, caution and a deep respect for the work he does, knowing he's out there every day making tough decisions for the good of the community."

Not all of Officer's Cones days are filled with bad news and hopelessness. He said he remembers a case that started off with apprehension for him and his fellow officers but that ended on a high note.

"The most memorable day on the job would have to be when an elderly woman was kidnapped from her home," he said. "Investigators quickly identified the suspect through business security cameras and tracked him using traffic cameras. This led to me and other SWAT team members entering a house, where we found her alive and safe. I was the first responding officer on that case, and it all culminated with me traveling to a neighboring state to pick up the suspect, who had been stopped by state police."

But it's the tough days that worried a young Maddie.

"Growing up as the daughter of a law enforcement officer has deeply shaped who I am," she said. "My dad's job was always a mix of pride and worry for me. I remember waiting up late, listening for his boots and feeling a mix of relief and anxiety when he walked through the door. He never shared too much about his work, but when he did, I could see the weight he carried. The stories he told, like responding to difficult calls, made me realize how much he sacrificed for others."

Her remedy was to always have a part of him to hold tight or a quick call to hear his voice.

"I was often anxious about having a parent in such a dangerous job," she said. "There were nights when I'd lie awake, worrying if he'd come home safely. The unpredictability of his work always lingered in the back of my mind. What helped soothe my fears were the stuffed animals he gave me over the years. Each one felt like a piece of him, something I could hold onto when he wasn't around. I'd hug them tightly on those nights when the worry was too much. And



Maddie Cone at FFA animal show

when I really needed reassurance, I'd call him just to hear his voice, even if it was just for a minute. Knowing he was okay, even briefly, made it easier to get through the night. Those small comforts helped me manage the anxiety that came with loving someone in such a risky job."

Her career in agriculture education likely will not bring such anxiety and fears. Maddie said she is excited about her future teaching young students to love and appreciate the Earth and its bounty as much as she always has.

"My career plans as an agriculture educator involve teaching high school students about the importance and reach of agriculture," she said. "After earning my degree in agriculture education, I plan to create engaging, hands-on learning experiences that cover topics like plant and animal science, environmental stewardship and agribusiness. My goal is to inspire the next generation to appreciate and pursue careers in agriculture, ensuring they understand its vital role in society."

NC MEMBER PROVES A 'GOOD MAN' AS TOP FIRST RESPONDER

By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

Senior Deputy Matt Goodman donned a law enforcement uniform comparatively late in life but is making great strides in leaving his mark on a profession he has grown to embrace.

Goodman was 42 when he was hired at Buncombe County, N.C., Detention Facility as a detention officer in November 2017.

"I actually began my college career in Virginia, majoring in criminal justice at Tidewater Community College right after high school, but my admiration and desire to be in law enforcement began when I was a kid," said Goodman. "The desire stayed and nagged at me, and at 42 years old, I decided if I was ever going to do it, I was only getting older, and it was now or never."

After working in the Buncombe County Detention Facility for just over three years, the sheriff's office sponsored and paid Goodman's way through BLET at Asheville-Buncombe Tech in Buncombe County. After graduation, he was sworn in as a deputy sheriff in June 2021.

Three and a half short years later, Goodman's calming manner and leadership abilities contributed to his being named Western North Carolina CIT First Responder of the Year for 2024 by the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Goodman was lauded by his superiors in the award nomination.

Sgt. Bryan Freeborn, BCSO CNT commander and sergeant for Strategic Initiatives, stated, "Deputy Goodman is well deserving of this award. His work in the early days of the Co-Responder pilot program, along with his dedication as we have implemented the team expansion, has proven to be invaluable. Deputy Goodman exemplifies the work of CIT and the Co-Responder Program. He is a calming presence to people in crisis. He is able to build rapport and trust with all manner of individuals. He treats people with dignity and compassion. I have



Senior Deputy Matt Goodman with his family

received multiple calls from constituents complimentary of him on how he has handled what they consider to be the toughest moments in their families' lives."

Maj. Don Eberhardt, BSCO major over Support Operations, stated, "This is an award issued by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and goes to a local LEO that demonstrates the willingness to go the extra mile and assist those dealing with mental health/substance abuse issues. As a co-responder lead, Deputy Goodman represents the BCSO in the most positive manner possible."

The Co-Responder Unit, as described on the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office website: "The Co-Responder Unit at the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office is an alternative crisis response model where specially trained law enforcement is paired with behavioral health professionals to respond to behavioral health and substance use calls for service. This program is a collaboration between the Sheriff's Office, the Community Paramedics, Mobile Crisis and many community partners. The Buncombe County Sheriff's Office Co-Responder Unit responds to incidents where

community members are experiencing a behavioral health or substance use crisis. The unit provides trauma-informed responses for individuals in crisis with the goal of preventing future crises and criminal justice system involvement."

Goodman, married 25 years and a father to two teenage daughters, said his childhood experiences in a Navy family helped form and shape his sensibilities and values.

"I was fortunate to grow up in an environment where loyalty, service and integrity were modeled and taught," he said. "Perhaps most special to me was my exposure to so many places and people. In those experiences, I learned how best to work with others, no matter their station in life or personality possessed. My ability to adapt and establish rapport with others was molded by a solid home life, going through struggles with my younger brother and always knowing that every few years things were going to change pretty significantly."

His daughters sum him up as someone who can always make people laugh and someone who has a calming influence in chaotic situations. Their assessments somewhat parallel Goodman's own

favorite personal quotes: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” — source unknown, but often attributed to President Theodore Roosevelt — and “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing” — Edmund Burke (1795), a British statesman and philosopher.

Goodman was born in Marion, N.C. His parents were high school sweethearts at McDowell High School in McDowell County, N.C. They married, and his dad joined the U.S. Navy when Goodman was just months old. The elder Goodman spent a career in the Navy, moving the family up and down the East Coast at various duty stations in Washington, D.C., Maryland, Florida and Virginia.

“Perhaps the most unique and amazing tour of duty was in Sicily, part of Italy and in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea,” Goodman said.

In total, Goodman’s dad spent 20 years in the Navy. He worked in Naval Aviation as an air crewman, spending many years as a Sikorsky CH-53E crew chief and part of various Helicopter Combat Support Squadrons. His final duty station before retirement was with Naval Search and Rescue out of Oceana, Va.

Meanwhile, Goodman’s mom welcomed the title “Navy Wife,” and made the best of wherever she was with her husband and two sons.

“My mom was the glue of our family when I was growing up,” said Goodman. “After I came along, she gave up the glamour of any long-term career in order to raise my brother and me while dad was being deployed around the world serving in the Navy. As my brother and I got older, she’d take jobs as needed that interested her. She was a ‘Navy Wife,’ which is often joked about as ‘the toughest job in the Navy.’”

After the Navy sent the family to Virginia, Goodman graduated Kellam High School in Virginia Beach in 1993. His brother, two years younger, finished school and works for the State

of Wyoming servicing state vehicles, primarily state highway patrol vehicles, said Goodman.

Goodman made the most of his high school years as an athlete and continued to seek education after graduation, trying to match his passion and interests to a lifelong vocation.

“Throughout my years growing up, I played baseball and basketball in school, and I spent a few years swimming on travel swim teams,” he said. “I went to Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City, Okla. I majored in advertising design for two and a half years before changing my major to theology. While there, I was involved in student government, one year serving as student vice president.”

Goodman graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 1998. In 2003, he attended the University of Oklahoma where he earned his master’s degree in organizational dynamics in 2005. Along the way, his top supporters were his wife and daughters. He also turned often to his faith for guidance and direction.

“The most influential leader in my life is Jesus Christ,” he said. “His flawless example of selfless service, dedication and sacrifice to others inspires me to try and be a better man each and every day.”

Having that support and guidance behind him, something clicked in 2017, and Goodman returned to his childhood dream of being in law enforcement at the age of 42. Perhaps making up for lost time, Goodman hit the ground running and tackled many aspects of the career. He also joined PBA.

“During my time in the detention division, I was appointed as an FTO, training new officers,” he said. “I also served as a member of the STORM team handling high security inmates, cell extractions and special callouts within and around the detention facility.

“As a detention officer and as a deputy, I have been a part of the Sheriff’s Quality Circle, a small group of BCSO employees who met quarterly with the Sheriff to voice employee needs and concerns,”

continued Goodman. “As a deputy, I have served on multiple dignitary details. I’m a team leader for the BCSO Crisis Negotiation Team. I am a full-time co-responder deputy with the BCSO Co-Responder Unit where we respond alongside mental health clinicians and community paramedics to behavioral health and crisis calls throughout the county.”

Outside of his career, he is a typical girl dad and husband, living a normal life mountain biking and hiking, and following his beloved Tar Heels basketball team. Of course, he has dogs and an old vehicle he putters with – it is North Carolina, after all

“I have a fairly pristine 1993 Chevy K Blazer that I enjoy tinkering with and driving,” said Goodman. “I have two great dogs, a Bernedoodle and a black Labrador Retriever. And finally, just about anything my daughters are involved in, I try to support and be a part of. My wife is in senior management with a North Carolina-based bank. Both our girls are strong academically and active in school and travel sports.”



The Goodman family

WEST VIRGINIA LEOS BENEFIT FROM PTSD AWARENESS SEMINAR



Cabell sheriff's Capt. Steve Vincent

**By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor**

STEVE VINCENT

Steve Vincent respects and loves life too much to consider suicide but said he completely understands that circumstances can drag a person to make such a choice, especially if they have military or law enforcement backgrounds.

Vincent, a CIU captain with Cabell County Sheriff's Office in West Virginia, was one of dozens of participants attending a December 2024 Behind the Badge PTSD and suicide prevention seminar held at the legendary Marshall University.

The eight-hour seminars are free, sponsored by donations to the Police Benevolent Foundation, and open to officers and their families. Attendees need not be PBA members.

Vincent served 32 years in the Army and has been with Cabell County since April 1999. He is married with two children.

He understands the turmoil and pain inside the men and women who wear a uniform.

"I struggled with military issues, kept it

bottled up for years," he said during a break in the seminar. "I was diagnosed with PTSD because of several incidents in the military but got counseling from the VA. I didn't realize the symptoms."

As the seminar instructor Tim Rutledge explains to attendees at each seminar, communication is key to working out feelings of stress and anxiety that can lead to PTSD. Vincent agreed.

"There is nothing wrong with talking with a therapist, but it helps to have people in your network who understand what you are going through," he said.

In Vincent's case, his primary sounding board is his wife.

"She works in the juvenile prosecutor's office, so she understands," he said. "She's my best friend."

One escape temptation Vincent has avoided is addiction.

"Working out is my release," he said. "I work out and get the stress out. I've never done drugs."

It is often said that law enforcement officers typically meet people on the worst day of their lives.

Vincent said it is impossible to unsee what they see and unknow what they learn when answering calls.

"The big thing is we have to see kids hurt, killed or abused," he said. "The bad things will never come out of your mind."

Vincent said he found the seminar useful and the statistics alarming. He recommends all officers attend the seminar so they can see PTSD and recognize its symptoms.

"I didn't realize PTSD was such a problem in law enforcement or that the suicide rates are so high," he said. "I was never suicidal. I love my life so it never crossed my mind."



Marshall U Patrolman Elijah Sowards

ELIJAH SOWARDS

Elijah Sowards is in his third year as a patrolman with Marshall University Police Department. He, too, found the seminar educational, but it hit close to home. He lost his brother to suicide.

"He was very funny and made all moments enjoyable," he said. "We were very, very, very close. Then, he was down and no longer joking. This is an important class to teach the signs and symptoms and where to seek help."

Because of his brother, Sowards said he observes people more closely than before.

"It's important to understand and appreciate people," he said. "This class is sending this message. Police officers need to recognize and understand signs and symptoms. I'm very glad this is a program that is educating officers."

Sowards is also a military veteran, having served his country as a Marine. When he left, he tried other jobs but missed the camaraderie he enjoyed as a Marine. However, he discovered a similar closeness in law enforcement.

West Virginia law enforcement officers have access to a program local to their area — Compass Huntington, a first for the country pilot program founded with



Compass Director Abbigail Davis

a \$1 million grant from Bloomberg.

“It’s a fantastic program,” said Sowards. “More departments should have them available.”

ABBIGAIL DAVIS

According to the website, compasshuntingtonwv.org, Compass Huntington is a program in Huntington, W.V., that provides members of the Huntington Fire Department and Huntington Police Department “with tools to process and effectively handle the stress they face each day of their professional lives.”

The program offers wellness coaching, the Compass Center, training and activities, policy and advocacy, communication, data and research and replication.

Abbigail Davis is program director at Compass and attended the December PTSD seminar. “We function like a city department that serves first responders,” she said.

CARLIE MCCOY

Veteran police officer Carlie McCoy also attended the seminar. As of January 2024, she works as a Bennett Aerospace data analyst in the Charleston, W.V. DEA Office. An outlet for PTSD sufferers recommended by Rutledge



Veteran Officer Carlie McCoy

is an employer’s Employee Assistance Program.

“EAP counselors are amazing,” said McCoy. “As cops, we think we have to have big boy shoulders and think ‘Oh, that’s not going to affect me,’ but that’s expected sometimes.”

McCoy immediately saw the benefit of the PTSD seminar.

“This brings awareness to mental health and ways to respond to stress,” she said. “Everyone has their own way of dealing with stress. Officers have to be able to talk to others who have gone through what they are going through. It brings awareness, for sure.”

The fact that the seminars are free is a huge benefit, she said.

“It’s amazing, it’s free and available to all officers,” said McCoy. “That’s a big benefit to departments because of budgets. The topics make me wish I’d been able to pick up on certain things from co-workers. It really opens your eyes a little bit.”

LARRY MORRIS

Larry Morris is in his 14th year as a campus police officer at Marshall University after retiring as a sergeant from West Virginia State Patrol after 25



Marshall U police Officer Larry Morris

years.

He called the PTSD seminar “outstanding.”

“It makes you think back over your own career – this wasn’t knowledge back then,” he said.

Morris recalled a trooper who was a “great guy” who had marital problems and was the subject of an IA investigation.

“He always had a smile on his face, but he had nowhere to go to for help,” he said. “This class could have helped him.”

Another trooper had to notify a man that his wife and several children had been killed in a car accident. “We thought he handled it well. At the time, he was single,” said Morris. “After that, he married and had a child. He started freaking out if there was a reported accident and he knew his wife and child were out and about.”

Morris said he considers the knowledge Rutledge presented during the seminar as tools. “The possibility of suicide is greater than when I started,” he said. “He gave us signs to look for and good tools in our toolbox to find the root of the problem. If you’re aware of the problem, you’ve got to take care of it, especially if you are a supervisor.”





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PBF PUSHES BACK AGAINST THE HELL BROUGHT BY HELENE

**By Randy Byrd, Director
Foundation and Media Relations**

On Sept. 27, 2024, Hurricane Helene came ashore as a Category 4 hurricane in the Florida Big Bend region and became the second deadliest storm in U.S. history.

According to the National Hurricane Center, the storm brought catastrophic inland flooding, extreme winds, deadly storm surge and numerous tornadoes that devastated portions of the southeastern U.S. and southern Appalachians.

Helene was responsible for at least 250 fatalities in the United States, including at least 176 direct deaths, making it the deadliest hurricane in the contiguous U.S. since Katrina in 2005. Helene also produced tropical storm conditions and minor damage across portions of Mexico and Cuba.

In July 2021, I retired from law enforcement after a 29-year career with the Cary, N.C., Police Department and would soon take a job as the director of foundation and media relations with the SSPBA.

My wife, Stephanie, and our son, Lincoln, moved with me from Youngsville, N.C., back to my home county of Yancey and the township of Green Mountain, where generations of my family had lived. Yancey County is situated on the Tennessee border and has the highest land elevation in North Carolina. The highest peak east of the Mississippi is Mount Mitchell.

For those who live in the area, Mount Mitchell was where the terror began. As Helene created destruction, the storm settled on the top of Mount Mitchell and time stood still as the winds churned. The winds pushed the headwaters of the Black Mountain range downward. Creeks turned into rivers, and the rivers reached the highest flood stages ever recorded. The overflowing rivers took everything along their path including



Brice and Lexis Molton

homes and lives.

Microburst tornadoes and wind decimated timber, and mudslides covered up homes and humans. Roads, bridges, power lines and cellular communications were also victims of the storm.

First responders had no way to communicate with each other during search and rescue operations. The county seat of Burnsville's entire water plant was destroyed, and the citizens of the small town I grew up in were without water for weeks.

My family was fortunate. Our cabin had some shingle damage and one way into our place had a power line over our gravel road. Our power wouldn't return for 24 days. For others, it would take months.

Our first communication with the outside world was a few days later with a spotty cell signal from the town square.

Our four daughters, who live outside the area, were left to watch news reports with no way of knowing we were okay. To say that they were relieved once we were finally able to make contact with them would be an understatement, and the same is certainly true for loved ones all across the country.

The next day I reached Reneé Dixon, the chief operating officer of SSPBA, and updated her on my welfare and what my community was facing. Shortly thereafter, our conversations turned to how we were going to help our members through the Police Benevolent Foundation. We agreed that the need would be immense, and a committee was quickly formed in anticipation of the requests we would receive.

In the end, the PBF assisted over 200 members in four states with financial assistance, including many who lost their homes.

Brice Molton, a detective with Henderson



The Moltons' view of their home from their kayak as the waters rise

County, N.C., Sheriff's Office, was one of the members who received assistance. He and his wife, Lexis, had moved into their house about two months before the storm. The house is in a small subdivision, and across the road is a field and a creek. The potential for the creek to rise and overflow had been witnessed by neighbors before, but it had never risen more than a few inches into the basement in a couple of decades.

As they watched the weather reports, they packed a go-bag with insulin since both he and Lexis have Type I diabetes. They also packed some food, water, a couple days of food for their dog and cats, some contractor trash bags, a gun, two first aid kits, a phone charging block and other necessities.

They had just bought two kayaks less than three weeks before Helene hit. Their plan was to put the dog in her carrier on one kayak and the cats in their carriers on the other.

"We never thought we would need to do this, but once the water started bubbling through the floors and coming through the base of the walls, we realized we needed go through with the plan," said Molton. "We realized we had to act, and we could process things later. We knew we had to take care of each other and our pets."

At this point, they loaded up the kayaks and floated in the house until the water got too high and they paddled just outside the front door under the porch cover. Once the water got too high for that, they paddled out from under the front porch. The situation got more precarious as they held onto the side of the house and a nearby tree to keep from drifting away in rising water.

At the height of the storm, Molton and Lexis were using the gutters as armrests and support, so they could remain in place while waiting for the water to recede. A swift water rescue team eventually got to them, and they were pulled to dry land at the front of their neighborhood.

They had spent between five and six



Interior of Molton home after the water receded



The Molton house after the clean-up

hours in the kayaks before they were rescued. In the end their house flooded almost to the roof. They were able to salvage some items and a few sentimental pieces, but they lost most of their possessions.

In the days following their ordeal, the Moltons were able to call on a neighbor who was a contractor and hire him and his crew to gut their house. Their fast work mitigated any mold damage, and they were able to find a place to live while restoration continued.

“We were fortunate to have so many people rally around us,” Molton said. “The PBF was very helpful as well.”

One of his coworkers, who is active in the PBA, had given Molton a number to call for assistance.

“It was a pleasant surprise to get a check in the mail a week or two later,” he said. “Words cannot express how grateful we are.”

Seventeen miles up the road, Travis Pisani, his wife, Stephanie, and their son, Elias, faced a different dilemma. Travis is an officer with the Asheville Police Department and a PBA member. He and his family live in the Edneyville area of Henderson County. As with the Molton family, they had prepared for the storm.

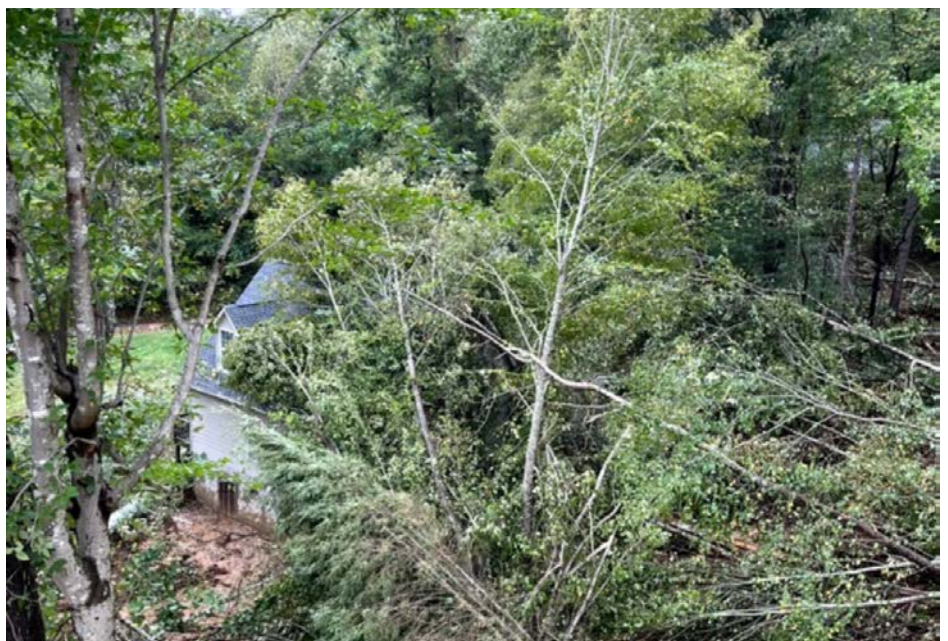
“The night before, I knew the rain would be a problem for our mountain community,” he said. “I went out the night before and dug some trenches in our access road to try to divert the water. Prior to the storm, we had a lot of rain that week, and I had a feeling it would be an issue.

“To be honest, I expected some high winds and maybe a few trees coming down, but nothing like this had happened,” he continued.

Pisani woke up the next morning around 6:30 when the power went out and immediately checked out the evolving situation through his front door. Trees had already come down at that point, and the rain was torrential. He knew they had a bigger problem than he had



Travis, Stephanie and Elias Pisani



What the storm did to the Pisani home

anticipated.

Pisani told his wife and son to put belongings together near the front door in case they needed to leave, and went outside to access the damage and to check on his elderly neighbors. In just a few moments, trees started falling, and he ran into the house to get his family out. They were able to move to a safer location by taking one of their vehicles to the base of the driveway. Pisani went into the house to retrieve a dog, and that is when the massive mud slide started.

“The whole mountain behind my house crashed down into my backyard onto my house and into my driveway, bringing nearly 500 trees with it,” he said. “These trees clogged the creek behind our home, destroyed our backyard and slammed up against the back of our house.”

They made their exit from the property down their driveway only to find that U.S. 64 had become a river and was impassable. Pisani parked where maybe they could mitigate the possibility of another tree falling directly on top of the car with everyone in it.

When the storm ended and Pisani knew his family was safe, he was able to walk back up to the area near his house and found that another mudslide completely blocked their road. A hike to the top of his neighbor’s property gave him a view of his house and numerous trees on top of it. Their first night after the storm would be spent with their neighbors.

The damage to the Pisani home was painful to absorb. There were dozens of trees that had smashed into the roof and punctured the side of the house and damaged the master bedroom. Their HVAC unit was demolished along with their propane tank. A personal vehicle was destroyed, as was an outdoor shed and all the tools that were inside.

Their backyard was a giant hole and was inaccessible due to the number of trees that had fallen. The house’s front and side decks were covered in mud and their railings were ripped off. They were not able to enter their home for weeks because of stability issues and lost most



The Pisani home today

of their personal belongings. They were denied insurance coverage because the mudslide was not considered part of the hurricane.

Numerous Christian organizations, however, pitched in to get the trees off the house, to clean out the inside and help mitigate the mold problems, covering a six-figure amount for the Pisani family.

The next home became a temporary one-bedroom apartment in Hendersonville, N.C., that Stephanie’s employer was able to find. The PBF was able to help when they moved to another location.

“The financial assistance the foundationth provided helped us afford an apartment in South Asheville,” said Pisani.

In a small rural part of Cleveland County near Shelby, N.C., Shannon Church and his wife, Susanne were, to meet the wrath of Helene through falling trees. Shannon is a PBA member and a lieutenant at the Marion Correctional Institute. He and Susanne didn’t expect much from the storm and assumed that the impact was



Shannon and Susanne Church

going to be mainly in Florida.

This was not to be the case, however. Around 10 a.m., a tree fell on the property, and Susanne went to the front door to see what was happening. At that moment, an oak tree fell through the house.

“I was sitting in my recliner when I heard the tree start to fall,” he said. “I dove on



The Church home after the storm

the floor toward the fireplace chimney where I thought I would be safer.”

As soon as he hit the floor, he jumped to his feet to make sure Susanne was safe. That was when he saw that the tree had crushed the chair he had been sitting in.

“If the tree had fallen a foot more to the right, I would have been crushed also,” Shannon said.

Church found Susanne in the middle of all the debris with only a bump on her head and a scratch on her face. Church grabbed her and pulled her out the back door as trees continued to fall around them. Ultimately, two trees destroyed most of their home.

An RV on the property had been damaged, but Church was able to get it hooked to a generator. They lived on generator power for two months until they could get a temporary power pole for electricity.

“I worked on cleaning up trees during

the day and then going to work at night,” Shannon said.

He only missed one day of work during the disaster.

Help for the Churches came from many directions. One of their primary concerns was where to store belongings that were salvageable. An associate warden and a captain from the prison immediately went to work and secured a shipping container for the property.

“Their help literally helped us save the history of our family and the contents of our home,” Church said.

The prison warden collected money and gift cards for Shannon and Susanne, and a grading company demolished the house and hauled it away at no cost. The PBF also assisted by donating money toward the purchase of a new home. Church had two words for everyone who helped them.

“Thank you,” he said.

Daniel Joyner is a PBA member and deputy with the Yancey County Sheriff’s Office, where I live. He witnessed the destruction of the storm firsthand while working. He and his wife, Kisha, a probation officer, lost their home in adjoining Madison County.

The night before the storm, Joyner insisted that Kisha pack a bag and go to Tennessee to stay with her sister.

“I was concerned about the possibility of trees falling and me not being able to get to her to check on her,” he said. “All the deputies with Yancey County Sheriff’s Office were on a mandatory report for the night before the storm.”

Around 4 a.m., Joyner and his partner made a trip up one of the rivers called the Cane, to examine the conditions and make reports back. The water was already rising, and a few private bridges were underwater. Calls for swift water rescue and citizens in distress started coming in over the radio.

“Not long after that, the sheriff announced on the radio for all staff to go



The Churches's new home today



The Joyners look at where their home stood after the debris was removed.



In the center, the Joyners proudly break ground at a new homesite on higher ground.

to higher ground,” Joyner said.

They heeded the order and chose to head to the road that his partner lived on since it was up a mountainside. By 8 a.m., they were trapped on that road due to landslides. A resident on the road had a track hoe and began moving dirt to open a travel lane.

As they progressed to the bottom of the road, they were met with power poles blocking their exit. During this time, all communications by radio and phone ceased. Thinking they would be stuck

for a few hours, they made the decision to return to the partner’s house and retrieve his utility vehicle.

They started checking on residents, but when they reached an area where the creek met the river, it became apparent that the storm was going to be catastrophic. Bridges, homes and even chunks of highway were completely gone.

“We had no certain way back out, and I wasn’t sure how I was going to get to my wife or to communicate with her,” he said. “Routes were blocked with high

water or fallen trees. Eventually, I started hiking toward town and ran across some people on an ATV that got me the rest of the way.”

It was a few days before Joyner could get to his house by hiking in. The house was still standing, but the foundation was gone with the exception of some mangled corners holding the home in place. He had to force his way in because the power of the river moving the house had jammed the door. Inside, cracks ran down the walls and the home itself was unstable.

“Our home was labeled a complete loss,” said Joyner.

Joyner continued to work through the storm while Kisha stayed in Tennessee. He traveled there to sleep until the couple eventually moved into a rental home. During the recovery process, they had a tremendous outpouring of love and support from law enforcement agencies, churches, non-profit groups, friends, family, complete strangers and the PBF.

“My wife and I felt so overwhelmed with love and blessings,” said Joyner. “Everything we have received has been beneficial, and the assistance from the foundation was another blessing for us.”

David Edenfield was another member who was working when the storm hit. Edenfield lives in Augusta, Ga., and is a deputy with the Richmond County, Ga., Sheriff’s Office. On the night of the storm, Edenfield and his coworkers were working on a road closure for an Ironman event in downtown Augusta.

Sitting in their patrol cars, the rain and wind became progressively worse as they tried to keep the barricades and fencing from being displaced.

“At one point, it felt as though my patrol car was actually sliding across the roadway from the wind, so I moved under the drive through at a bank,” he said.

The time was around 4 a.m., and Edenfield soon got a call from his wife, Cindy, who is also a law enforcement

officer and PBA member. She had been awakened, along with their sons, when the power went out. It was at this moment that a tree fell on the house.

Thankfully, no one was injured, and Edenfield started his journey home. On the way, he was met with falling trees, fallen power lines and blocked roads from every direction. After numerous reroutes and help from citizens, he was able to arrive home. A routine 20-minute drive had turned into a three-hour ordeal.

With daylight, the damage became more apparent. The tree that fell into the house had also damaged two vehicles. Every window in the house had become dislodged when the tree fell, and the floor had been soaked by rain. The tree had also taken out the power meter attached to the house.

The damage was immense, but thankfully, those inside were unscathed. The family dog was in a kennel during the storm but was found to be unharmed.

One son, who was on active duty with the Army, was not home during the storm. Large limbs had hit where his head would have normally been on the pillow in his bedroom.

The Edenfields were able to stay with another family during the first two weeks after the storm. Their sojourn led to an extended stay hotel and then a rental house. Through it all, Edenfield continued to work.

A group of church volunteers got the tree off their house and placed tarps over the holes. Friends came and cleared the driveway. Insurance claims were filed, but those monies had to go through the mortgage company before they would release any funds for repairs. For Edenfield, assistance by the PBF was critical to the process.

"The check from the PBF was a definite help to the costs of our chaos before insurance began to help," he said.

I noticed common themes while



The Edenfield family

documenting these stories: resilience, perseverance, fortitude and faith were integral parts of each. These characteristics sustained those affected by this disaster as they worked diligently to rebuild their homes and reset their lives.

"We now have floors, cabinets, and counters, and things are looking really good," said Brice Molton. "It actually feels like a house again. We're hoping to be able to move in later this summer."

Travis Pisani and his family are also on the road to recovery. "We've replaced all the carpeting and all the appliances and were able to button up the back of the house and get moved back in," he said.

The Edenfields are also back in their house, and most of the repairs have been completed, although ceiling and wall damage has developed as the house continues to settle.

"We are in the process of finding a

new contractor to handle these repairs and supplemental claims," said David Edenfield.

A new home has replaced the destroyed one for the Churches.

"It has been a long stressful ordeal, but we have now moved into our new home," said Shannon Church.

The Joyner family has seen the ground broken on a new home site. In January, they were selected by Bunco Yancey Helene Relief to be the recipient of a new home.

"This new home is more than just walls and a roof—it's a fresh start," said Kisha Joyner. "It means staying in the community we love, fostering children again and rebuilding our life together. It's a reminder that out of loss, love and kindness prevail. I look forward to the simple things, like morning coffee on the porch, surrounded by the mountains that have always been home."



The exterior of the Edenfield family home after the storm



The Edenfield family home after repairs

2024 RECRUITERS WORKSHOP AND TOP RECOGNITION

By Kris Jarvis
SSPBA Director of Operations

On Oct. 23, 2024, SSPBA recruiters and support staff held the annual workshop directed by Chief Operating Officer Renée Dixon.

SSPBA operations are founded on a team effort approach, focused on providing our standard of excellence and support for our valuable membership who bravely serve their communities.

Recruiters carry out an important function in the operations. The commitment and dedication that each of our recruiters possesses for sharing the benefits that a membership brings is truly amazing.

The annual gathering provides an opportunity to reflect on the recruiters' individual efforts and experiences.

Nick Meadows received the award for most recruited members for 2024. Meadows has exhibited his passion throughout his 16-year career with the PBA.

"I love the opportunity I have to help share the importance of PBA membership to the men and women of law enforcement," said Meadows.

If you are interested in having a PBA recruiter visit your department to discuss the benefits a PBA membership provides, call our office at 1-800-233-3506.



Chief Operating Officer Renée Dixon presides over recruiter meeting.



Nick Meadows, with Dixon and Jarvis, receives the award for most recruited members in 2024.



SSPBA recruiters at their annual meeting with Dixon and Jarvis

SPOTLIGHT ON NASHVILLE ATTORNEY JACK BYRD

By Joni Fletcher Cawthon
SSPBA Director of Legal Services

Attorney Jack Byrd of Nashville, Tenn., brings a unique set of skills and experiences to his representation of law enforcement officers through PBA.

In addition to having martial arts training, Byrd served in the U.S. Navy for 15 years handling such duties as command criminal investigator, police watch commander, firearms instructor and federal law enforcement liaison.

He said this background, plus the law enforcement use of force cases he was exposed to early in his legal career, led to him acquiring more training into the dynamics and principles of use of force and how the actions officers face affect their reactions.

When asked whether a special skill set is required to represent law enforcement officers, Byrd responded, "I don't know if it is a different set of skills so much as a different life experience and a more tuned ability to listen. You have to be able to bring your legal training to bear while taking into account the burdens an officer carries by merely wearing a badge and gun."

Byrd has been representing law enforcement officers since he graduated from law school in 2004. He began working with PBA when a PBA member requested his representation, and his relationship with PBA has grown over the years.

He has now handled around 125 PBA cases of all types, ranging from shooting incidents and criminal investigations to employment and certification matters.

"The environment that law enforcement works in now is a continually more hostile and challenging arena than before," Byrd said. "I feel that now an attorney has to be able to advise the officer by looking forward on what may come later, not just what they are facing immediately after a critical incident, such as POST hearings and the possibility of



Nashville attorney Jack Byrd has handled more than 120 cases defending PBA members.

civil actions."

Byrd is a graduate of the State University of New York and the Nashville School of Law. Between his military and legal careers, he also was the owner and qualifying agent of a private investigations firm. He has a variety of additional training and certifications, including the prestigious Force Science certification.

He has testified as a use of force expert himself, and he spoke at this year's PBA attorney seminar on the topic about the role and impact on use of force experts before and during court proceedings.

SSPBA Assistant Director of Legal

Service Dale Preiser said, "I think the time and effort Jack took to become certified in use of force reflects his commitment to the practice of law and the profession of policing. Anytime we assign Jack to represent one of our members, I feel confident that they are in very capable hands."

As for his impressions of PBA and the services it provides to members, Byrd said: "My feedback would be that PBA members have someone who will stand beside them when they need it most. I have had nothing but positive interactions with the staff at PBA and have never been denied a request in support of a member."

LONGEST SERVING SHERIFF IN U.S. WAS ALSO PBAGA MEMBER

By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

Houston County Sheriff Cullen Talton, the nation's longest-serving sheriff, died Oct. 19, 2024, three days after reaching his 92nd birthday in hospice care. He served almost 52 years – 13 terms – as the county's top lawman.

He joined PBA in 1988, making him one of the organization's longest-serving members.

After announcing he would not seek a 14th term in 2024, Talton endorsed sheriff's Lt. Matt Moulton as his successor. Republican Moulton won the seat Nov. 5, 2024, and officially took office Jan. 1, 2025.

Longtime Chief Deputy W.H. "Billy" Rape served as interim sheriff after Talton died.

Sgt. Guy Clark Fussell Jr. joined Houston County SO in 1988 and has spent the entirety of his law enforcement career there. He is an elected PBAGA regional director and board member in the Middle Georgia Chapter. He was voted as a lifetime member last year.

Fussell said Talton was "very well-respected."

"He was one of the most fair bosses," said Fussell. "He put the right people in the right places and let them do their jobs. He didn't micromanage. He attributed success to people under him and if we did something right, he'd let us know. And he was transparent."

Talton was already knee deep into the family dairy farming operation in Bonaire, Ga., when he opted to run for Houston County Commission in 1966. He was 33. After a term and a half, Talton decided he would run for sheriff, beginning his legacy in 1973. It was his first foray into law enforcement. He was 40 when he took the oath.

Talton was born Oct. 16, 1932, in Bonaire, to the late Henry Cullen Talton



Houston County Sheriff Cullen Talton served 13 terms in office

Sr. and Lois Ammons Talton.

He attended Bonaire schools but transferred as a senior to Warner Robins in 1948 when his school burned down. It was there he met Peggy Sears.

In a recorded oral history created through the Warner Robins Heritage Society Oral History Project, Talton told interviewer Mike Chalout that Sears "won him in a bet" with friends that she could get a date with him. Something clicked between the two because at 17, high school graduate Talton married Sears, who was 16 and a senior.

"We had three kids before we knew what was causing it," Talton said, laughing.

"And then we had one five years later. Two daughters and two sons. I always tell her she did a good job raising the kids."

They were married 68 years at the time of her death.

Talton's father was on Houston County

Board of Education for 27 years. "That may be one reason I got into politics," said Talton.

Talton said he has an ancestor, also named Cullen Talton, who served as a county commissioner in the 1820s and another who served as sheriff in the 1850s.

Talton said during the interview that because he lacked his own law enforcement experience, he surrounded himself with a solid staff, including Rape. He shied away from personal acclamations and publicity, insisting his deputies get credit for the glories of the department.

"My campaign promise was I would hire professionals," said Talton. "I felt like we needed professional law enforcement. I felt like I fulfilled my promises."

Talton also attributed the successes of his office to working with other law enforcement agencies in Houston County. "We worked closely together, and I believe we kept crime down in our county," he said.

Talton said one of his first experiences as sheriff involved answering a fire call in Kathleen.

"They were making moonshine whiskey," he said. "There were about 100 gallons of moonshine whiskey. That was quite an experience."

He also recalled the embarrassment of conducting a traffic stop with him on one side of train tracks and the driver on the other. "I went to check his license, the train came, and he took off," said Talton. "That was kind of embarrassing."

According to his obituary, published by McCullough Funeral Home, Talton was known for his professional approach to law enforcement and was rarely seen wearing a badge or carrying a gun. Instead, Talton believed in building relationships rooted in respect.

TN DEPUTY PROSSER SEEKS HONOR FOR FAMILY NAME

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

When asked why they chose their career, many in law enforcement offer reasons such as wanting to make a difference, giving back to their communities and simply because they enjoy helping people.

Deputy Tylar Prosser with the Bedford County, Tenn., Sheriff's Office, however, minces no words about his choice to become an officer.

"I got into law enforcement to have my family name associated on the right side of the law," he said. "I initially wanted to be active around children with no family members, in a support role for them."

His story is different from many others who embark on this type of career. He is not a legacy officer with varied relatives in police work before him. Prosser noted that while growing up, his mother "wasn't really around and my dad was generally on the wrong side of the law. (My father) spent most of my life in prison for drug sales."

For Prosser, his dad's life choices proved to be highly motivating, though, leading him in the opposite direction career-wise.

After high school graduation from Shelbyville Central in 2013 and some community college time, Prosser completed his rookie school through the Tennessee Law Enforcement Training Academy. He started his career with the Bedford County Sheriff's Office in his hometown of Shelbyville, where he's been employed ever since.

In December 2024, Prosser wrapped up eight years with BCSO. He has served for five of those years as a SWAT team member and with his K9, Ranger, for one year. Prosser and Ranger began training together in July 2023. Once they'd completed their training, Ranger was certified in tracking, biting, obedience and narcotics. Prosser and Ranger were released to operate on their own Sept. 11, 2023. The pair has been exceptionally effective in their work thus far.

"Since having Ranger, we have made roughly 40 drug-related arrests with over half being felonies," he said.

One such example occurred Aug. 13, 2024. Deputy Prosser and Ranger were successful in a suspicious traffic stop that turned into a drug bust. He had Ranger conduct an open-air sniff check of the car, and Prosser's suspicions were confirmed after the dog alerted on the vehicle. Police seized 200 blue pills, suspected of containing fentanyl, a stolen gun and methamphetamine.

Based on the findings from this traffic stop, a search warrant was obtained, and the 17th Judicial Drug Task Force discovered about 800 more of the blue pills, also thought to contain fentanyl, and an AK-47 style carbine firearm.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, fentanyl was responsible for 74,702 deaths in the U.S. in 2023. Fortunately, due to Deputy Prosser and Ranger's skills, there are 1,000 less of these dangerous and addictive fentanyl pills available on the streets of Shelbyville.



Prosser and Ranger during a bust

"This one is hands down the best of my career thus far, stemming only from abnormal driving behavior and simple understanding of human psychology," said Prosser. "(The vehicle was) stopped for a tag issue and stop sign violation."

Prosser's accomplishments in police work are not limited to drug-related issues, however. In 2018, he was awarded the medal of valor for his actions during a shooting in Wartrace, Tenn.

"The call came in as an accidental shooting but slowly escalated when deputies arrived on scene and instantly took fire," he said. "I was en route and, after arriving on scene, it was advised that another deputy was pinned down with gunfire behind a tree. A trooper and I used a vehicle as a rolling barrier to get the deputy."

"Shortly after, I took a series of shots



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from the shooter, striking the front of the car I was behind,” continued Prosser. After several hours, the standoff ended with the shooter being caught and arrested.

The 2018 shooting event was the catalyst Prosser needed to become a PBA member, joining primarily for the legal representation.

“After that shooting, I knew I did everything right, and there were talks of lawsuits, and I knew that I had nothing or no one,” he said.

Membership with PBA eliminated the feeling Prosser described of “having nothing or no one” in his corner.

Throughout his time in law enforcement, Prosser said he is lucky to have had positive role models within his agency.

“Sgt. Clyde Boyce and Sgt. Chris Morton have probably been my biggest influences,” he said. “Both have an interest in criminal interdiction type of work, and if it wasn’t for them both showing and helping me, I wouldn’t be doing what I do now.”

Prosser found that those in leadership roles in his department are some of his favorites.

“It shows that if you put the right people in the right places and support them, great things will come,” he said.

When he’s not busy as a deputy, Prosser enjoys weightlifting and being with his friends and family. The advice he’d share with someone considering a law enforcement career is to “invest in yourself, whether it be your health or your education.”

“Not all departments are capable of sending you to classes or paying your memberships, but don’t let it stop you from being the best version of yourself,” said Prosser.

Through his hard work in policing and his handling skills with Ranger, Prosser has accomplished his goal of making sure his family name is on the right side of the law. He used his challenging



Prosser and Ranger

childhood circumstances as an impetus to create real change in his hometown community.

Considering his career in law enforcement, Prosser and his family of four will never have to worry about their family name having negative connotations.

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Ready to ride and catch the bad guys

RISE IN CRIMINAL CASES AGAINST GA MEMBERS CAUSES CONCERNS

By Andrew Lindsey
PBA Operations Project Coordinator

An alarming new trend is taking place in the state of Georgia. As of March 2025, 61 members are criminally charged or indicted in Georgia, more than in all other PBA represented states combined.

Jim Wright is PBA's general counsel and a former elected district attorney in Georgia. He offered a few possible reasons for the troubling development of officers being charged.

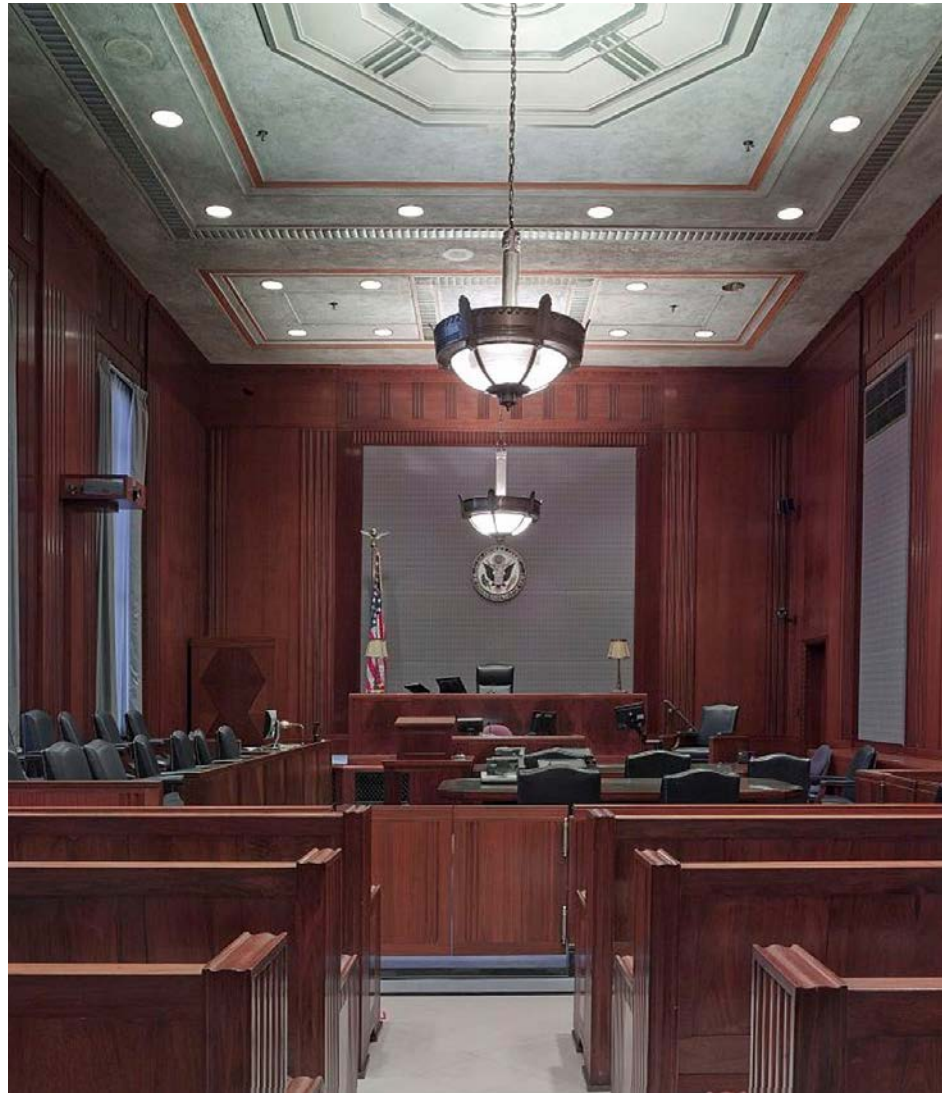
"Since the George Floyd case in 2020, we've seen an increase in progressive DA's presenting cases to grand juries for political reasons," said Wright. "In connection with that, we've also seen an exodus of experienced law enforcement officers due to the enhanced scrutiny from the new generation of progressive DAs, who would prefer to Monday morning quarterback an officer's split-second decision rather than place themselves in the officer's position."

It is particularly concerning that this phenomenon is taking place throughout the state — in urban and rural locations, involving state employees as well as city and county officers.

Most of the charges pertain to incidents involving the use of force. Many involve indictments on charges related to shootings or deaths in custody, including involuntary manslaughter, felony murder and malice murder. Other common charges include battery, aggravated assault and cruelty to inmates.

Of note is the prevalence with which members are being charged with violation of their oath of office in connection with alleged offenses, often bringing a misdemeanor charge up to the felony level.

"As I'm talking with PBA members across the state, I'm finding that these members have no idea that this huge increase of officers being charged is happening in Georgia," said Patrick



Cullinan, executive director of PBA of Georgia. "I think that it's important that we put this information out so that our members understand the environment that they're working in."

There is concern about the impact of this trend on the law enforcement profession in Georgia. This high rate of indictments could cause officers to hesitate in high-pressure situations, creating higher levels of risk for both officers and the public, and it also is likely to impact the decisions of officers to remain in the profession or to enter it in the first place.

Charlie Cordell, PBA corporate counsel, said the risk of criminal prosecutions is a "significant threat" to law enforcement officers.

"The number of PBA members facing criminal prosecution, particularly in Georgia, is unprecedented," he said. "Although the pendulum of public opinion has begun to swing back in favor of law enforcement officers, the risk of criminal prosecution for carrying out their duties remains a significant threat for all PBA members."

As always, the PBA stands ready to defend and support our members with no financial caps or limits when the incident arises from the member's performance of law enforcement duties. The PBA will continue to monitor legal trends and update our membership on important issues facing law enforcement officers throughout the Southeast.

ARKANSAS HONORS PBA MEMBER FOR SAVING INFANT'S LIFE

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

Law enforcement officers never know what the next call will entail. That is certainly true for Arkansas member Josh Rakoczy, an officer with the Hoxie Police Department.

Recently, his typical shift evolved into much more. So much so, in fact, that Rakoczy was recognized with a commendation from the Arkansas House of Representatives citing his actions that to help an unresponsive infant get needed medical attention.

Rakoczy recalled the events of the evening:

"On Wednesday, Aug. 14, 2024, I had reserve Officer James Guimon riding with me as part of his training. We had just cleared off our meal break and were heading out to the highway to work traffic enforcement. We were just about to the highway's on-ramp when dispatch advised that they had paged EMS and fire department first responders to a local church for a 1-year-old who was unresponsive and not breathing. Dispatch advised us that CPR was currently in progress. Officer Guimon was driving so he activated our emergency lights and sirens, and we responded. While enroute, I began reverting to my previous EMS training and going through the steps in my head on what we could do when we arrived on scene, which I then explained to Officer Guimon.

As we were pulling up on scene, I noticed a fire department first responder exiting the church with the child who was limp in his hands. Prior to exiting our patrol vehicle, dispatch had advised us that an ambulance was responding from Pocahontas, Ark., and had a 20–30-minute ETA. At this point, I directed Officer Guimon to assist the mother to the front seat of our patrol vehicle and I had the first responder load the child with me into the back of the patrol unit. We advised dispatch that we would be transporting the child to the emergency

room.

"Walnut Ridge Officer Joshua Lemmons was also on scene and assisted us with an escort. Once en route to the hospital, I began assessing the child. I started trying to stimulate the child by rubbing his back and rubbing his chest. The child began crying shortly after and during the two and a half to three-minute transport ... the child went from barely responding to crying loudly, which was the best reaction anyone could hope for. After carrying the child to a trauma room, the child began opening his eyes and moving his extremities. Everyone on scene that day did an awesome job, and it was a collaborated team effort."

Rakoczy said that in the moment of the crisis, his law enforcement and emergency medical technician training kicked in and he just automatically reacted.

"With a child," he said, "one minute they can be fine, and the next they aren't. That's why we decided to transport to the hospital instead of waiting for an ambulance."

This incident is a textbook example of first responders joining forces to assist a child in need. Dispatchers, the Medic One ambulance, Hoxie Fire Department, Walnut Ridge PD and Hoxie PD all played a part in resolving the emergency.

Rakoczy has worked in public service since he was 18. He began his career in Illinois as an EMT-Basic, then obtained his EMT technician intermediate status while also working as a firefighter. He graduated from Black River Technical College Law Enforcement Training Academy in April 2021 and is working on a degree in criminal justice.

After starting in law enforcement as a reserve officer with Pocahontas, Ark., PD in 2019, and going full time there from 2020 to 2023, Rakoczy's role with Hoxie PD is as a narcotics officer working on the usual patrolman duties.

In addition, he works with the narcotics



Rakoczy as he is presented with his commendation

investigator on performing probation and parole compliance checks and traffic interdiction. He enjoys this position because he gets to serve the community while taking drugs off the streets.

His next employment goal is to become a detective within Hoxie PD, and he's working toward that by assisting the lead detective with writing and obtaining grants for equipment.

Now, with five years in law enforcement and over 1,100 hours of continuing education under his belt — most of it focused on drug interdiction, drug investigations and impairment — Rakoczy's also a part of the Special Response team, an instructor and a field training officer.

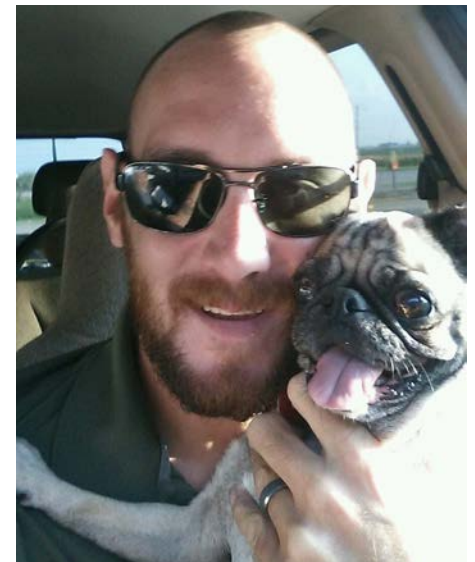
When asked to name the biggest influence in his career, Rakoczy said he cannot point to one single individual. "I have had the honor of working with some great individuals, and every one of them has had a great influence," he said. "I have learned something (from each of them) that I have carried with me from the beginning of my career until now."



Rakoczy, his wife and five sons - (l-r) Riley Rakoczy, Joshua Rakoczy, Rebecca Rakoczy, Chevy Rakoczy, (back) Harold Rakoczy and Tyler Rakoczy, and (front) Parker Rakoczy



(Left rear) father Walter Rakoczy, (middle) Joshua Rakoczy, brother Kevin Rakoczy. (Front left) wife Rebecca Rakoczy, mother Regenia Rakoczy, sister Angela Rakoczy and sister-in-law Rebecca Rakoczy



Officer Rakoczy with Nubby

On a personal level that translates into his professional life, he calls his father a great influence because “he taught me and my siblings a great work ethic and always instilled in us that it didn’t matter if we were on the back of a garbage truck or a CEO, as long as we found purpose and were happy.”

Rakoczy is sharing some of his father’s wisdom with the five sons that he and his wife, Rebecca, have together: Tyler,

20, Chevy, 16, Parker, 14, Riley, 12, and Harold, 9. Raising five boys takes up most of his free time, but when he does find a spare minute, he enjoys playing guitar and helping his oldest son record and produce music.

He also likes taking weekend trips to St. Louis and Memphis. Storm chasing is another pastime for him in the spring. He’s always liked the weather and storms and often goes to Oklahoma,

Kansas and Missouri in pursuit.

There are two favorite quotes that provide Rakoczy with a guiding outlook and are relevant to his actions with this baby’s emergency situation.

One is from the U.S. Navy SEALs, “The only easy day was yesterday.” The second quote is a Bible verse, Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”



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CALDWELL PARISH NAMES PBA MEMBER 'DEPUTY OF THE YEAR'

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

Tori Brackett has a close bond with her family and has always wanted to be around them. She was born in Monroe, La., and has lived in Caldwell Parish her whole life, so she feels fortunate to be able to serve in her community. She was recently named the Deputy of the Year for Caldwell Parish Sheriff's Office.

"Tori is a good employee and works hard to keep Caldwell Parish safe," said Sheriff Clay Bennett.

Brackett has worked with the CPSO for almost 17 years and is the first female assigned to work narcotics full time. She serves as the narcotics supervisor. Her career in law enforcement began in April 2008 as a dispatcher at CPSO. "As soon as I started, I loved it and knew I wanted to be a patrol officer," she said.

She worked in dispatch for a year and was then given the opportunity to attend the police academy at North Delta Regional Training Academy in Monroe.

One night while working dispatch, not too long before she was scheduled to start the police academy, Brackett said she was contemplating her journey in law enforcement.

"I was stressing about starting academy and there was a TV on in the background," she said. "A preacher came on the TV, and he said, 'God will never give you the desire to do something if he did not give you the ability to achieve it first.' That stuck with me, and I knew this is what I was meant to do."

Once she graduated from the police academy, Brackett started working nights on patrol. After a few years of working nights, she was given the opportunity to begin a day shift on patrol and served in that capacity until 2016, when she was transferred to be the lead narcotics detective of the department.

In her time with CPSO, Brackett racked

up some impressive job stats. Not only was she the first female assigned to work narcotics, but she was also the first female in her department to be a member of SWAT, and she's been an operator for 13 years. She's also an SSGT Vanguard Level One instructor, a diver for the sheriff's department, a stop stick instructor and a hunter safety instructor. On top of all those credentials, she's also volunteered her time to organize the CPSO's toy drive every Christmas for the past nine years.

Brackett said she is unable to name just one person as her greatest influence.

"I have learned many things from the people that I work with," she said. "To list just one would be impossible, whether it was learning what to do or what not to do. Everyone that I have worked with has been an influence."

In her spare time, Brackett loves spending time with her family, which includes her husband, Jackson Brackett. He is a veteran serving as a police officer, and he's just opened his own security company.

Together, they have eight children, Corey, Cameron, Chloe, Michael, Jackson Wayne, Blake, Darla and CJ. They also have 10 grandchildren, which

makes her family life busy. Her latest hobby, remodeling a 1908 house that was given to her by her dad, adds more fun and busyness to the mix.

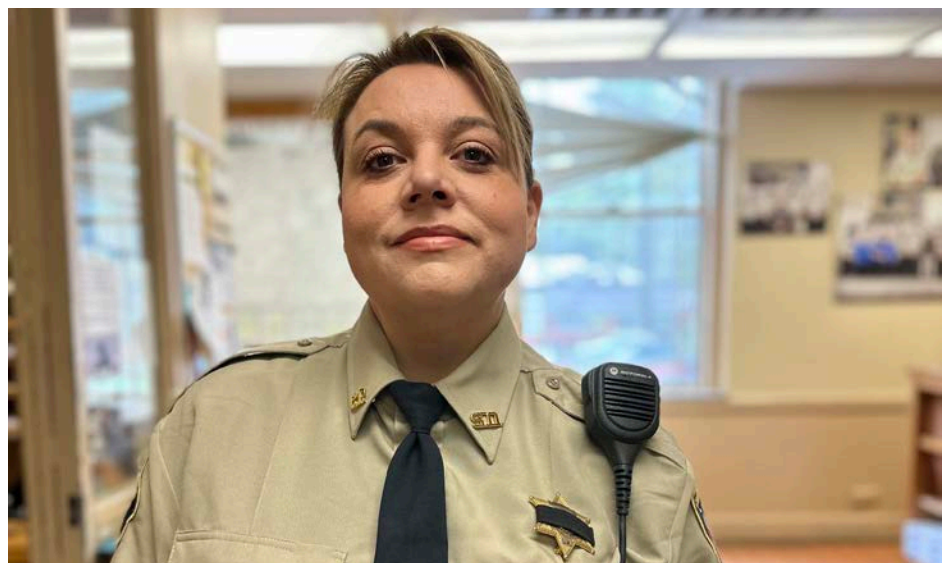
As a PBA member, Brackett is quick to acknowledge the importance of the association.

"PBA is an organization that stands behind officers and their families, sometimes in their most desperate time of need," she said. "From the moment I was told about PBA, I knew I wanted to be a part of that. I also encourage any new officers to also be members as well. You could never have too many good people backing you when doing this job."

As for her Deputy of the Year Award, Brackett, like most law enforcement officers, is modest.

"I try to do the best that I can and whatever is asked of me for my sheriff, chief and community," she said. "I love my little town and my people in it. I don't always like the way they act, but I always love them."

Brackett said she tries each day to embody her favorite verse from the Bible, 1 John 3:18: "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in the truth."



Class A Day, in dress uniform

VAPBA MEMBER 'IN THE THICK OF IT' AND LOVES EVERY MINUTE

By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

When he was a young boy in Orange County, Va., Daniel Babcock wanted to try everything, from being a radio DJ to driving a school bus.

Not content to pick one career, the industrious Babcock decided that the sky's his only limit. "When I was a kid, like 5 years old, I wanted to be a bus driver, why, I don't know," he said. "I always wanted to be a fireman, too, and knew that I could do both when I grew up."

He was still a student at Chancellor High School when he started working at the 911 center of Spotsylvania Sheriff's Office. He worked the 911 system from 2002 to 2005.

"I had early release as a senior and was able to leave and go work until midnight," said Babcock. "Well, I started in our communications center with the intentions of being a career firefighter. A buddy of mine, John Harvey, was a dispatcher, too, and he really influenced me to apply to be an officer with him. We ended up going to the academy together."

After Babcock graduated from the academy, he switched over to the patrol and traffic division in 2005. He was only 21 years old. He also joined the Virginia Division of PBA.

Babcock said he was influenced by his dad, a retired firefighter who then became a bailiff for Spotsylvania SO. The elder Babcock passed away in 2018.

Babcock married and fathered three children, a son, 18, and two daughters, 16 and 15. The family includes four dogs.

He developed hobbies such as working on and restoring older vehicles and adding to his collection of firetrucks and ambulances. He enjoys the outdoor sports of hunting and fishing and just staying busy because he said he does not like staying still.



Spotsylvania sheriff's First Sgt. Daniel Babcock wearing just one of many hats he wears on his jobs

There's little chance of Babcock ending up with free time on his hands. Enter career No. 2.

"When I was working in the 911 center, the school system for Spotsylvania was advertising bus driver positions," he said. "They were short-staffed, and I decided to apply. One of the drivers I had always looked up to growing up knew I was interested. Her name is Audrey Fox. She supported me and was grateful that I wanted to drive as a sub."

"I got the job and began to sub-drive on my days off from the 911 center," continued Babcock. "Once I moved into patrol and after the academy, I continued driving for Spotsylvania up until 2014."

But 2014 was not the end of the line for the sheriff's first sergeant. "All of my kids went to Orange Public Schools, and when my youngest daughter started school, I had applied to drive for the Orange Public Schools," he said. "I drive almost every day I am off from the sheriff's office."

Babcock can be seen in the big yellow buses driving students wherever they are needed. "I drive routes for when a driver is out sick or they need a fill in," he said. "I drive sports teams to the away games and field trips throughout the school

year. Our transportation office is always short on bus drivers, so I drive whenever I can."

Babcock said he helps out so routes are not cancelled or games are not postponed or even worse, forfeited. "When my own kids were younger, I had the opportunity to drive their routes and trips, too," he said. "It was so sweet to be able to see them grow up through the years as I drove the bus."

In addition to driving, Babcock fills time as a school bus driving instructor. He's had mostly positive encounters with the students on his bus, but one in particular stands out.

"I did have one high school kid sit behind me one day," said Babcock. "He had asked if I could help him with a few questions he was struggling with on his driver's test. This kid knew I was an officer, and I knew his parents really paid him no attention."

"I told him, 'ask away,' and he went through dozens of drivers ed questions," he continued. "See, he had failed the test at school and was so worked up about the test. He finally built the courage to ask me for advice. I can happily say he passed, and he was so grateful. He has since graduated, and I do see him from

time to time.”

But wait, there’s more. Babcock added a third career to his resume. “I am a volunteer firefighter with Mine Run Volunteer Fire Company in Orange County,” said Babcock. “Our station is No. 21 and I have been a member there since 2004.”

Babcock said that he joined Spotsylvania Fire Department at 16. He then moved to Orange County in 2004 and bought a home.

“I was too far away from my home station, so I stopped in the local fire department and applied,” he said. “Our station is volunteer-based and is a rural response area. We typically have 300-400 calls a year.”

Orange County employs paid EMS workers, who staff the medic units, and volunteers staff the fire trucks.

“The majority of us respond to the fire house from home if a call comes out,” said Babcock. “Orange has five fire stations. I hold the rank of lieutenant within the department at Station 21.”

Oh, but Babcock decided he could do more with four – careers, that is. “Yes, I have driven fuel oil and propane trucks since 2010,” he said. “I am on an on-call list for several oil companies in my area. Same as the bus, if a driver calls out, I could go drive for them when needed. The season will usually pick up when it starts to get colder.”

Sometimes, Babcock’s worlds collide, and he has to chuckle. “When I was on patrol, I had responded to a call where I arrested a female,” he said. “A few days later, I delivered propane to the same house and the person I had arrested was there. She said, ‘You look so familiar,’ and I was like, ‘Well, I have no clue.’ To this day, I do not think she ever knew I was one and the same person.”

Babcock developed his work ethic from watching his father take on more than one job to pay bills and raise his family. Babcock’s son mimics the two generations before him. “My dad was a career firefighter starting in 1986,” he

said. “Growing up, we did not have much money, but my dad worked hard for what we had. He, too, had numerous jobs, and I saw how hard he worked to provide for us.”

The elder Babcock also drove fuel trucks and was a bricklayer. He retired from the fire service in mid-2000s. After a short retirement he went to work at the sheriff’s office as a bailiff until he passed away. “My son is doing the same as I,” said Babcock. “He recently graduated high school and works for several different farmers in our area. He has several applications out to become a paid firefighter. We do get to volunteer together at our firehouse, and my daughter is a junior member there, too.”

It was Babcock’s father who encouraged not just working as needed to survive and thrive but to stay busy and occupied.

“My first job was at Walmart,” he said. “Loved it, and it started me out learning how to deal with the public and customer service. My dad always said to find a hobby or a part-time job just in case I needed something to fall back on.”

“That stuck with me, and I think more people should do that,” continued Babcock. “I have seen it first-hand. I would say if anyone is just starting out in law enforcement, get a good hobby, get a side job if your department allows. It is very rewarding, because as LE, we are treated so differently within the public.”

Having another job to go to can provide stress relief, he said.

“It is for me and, honestly, that is how I deal with the stress within my job,” said Babcock. “Don’t get me wrong, I do have days off to get things done and spending time with the family. I enjoy driving the bus, I love helping – honestly, I would do it for free. Some kids do not have any other way to school other than the bus. These kids look up to the driver, and most of the time, the bus driver is the first smiling face that a child sees in the morning and the last smiling face they see in the evening. It’s sad but true.”

Along the way, Babcock has been recognized for his successes, most

recently as Supervisor of the Year for 2023. He’s earned nicknames such as Deputy Dan at the bus garage, 5-0 on the bus and Danny at the fire department.

Believe it or not, Babcock still manages to make time for family fun. “I love camping with the family,” he said. “In 2014, I bought a used school bus — oddly enough the same bus I rode as a student in high school — and we converted it into a camper.”

The bus has two sets of bunk beds, a queen bed, kitchen, dinette, bathroom and more.

“I love it, and the family and I worked on it all ourselves right here in the driveway,” said Babcock. “I also own two fire trucks and one ambulance. I take them to shows and parades to show them off. My daughters are also on the travel softball team. We tend to travel out of state more and more, and I will attend with them on the weekends I am off.”

Babcock doesn’t see his daily duties changing anytime soon. His superiors at Spotsylvania SO approve of his extra duties. “Honestly, they really don’t talk much about what I do,” he said. “My command staff is very supportive of it as long as my extra jobs don’t interfere with my LE responsibilities.”

In fact, he considers one of his colleagues a supportive mentor.

“There is one within my agency that has always pointed me in the right direction, never judged me and has always supported me in my decisions,” said Babcock. “He is like a big brother to me. I cannot thank him enough for his mentorship through the years.”

As long as they will have him, Babcock said he’ll gladly climb behind the big wheel of a yellow school bus, smiling at each student as he carts them to and from their homes and schools.

“I plan on continuing to drive the school bus for Orange County and have an interest in becoming the director of bus transportation if that position ever became vacant,” he said. “Who knows what the future holds?”

LEGAL INFO FOR NCDAC MEMBERS FACING DISCIPLINARY ACTION

By Andrew Valli
SSPBA Staff Attorney

We understand: stuff happens, and you may receive a written notice of disciplinary action for an incident that occurred while on duty at work.

If you are an employee of NC DAC, you have appeal and grievance rights far beyond those of corrections officers in other states covered by SSPBA.

Here are the basics of what you should expect as you navigate the grievance process.

The OIA investigative file and notice of disciplinary action

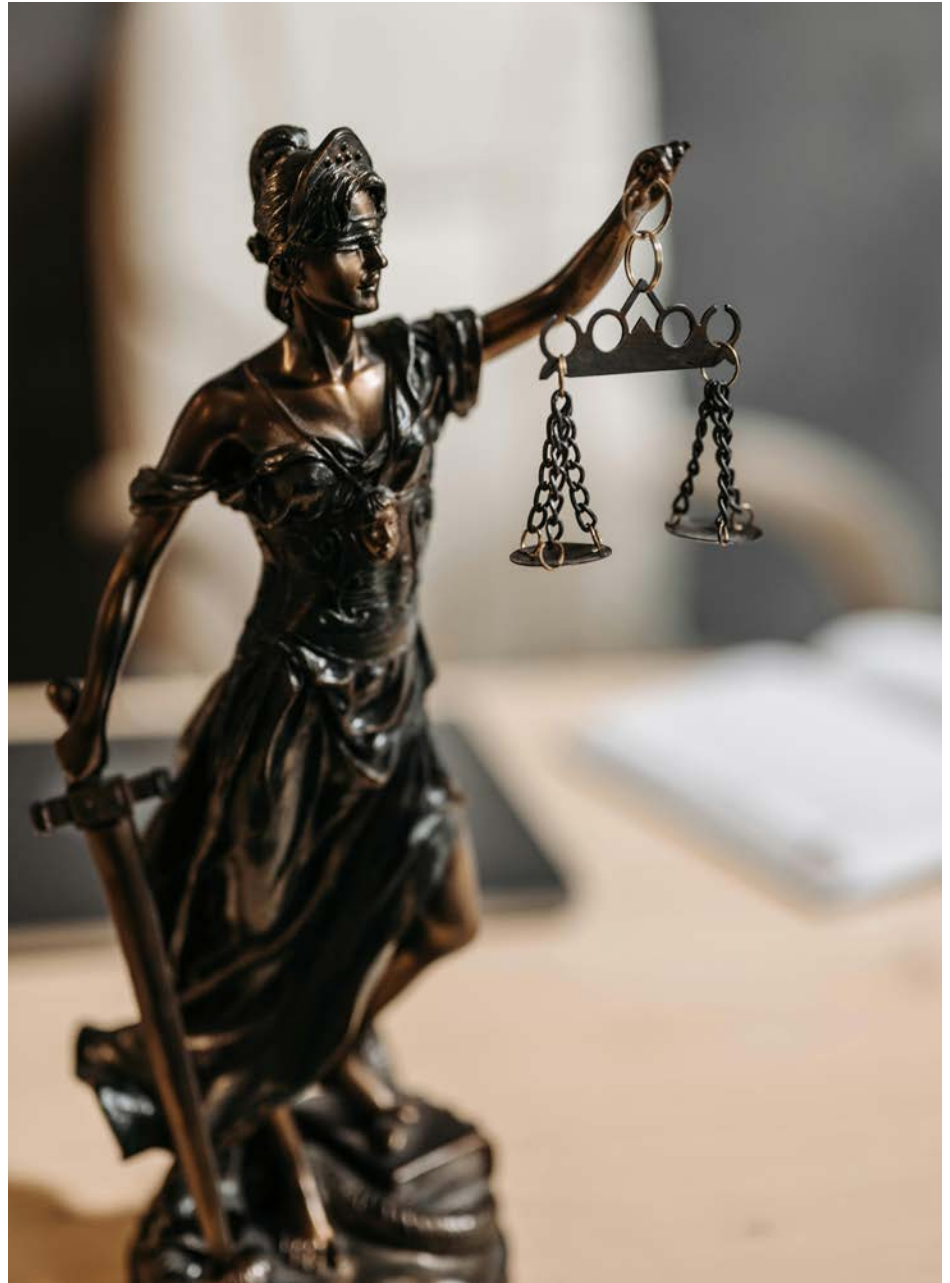
The DAC Office of Internal Affairs will investigate the incident. In some instances, the OIA will decline to investigate, and in those cases, the investigation will be performed by local management. You should educate yourselves on this process by reviewing the DAC “Staff Investigation Workflow & Guidelines” policy. You will not receive the OIA report or investigative file upon which the recommendation for disciplinary action is based.

Instead, you will receive a pre-disciplinary conference letter. Drafts of the PDC letter are reviewed by local management, regional management, central HR and the DAC general counsel’s office. Think of the PDC letter as management’s summary of the incident and its justification to take disciplinary action. The PDC letter will resolve all questions of fact and interpretation of policy against you.

You then have your pre-disciplinary conference. Shortly after the PDC, you will receive your final written notice of disciplinary action.

Step 1 grievance - mediation

You have 15 calendar days from the date you receive your final written notice of disciplinary action to file a Step 1 grievance with the DAC. You file a Step 1



grievance on Form DAC-HR 555.

There are instructions on the top of the first page of the form on how to file the grievance form by email. Filing by email will create a paper trail, which is useful to confirm that you timely filed your grievance.

The DAC will schedule a mediation session shortly thereafter. While you are not permitted attorney representation during the Step 1 mediation, we do suggest that you contact PBA during the Step 1 process as an attorney may be

assigned at this point to assist you.

If your case does settle during mediation, the mediator will draft a settlement document listing the terms of settlement. You should step out of the mediation and call your attorney to review the settlement before you sign it.

Step 2 grievance – hearing before DAC employees

If you and the DAC do not negotiate settlement of the grievance during the Step 1 mediation session, then the

mediator(s) will declare an impasse. Ninety-nine percent of the time, there is no settlement and the mediation ends in impasse.

The DAC is required to mediate in good faith; however, our experience is that the DAC representative will come to the mediation with no settlement authority at all.

In order to proceed to Step 2, you will need to complete and file your DAC HR-556 – Step 2 (hearing) grievance form via email within five days of the date the Step 1 mediation ended in impasse. Again, the instructions on how to file are at the top of the first page of the form, and you should timely file the form by email.

You are not entitled to attorney representation during the Step 2

grievance hearing.

After the Step 2 hearing is held, the DAC will issue its written Final Agency Decision, referred to as a FAD. The grievance process is technically complete from the DAC's point of view once it issues you a FAD.

The FAD is your ticket to the final and most important chapter of the grievance process — which is to file a Petition for a Contested Case Hearing with the Office of Administrative Hearings. You cannot petition the OAH until after you receive an FAD.

However, if the department does not issue the FAD within 90 days of the filing of the Step 1 grievance as required by state law, you may proceed directly to OAH.

You have 30 days from receipt of the

FAD to file that Petition for a Contested Case Hearing with the OAH.

You are permitted attorney representation during the contested case hearing. The contested case hearing is held before an independent state agency, and your case will be heard by a well-trained administrative law judge.

It is at this step of the process where you will finally receive a fair hearing and your attorney can demand documents and cross-examine DAC agency witnesses.

This information is provided to give you a roadmap of what the NC DAC grievance process entails. If you are disciplined, contact PBA early in the process so that you may receive assistance.

Retired Members

If you would like to go into our retired chapter, please send in a copy of your retirement paperwork showing the effective date. Please fax (866-337-7722) or email (membership_info@sspba.org) the necessary paperwork.

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MEET TNPBA MEMBER LOCKRIDGE, OFFICER AND FILMMAKER



Officer Jaron Lockridge
Rising filmmaker

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

Find a hobby.

That was the advice that Officer Jaron Lockridge remembers from one of his instructors in the Tennessee Law Enforcement Training Academy in Donelson, Tenn.

As a member of Class 1497, this advice stood out to Lockridge because the instructor encouraged hobbies and other creative outlets to cope with some of the stressors of being a police officer.

He recalled the instructor saying, "Turn the radio off when you get home, and get away from being a cop in your off time."

This seemed like helpful advice from an expert, so Lockridge turned to writing, which he said has always been an outlet for him and helped him alleviate a lot of the stress that comes with his law enforcement job. He had always enjoyed writing and other creative pursuits.

In fact, in high school, as he participated in theater arts class and chorus, he found

he had a natural gift for writing.

"I actually wrote my first stage play for the school that was performed for the spring play, for some time (even) after I graduated," he said.

As a patrol officer serving as the desk officer for the evening shift at the Jackson Police Department, he exercises his creative muscles as a writer and filmmaker. Much of his work can easily be found online.

"You can Google my name and find quite a bit," said Lockridge. "I have a recent film titled 'Cubic Zirconia' that was recently released on Amazon about a detective investigating a case with a missing family. I released a movie titled 'The Stix' last year, which is a gritty crime drama in the likes of shows such as 'The Wire.' I've also done some horror movies and dramas that are available on pretty much any streaming platform other than Netflix and Hulu."

All of that seems unlikely considering Lockridge had basically given up writing when he graduated high school, realizing that he had no desire to move to Los Angeles to pursue movies.

"Soon after, the internet started to provide opportunities, and there was

so much free training just on YouTube that I started to self-teach myself and make movies," he said. "I've been making movies consistently now since 2016. Law enforcement and my experiences in the job actually renewed my itch to write again."

As for law enforcement, Lockridge has served for 14 years. He began his career with Whiteville, Tenn., Police Department for two years, then Brownsville, Tenn., Police Department for two years, and he serves with Jackson PD, where he's worked for 10 years.

His favorite thing about serving in law enforcement is that no two days are the same. "I think cops could never work factory jobs where you do the exact same thing day in and day out," he said. "This is a job you find out pretty quickly if it's for you or not. I enjoy being the front desk officer mostly because of my 'second job' as a filmmaker. It's a little more controlled which kind of contradicts what makes me love the job, in a way. But there are days I do miss the hustle and bustle of patrol."

Lockridge has been successful in his policing career, having won Officer of the Year when he was with Whiteville PD and numerous traffic and DUI



Graduation 2010 from TLETA academy with Whiteville PD (with fellow officers)

enforcement awards. He also served in general investigations early in his career. He joined the PBA during that same early time frame, after “pretty much everyone” in his department at the time encouraged him to do so.

“I’ve seen firsthand how PBA takes care of its members,” he said.

He counts his former field training officer at Brownsville PD, Roy Turner, as the greatest influence in his law enforcement career. “He probably doesn’t know it, but my old FTO was a great influence,” he said. “He showed me I could be me, be involved in the community while still doing your job with integrity and humility.”

Lockridge acknowledged that this job is difficult. When asked what advice he’d give to those who may be interested in working in law enforcement — “know your ‘why.’”

“This job is hard, and more times than not, you will feel hated, and you only truly want to help people and protect,” said Lockridge. “Your ‘why’ will fuel you in those low times when you feel like it’s best to get out of the profession altogether.”

There are similarities between Lockridge’s role as a police officer and as a filmmaker. For example, knowing your ‘why’ is also important for creating movies. “This is the most expensive art form there is, and if you truly want to do this, have a passion for filmmaking and storytelling because there is no guarantee the money will come,” he said. “Your passion has to fuel your drive, not the belief of profit.”

Lockridge said another similarity between the two jobs is that they are both stressful and they both require great problem-solving skills. There are instances in both fields where you must make a decision in whatever situation you are facing. The saying “It is what it is,” is a favorite and frequent thought of his.

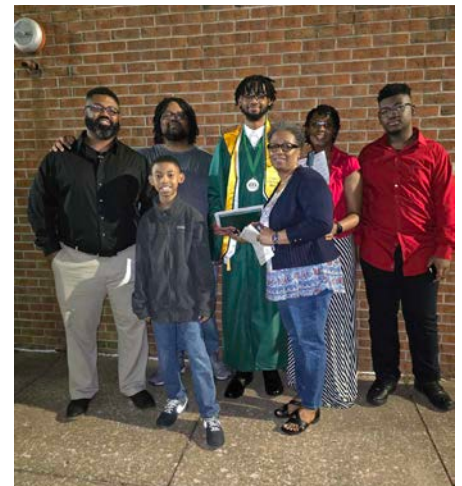
“I’ve learned not to get too high or too low in any situation,” he said. “Life can be great one day and terrible the next.

It’s wash, rinse and repeat if you live long enough. Wake up everyday and tackle it, regardless.”

Finding his work online and on platforms such as Amazon is an “amazing feeling,” said Lockridge. Having the ability to reach millions of viewers represents a huge accomplishment. He called it a goal to “eventually have the budgets to where I can really use my experience as a law enforcement officer to highlight some of the issues we deal with in the job.”

Echoing what he learned at the academy, he said, “I advise any officer out there to find something you love away from the job and do it. Don’t let the uniform be your end all, be all.”

It is apparent that Lockridge has found his outlet with his filmmaking side gig. When he’s not busy working as an officer and a filmmaker, or writing screenplays, he enjoys spending time with his wife Amber, and their children. His son, Ja’Micheal, attends Lipscomb University in Nashville, where he studies engineering. His two younger sons are Ayden, 16, and Kortlen, 12. He is also a season ticket holder for the Tennessee Titans, calling himself a “diehard fan.” “I actually hope to go full time with my production company one day or after I retire from law enforcement,” he said.



With family at oldest son's graduation with honors

“Making movies is a business for me now. I plan to continue and see where this thing goes and, hopefully, become a self-sufficient filmmaker on a larger scale.”

It’s interesting to think that Lockridge is on this trajectory because of the encouragement he got from two teachers. “As far as filmmaking, my greatest influence would be two teachers, Ronald Whitmore, who once taught at a middle school in Bolivar, and my theater arts teacher, Deborah Hodge, in high school. They both showed me I really had a talent in the arts.”



Lockridge on set of latest film, 'Cubic Zirconia'

PBA MEMBER DEPUTY HUNTER REEDY LIVED HIS EPITAPH DAILY

**By Randy Byrd, Director
Foundation and Media Relations**

“Live fast, love hard, die young, and leave a beautiful memory,” was a tattoo on Deputy Hunter Reedy’s arm on Aug. 9, 2024.

No one, however, could predict that on that day it would become his epitaph. A tragic sequence of events began when an officer from the Marion Police Department in Virginia attempted a traffic stop for a moving violation.

The vehicle didn’t stop immediately, but eventually pulled over in the county, where Smyth County deputies, including Deputy Reedy, became part of the stop.

The driver was issued a traffic summons and became extremely agitated. The driver then shot Deputy Reedy, who had approached him. Gunfire was exchanged, and the suspect and another deputy were shot. The deputy survived, and the suspect died days later.

For the next few days, life was a blur for his wife, Bettina.

“There were so many people who came to see the kids and myself at mom’s house, along with messages and calls and letters from people I didn’t even know,” she said.

She remembers going with the sheriff’s office to bring his body back from Roanoke, where the autopsy was performed, and the hearse coming by and her running to it.

“I just wanted him to know I was there, and I love him,” she said.

Bettina wasn’t ready for all that had happened and was to come. Support from family, friends and police officers from all over helped pull her through. Their children — Brantley, Kaden and Kaede Belle — and her faith provided strength.

Her two best friends, Noel Scott and Michelle Smith, who were more like



(L-R) Sgt. Landon Smith, Reedy and Deputy Mauricio Centeno

sisters, were by her side every day. Sgt. Landon Smith, Hunter’s supervisor and best friend, handled everything with the services and the funeral arrangements.

Bettina never imagined that this was something she would have to go through.

“Yes, I realized the possibility of losing him on the job was real, but where we live, this small place, I never thought pure evil would take him,” she said.

Hunter’s parents, Chuck and Marie, are now left with just the memories of their son, whom they described as a wonderful son who was always on an adventure.

“He was one of a kind, and with him, there never was a dull moment,” his parents said.

Hunter learned to ride a bike without training wheels when he was 3 and was riding a motorcycle at 5. He started working on a farm when he was 11 and could operate any kind of farm equipment.

At 12, he started racing at Wythe Raceway in the U-Car division. Working with his maternal grandfather, he won

several championships in his division.

“Hunter even tried his hand at bull riding,” his parents said. “He sure kept us on our knees in prayer. You never knew what he would get into next.”

In high school, Hunter was known as Cowboy Reedy, just a “good ole country boy.” He also was a trader, according to his parents. They would go to work with a car in the driveway and come home to find motorcycles and four-wheelers as replacements.

“He always seemed to come out ahead,” they said.

Hunter also loved playing the bass guitar and was active in his church growing up.

In Chuck and Marie’s words: “Hunter was taken from us way too soon. He was so loved, and we will always miss him.”

His older sister, Nicole Burkett, remembered praying for many years for a baby brother. When Hunter was born, he became a real-life baby doll to her, nicknamed “Bubba.”

When she and husband Adam started

a family, he became “Uncle Bubba.” She remembers that he wore the title proudly. Nicole wanted others to know her children adored Hunter and fondly remember his big personality. She said they have started a saying that exemplifies his life: “We want to live like Bubba did, with no page unturned, no opportunity missed and a life that speaks volumes.”

“What made my brother exceptional was his helping heart,” she said. “Anytime I needed him, he didn’t hesitate. He always wanted to know where I was and that he was on the way. This helping hand extended to others, and Hunter could inspire a laugh while he was at it. It was a gift that extended to his community, which he ultimately gave his life for while protecting.”

One community was the town of Chilhowie where Hunter served as an office early in his career. The Town of Chilhowie honored his life and the way he impacted others in a press release.

“Hunter Reedy started his law enforcement career in the Town of Chilhowie. This was not just a job for Hunter. It was a lifestyle. He worked countless hours with Lt. Ben Perry to get prepared for the police academy.

“Hunter ran many miles on the high school track, around the town park and on the town sidewalks, doing calisthenic exercises for hours each day to prepare. Unfortunately, he suffered from two fractured ankles during his police academy training, forcing him to withdraw from that class and be moved to the next one.

“Once healed, he worked even harder, wearing braces. He was able to attend the next academy held at Southwest Virginia Criminal Justice Training Academy where he completed 20 weeks of training. In a proud moment, he walked the stage, shook the hand of the academy’s director and became a certified officer.

“During his employment in Chilhowie, Hunter worked tirelessly to become the best officer he could be. He was never shy to speak up for what he thought was right. He was recognized as Chilhowie’s



Reedy with his wife, Bettina, and their three children



Chuck and Marie Reedy with a young Hunter and daughter Nicole



The Reedy family hits the dirt trails on four-wheelers.

Officer of the Year in 2019.”

Being a small-town community, officers with Chilhowie become close with each other and the citizens. Hunter was childhood friends with three Chilhowie officers. He went to school with officers Austin Millsaps and Gage Prater. He grew up in the same church as Deputy Chief Aaron Smith.

Hunter maintained these friendships and would often lend a helping hand to these friends outside of work. Whether it was helping wire up an outbuilding, running a backhoe to level off land, or helping fix something around the house, Hunter was handy and would always be there.

Once Hunter found Bettina, everyone at the department saw him become the best version of himself. He accepted her two boys as his own and eventually adopted them. Hunter proudly and boldly spoke about his family. He would beam with pride when talking about his wife and kids. He was happy. He had a great sense of humor. Hunter was quick to laugh

and make others do the same.

Eventually, Hunter saw a vision in a new department and left the Chilhowie Police Department to further his career at the Smyth County Sheriff’s Office. During his time there, he never forgot his Chilhowie family. He would come and eat work meals with his former co-workers and stop by the department to chat with his LEO brothers.

Shortly after his move to the SCSO, Bettina became pregnant and Hunter was to become the father of a little girl. His pride in being a father was unmatched.

“The loss of Hunter was a devastating blow to all members of the Chilhowie Police Department,” said Lt. Ben Perry speaking on behalf of the agency. “We were all extremely close and it feels as though there is a part of each of us that will always be missing.

“We were all honored to be there for Hunter and his family and will continue to be whenever needed,” he continued.

“Hunter will fondly be remembered, not as just a coworker, but as a friend and a brother to us all.”

In addition to Landon Smith’s work with the family in the days after the shooting, Smith wrote a piece honoring him as Officer of the Year of 2024. This award was given posthumously by the VFW for his work with a Neighborhood Watch program.

“Deputy Hunter Dakota Reedy was more than a law enforcement officer, he was a symbol of dedication, grit, and compassion in the community he served,” Smith wrote.

He continued his writing by giving an inside look at Hunter’s service with Smyth County.

“In December 2021, Deputy Reedy brought his talents and unwavering sense of duty to the Smyth County Sheriff’s Office. It was here that he truly came into his own, pursuing specialized training and refining his skills. But it was not only in the field where Deputy Reedy made his mark, it was in the hearts of the people he touched.

“In early 2023, Hunter became deeply involved in community policing, a role that seemed tailor-made for his generous spirit. He became a real-life teddy bear to the children living in a local apartment complex, where he was more than just a deputy — he was a mentor, a playmate and a friend.

“From manning the bounce house to leading spirited touch football games, Hunter poured his heart into creating safe, joyful spaces for the youngest members of his community.

“Whether dancing in the streets during prom night or answering phones in dispatch when no one else could, Hunter was the kind of person who showed up. He was the deputy who never backed down from danger, but also the friend who always brought the coffee,” Smith continued.

Bettina and Hunter’s story is nothing short of magical. They originally met at birthday parties for the children of their

friends. They saw each other a few times outside of the events, but it was only in passing.

Dinner parties Bettina had with girlfriends and their kids turned into full-fledged events, playing cards and watching movies. Hunter's boss was married to one of her friends. He and other officers, including Hunter, started coming to the weekly events.

The first time that Hunter attended, Bettina came running through her mom's house, where she and her boys lived, and slid from the kitchen to the living room on her sock feet. She lost her balance, fell and landed right in front of him. She remembers laughing so hard that her ribs hurt and looking up and saying, "Hey" to him. This embarrassing but hilarious moment led to a pattern of daily communication between the two.

The conversations went on for months, and during this time Bettina's youngest son, Kaden, underwent a kidney transplant.

"We became really good friends and started hanging out more and more," she said. "My two boys were my priority, but Hunter took right up with them from the start."

The friendship continued until one day Hunter asked her on a dinner date. It wasn't long before they officially became a couple and said they loved each other. The romance continued at Disney World in Orlando, Fla., in February 2020 on a trip for Kaden, sponsored by Make A Wish. On her birthday, and atop a ferris wheel, Hunter dropped to one knee and asked her to marry him. The scream — "Yes," from inside the enclosed car — sealed the deal.

On Oct. 17, 2020, they were married on a farm where Hunter worked as a kid. Their forever had just started, and they soon added their daughter to the fold. The adoption of the boys by Hunter made the family circle complete, and they settled into a house with 10 acres.

"We would camp, ride the trails with side by sides and go to Dollywood," Bettina said. "We wanted to show our babies



The Reedy men, father and son, after hunting on family farm



A win in the dirt for Cowboy Reedy

the world and build a homestead that we could teach them work ethic." Bettina is still working on their dream.

"I am sure that it might take me a little longer now, but it is one I am trying hard to honor," she said.

Bettina is left to be part of the legacy that is being continued by his children, friends and family. Hunter Reedy was more than the uniform he wore, she said.

"Yes, he was a law enforcement officer,

it was his job, what he did every day," said Bettina. "He took that seriously and wanted to make our county a safer place for our children to call home. He wanted change for the children who did not have it so lucky, to be an inspiration and a role model for them to look up to.

"But he was a daddy, a husband, a son, a brother, a best friend, and so much more to everyone," she continued. "The light God blessed him with will forever shine in those he touched."

MONAHAN: COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, ADVOCACY LEADER

By Rich Goszka
SSPBA VA/WV Field Representative

Steven Monahan, the Fairfax County Chapter president of the Virginia Division of the Southern States Police Benevolent Association, exemplifies dedication to public service and advocacy. With over a decade of law enforcement experience and a proven track record in leadership roles, Monahan has become a cornerstone in advancing officers' rights and fostering collaboration between police personnel and local government.

A distinguished career in law enforcement

Monahan began his career with the Herndon Police Department in 2011 and joined the Fairfax County Police Department in 2015, where he has served in various capacities. Rising through the ranks to sergeant, Monahan has held roles including labor relations officer, Franconia neighborhood patrol unit member and instructor with the civil disturbance unit leadership team.

His professional development includes specialized training in narcotics investigations, hostage negotiations and conflict mitigation, equipping him to handle diverse and challenging situations effectively.

In addition to his operational duties, Monahan has received numerous accolades for his service, including the Reston Chamber of Commerce Gold and Bronze Medals of Valor and the Metropolitan Police Department Ribbon of Valor. These commendations underscore his unwavering commitment to excellence in public safety.

Leadership in SSPBA and collective bargaining

Monahan's tenure with the SSPBA began in 2011, and his rise through the ranks of the Fairfax County Chapter has been marked by significant milestones. Serving as vice president, senior vice



Monahan (third from left) with the PBA Fairfax Chapter collective bargaining committee

president and president since 2022, Monahan has been instrumental in advocating for the rights and interests of Fairfax County law enforcement officers.

His most notable accomplishment is his leadership on the Collective Bargaining Committee. Under Monahan's guidance, the SSPBA secured the vote to become the bargaining agent for Fairfax County officers in January 2023. This achievement marked a historic moment, as it laid the groundwork for negotiating the county's first-ever collective bargaining contract.

Through tireless dedication and negotiation, Monahan and the committee successfully ratified the contract in December 2023. The agreement, effective from 2024 through 2027, represents a significant step forward in ensuring fair wages, benefits and working conditions for officers.

Sean McGowan, executive director of the SSPBA, said Monahan's demeanor suits him well to the role. "Steve Monahan exemplifies all the traits necessary for leadership in his role as a sergeant with the Fairfax Police Department, which he expertly balances with his role as president of the Fairfax County Chapter of the Virginia Police Benevolent Association," said McGowan. "His calm, thoughtful, respectful and straightforward approach directly benefits those he represents and fosters respect from administrators, elected

officials and chapter members."

A vision for the future

Monahan's efforts have not only shaped the immediate future of Fairfax County law enforcement but also set a precedent for advocacy and collaboration throughout Virginia. His leadership exemplifies the core values of the SSPBA: professionalism, dedication and a commitment to enhancing the welfare of law enforcement officers.

As Fairfax County officers work under their first collective bargaining contract, Monahan's legacy as a transformative leader and tireless advocate will undoubtedly continue to inspire those he serves and leads.



Monahan in Paris working security during the 2024 Summer Olympics

NEARLY 50 ATTORNEYS ASSEMBLE FOR ANNUAL LEGAL SEMINAR



SSPBA attorneys gather annually for a legal seminar in Atlanta

By Andrew Lindsey
PBA Operations Project Coordinator

On Friday, April 26, 2024, SSPBA welcomed 46 attorneys from across the Southeast to Atlanta, Ga., for a legal training seminar about the challenges faced when representing law enforcement officers. Attorneys traveled from all over the region to attend the event titled “Officer Needs Assistance: PBA’s Perspective on the Challenges of Representing Law Enforcement Officers Today.”

PBA staff attorneys gave presentations on topics addressing the basics of handling a critical incident, the ever-increasing number of members facing criminal charges for law enforcement actions, the psychology of critical incidents and how legal developments such as Giglio letters continue to be involved with our efforts to protect our members.

PBA panel attorney Michael Cory spoke to the group about examining shooting incidents from a neuroscience perspective, making the case that officers often find themselves forced to rely on instinct in such scenarios.

Officers involved in these types of incidents find themselves exposed to high levels of stress, which can impact an officer’s testimony and memory of the event. Cory’s presentation conveyed information about the best practices for protecting members involved in such incidents.



SSPBA staff attorney Dana Nicolazzi Johnson speaks during the legal seminar

Staff attorneys also discussed other crucial matters that can arise even after a critical incident has been settled legally: internal investigations, civil lawsuits and issues with an officer’s post certification. The growing issue of Giglio actions was also discussed. These actions effectively end an officer’s law enforcement career via a blanket ban on offering testimony, as the letter labels the officer as a dishonest reporter. Giglio actions typically have no system for review, leaving the afflicted officer no chance for due process to occur.

The event concluded with a discussion about post-traumatic stress disorder and how it can affect officers after a particularly traumatic event. The presentation noted the importance of

ensuring members in the aftermath of a critical incident are managing their mental health. Charlie Cordell, SSPBA corporate counsel, said that “just because a member is told they are cleared to go back does not mean they are ready to go back.”

Equally as important as the topics presented was the opportunity the event provided for PBA staff to learn from, interact with and show appreciation for the attorneys who help our organization fulfill its mission to protect our members every day. The attorneys were also able to exchange valuable information about how best to represent members in different scenarios. PBA staff appreciate the opportunity to host panel attorneys and to thank them for all that they do.

RUSPOLI HELPS MSPBA REACH 5K MEMBERSHIP MARK

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

When Shaun Ruspoli of the Gulfport, Miss., police department transferred into his agency, fellow officers convinced him that membership in the PBA would be “beneficial in several ways,” so he joined. Little did he know that his enrollment would make him the 5,000th member of MSPBA.

As an officer in Gulfport, Ruspoli, who is relatively new to Mississippi, patrols his assigned area to help ensure the safety of the public and property.

“I enjoy community policing and building rapport with the citizens,” he said.

Ruspoli was born and raised in Las Cruces, N.M., and graduated in 2008 from Mayfield High School in Las Cruces. He played football in school and studied martial arts for nine years, earning a first-degree black belt.

“I was an only child and tried to be a good kid growing up,” he said. “My family was very loving and supportive. I’ve always strived to be someone important, so I served in the military and law enforcement.”

As a Seabee in the U.S. Navy from 2008 to 2014, Ruspoli was deployed to Guam, Kuwait, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa.

“I loved and missed the comradery, which inspired me to pursue law enforcement,” he said, pointing out his favorite part of serving in the Navy.

Ruspoli attended the police academy in North Little Rock, Ark., and became certified. He worked with the Pulaski County Sheriff’s Office starting in 2020.

He moved to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences PD in 2022 and has been with Gulfport PD since 2024. Throughout his career, he’s earned attendance and dedication awards.



At left, Ruspoli is sworn into office. At right, he's on the job in his patrol car.



Officer Ruspoli with his wife, Jennifer

Ruspoli is married and said his wife, Jennifer, is “the greatest influence in (his) law enforcement career, very loving and supportive.” He has five children: Brooklyn, Caleb, Ryleigh, Hannah and Alexandria. In his spare time, he loves to read, play drums and board games, and spend time with his wife.

For Ruspoli, the best part about being a law enforcement officer is “the

satisfaction of assuring people that you are there for them.” Conversely, he said the worst part of being an officer is that his wife is always worried about his safety. He tries to take this into consideration in his daily work and his approach to life is, “I never quit.”

Ruspoli offers the following advice for those who may be interested in working in law enforcement: “Don’t stress the small things, and always watch your six.”



Recovery and Memorial Funds

In addition to the comprehensive benefits package that PBA offers its members, the PBF works to raise additional funds for the families of fallen officers and those who are experiencing unforeseen financial hardships.

Last year, the PBF assisted 14 members!

For a fund to be successful, there are questions that can be asked before making a request.

The more “yes” answers, the better the chance of success.

- Has the member or their beneficiary given permission for a fundraiser?
- Is there a monetary goal of the fundraiser?
- Is there a local chapter in place?
- If so, are the chapter members going to be involved with the fundraising?
- Is the agency of the member willing to promote the fundraiser through their social media and media contacts?
- Are there local businesses in the member's jurisdiction that will contribute to the fundraiser or otherwise promote the fundraiser through their social media?
- Does the member or chapter/division leader making the request have any media contacts that would be willing to do a story?

For more information on the PBF and its initiatives, please scan the QR code or visit:

pbfi.org/about-us



BLUE LIGHTS SHINE ON IN COLUMBUS, GA AT CHRISTMAS

By Shanon Zeisloft
West Georgia Chapter President

For the 11th year, the 2024 Operation Blue Lights and Smiles was our annual event. The festivities began at Columbus State University, followed by a dramatic procession as officers drove toward Piedmont Regional Hospital with blue lights flashing and sirens blaring.

Members of the West Georgia Chapter visited the hospital, spreading holiday cheer among the children celebrating the season.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg once said, “To make life a little better for people less fortunate than you; that’s what I think a meaningful life is. One lives not just for oneself but for one’s community.”

Her words remind us of the importance of serving others, and they serve as a motto, a badge and a way of life for every participant in Blue Lights and Smiles as we work daily to support our community.

This year also marked the 11th anniversary of the collaboration between the West Georgia Chapter PBA and Piedmont’s Bill and Olivia Amos Children’s Hospital.

Operation Blue Lights and Smiles was a fabulous success. Officers from various local agencies delivered toys to children at Piedmont Hospital, adding extra joy to many families during the holiday season and throughout the year.

Children eagerly gathered by the windows to catch a glimpse of the flashing blue lights as the patrol cars, fire trucks and decorated Jeeps arrived, and the children responded by waving their flashlights in response to all the lights’ arrival.

Another highlight was watching Santa being lifted in the bucket of a Columbus Fire and EMS fire truck, his big red sack of presents in tow as he waved to everyone who couldn’t be home for the holiday.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the public servants who participate each year. A special shout-out goes to Santa, the Columbus Police Department, the Muscogee County Sheriff’s Office, “The Grinch,” the Boy Scouts and the

Chattahoochee Crawlers Jeep Club. Rounding out the festivities was Beethoven, a deaf therapy dog popular with patients. We look forward to seeing everyone again in 2025.



Santa, the Grinch and Beethoven help this patient smile.



Decorated Jeeps help light up the night for Christmas.

SSPBA PROVIDES THE LEGAL BENEFITS WE PROMISE

**Total Requests for Service Opened in 2024:
2337**

MOST COMMON REQUEST BY CATEGORY

Disciplinary	323
Grievance	38
Serious Accident	80
Criminal Investigation	387
Lawsuit	516
Death in Custody	102
Shooting	587
Legal Opinion	174
Certification	115

MEET HUNTER WHITLOCK, SC SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

Academic achievements and volunteer efforts have paid off for Hunter Whitlock of Irmo, S.C., as he was awarded a scholarship through the SCPBA by the Police Benevolent Foundation.

Whitlock arrived at Presbyterian College in South Carolina with a health science certification and a veterinary science certification already under his belt via his high school career and technology classes.

These advancements should be beneficial as he embarks on his college career since he hopes to eventually become a dentist. Whitlock is majoring in biology with a minor in history just because he “loves to learn history.”

He chose Presbyterian because he liked that it is a small school where he can get to know his professors. The biology and history programs at Presbyterian are “great,” said Whitlock. But ultimately, he chose to attend Presbyterian because “it felt right when I toured it.”

Whitlock grew up in Irmo. He described it as “a small town, but close to the state capital, so there is a lot to do. There are lots of places to eat and have fun with your family.”

He graduated from Dutch Fork High School in May 2024. He was a member of the Beta Club. Whitlock also gained useful experience in the medical field by doing clinical rotations as he worked with patients to learn about his chosen field in medical health science class.

Volunteer work is something that Whitlock said he has enjoyed. During high school, he spent time making cards to send to veterans and nursing home residents, assembling care packages to share with orphans and working at community-oriented events.

Whitlock also logged hours at the bunny rescue facility cleaning enclosures and spending time with the bunnies to



Future dentist Hunter Whitlock



Graduate Hunter Whitlock

socialize them and prepare them for adoption. Additionally, as a United Way volunteer, he mentored and read to children at a local elementary school.

Because his father, Ryan Whitlock, is a retired police officer and his mother, Gayle Whitlock, is a teacher and a former police officer, Whitlock sees the importance of giving back to his community. Whitlock’s dad served for 21 years with Lexington Police Department, where he was on the Community Action Team and worked as a patrol officer.

When he was younger, his father was a member of the University of South Carolina Police Department and the Kingstree Police Department. Whitlock’s mother served at USCPD and taught classes at the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy. Hunter named his mother as his greatest influence growing up.

“She does so much in our home and takes care of everyone,” he said. “She has done so much for me.”

Being in law enforcement is a high calling, said Whitlock.

“Police officers uphold the peace and keep others safe,” he said. “They risk their lives to do so. I watched the long hours they worked. My dad lost a close friend in the line of duty. This profession is not for the faint of heart, and I have nothing but respect for law enforcement.”

Whitlock’s father was led to law enforcement by to the example of his grandfather, who was assistant police chief in Liberty, S.C. “When I served as an officer, I enjoyed helping people and meeting community members,” said the elder Whitlock. “I have always had peace of mind as a SSPBA member that if I needed help, they would be there. I also appreciate all that they do to support law enforcement officers and their families.”

Whitlock’s membership in the SCPBA as a retired officer is what enabled his son to be eligible to receive this scholarship. He is honored Hunter was selected as deserving of the award.

“I am so proud of Hunter and how hard he has worked throughout his high school years,” the retired officer said. “While studying to keep his grades up, he still found time to commit to community service and organizations like the Beta Club. This makes me proud of the young man he has become. I know that he will work just as hard at Presbyterian College as he did in high school. Hunter dreams of being a dentist and wants to go to a school where he can best prepare to meet that goal. I can’t wait to see what the



With his parents, Ryan and Gayle, Hunter Whitlock accepts scholarship check from SSPBA Senior VP Dave Soderberg.

future holds for Hunter.

"I am extremely grateful for the PBF's scholarship program, and the scholarship awarded to my son," Whitlock continued. "I have seen firsthand how hard Hunter works, but it was an honor to hear Senior Vice President Dave Soderberg recognize his achievements and efforts. This was such a proud moment for my wife and me. This is an example of how the SSPBA makes a positive impact on the lives of law enforcement families."

Hunter said he was excited and a bit nervous about going to college but is so happy to have the opportunity. Though he is a history buff and listed George Washington as his favorite leader, he cited his favorite video game character, Zenyatta from Overwatch, as the source of a quote that resonates with him: "Change often comes uninvited, what you make of it is up to you."

The changes that he'll encounter as a freshman at Presbyterian College are not uninvited, but with the support and encouragement of his family and wealth of experience behind him, he's bound to make the most of them.



Hunter Whitlock volunteers with bunnies.



Hunter's parents, Gayle and Ryan, are retired police officers.

NCPBA MEMBER IRIZARRY IS '24 OFFICER OF THE YEAR IN MONROE

By Cindy Baugher
Communications Project Coordinator

Less than six years into his career as a law enforcement officer, Detective Frank Irizarry of the Monroe, N.C., Police Department, has earned two prestigious honors.

He was awarded the Medal of Valor for his heroic actions in April 2024, and he also earned the title of Officer of the Year for 2024.

Initially, Irizarry entered public service as a paramedic with the Union County Emergency Medical Service in 2011 and became a supervisor in 2014. Along the way, he found he wanted to use his skills as a medic to help law enforcement incorporate a medical element into the Special Response Team to treat injured officers.

“When I worked full-time as a paramedic, I was able to join the Special Response Team as a medic,” he said.

“We were attached to the Union County Sheriff’s Office and the Monroe Police Department’s SRT team. One day, I was working off-duty EMS at a high school football game, and Chief Gilliard from Monroe police asked to speak to me. His son attended the school at the time.

“He said that he had heard that I may have an interest in law enforcement, to which I told him that I did. He offered me a chance to go to school and work for Monroe PD, which I took him up on. Best decision I ever made,” Irizarry continued.

Irizarry attended rookie school at BLET at South Piedmont Community College, and after resigning from his full-time position with Union County EMS, he started with the Monroe PD in August 2019. He continues to work part-time as a paramedic.

He was a narcotics detective for two years with Monroe PD and served with patrol prior to that. Twice, he was recognized as Officer of the Month.



NYC native Frank Irizarry moved to Monroe, N.C., and excels at his career

As a police officer, Irizarry maintains his medical certifications and helps the department as their infectious control officer.

He also tried out for and made the SRT as an operator, as well as the unit’s medic, a role that “sets our department ahead of others,” stated Sgt. Barney Malone’s letter nominating Irizarry for OOTY.

“If history has taught us one thing, it is that Det. Irizarry is always trying to challenge himself to the next level of excellence,” the nomination letter stated. “Det. Irizarry transferred to the narcotics

unit and spent time learning about drug and vice investigations.

“With his stint there, he was able to develop skills that allowed him to take a position with the United States Marshals Service as a task force officer. As a TFO with the Marshals, Det. Irizarry tracks, hunts and locates violent offenders in the worst of criminal cases stemming from state, local and federal defendants.”

In the encounter for which he earned the Medal of Valor, Irizarry was able to successfully subdue a suspect who was shooting at responding North Carolina officers for close to an hour. The tragic

confrontation ended with four fallen officers and four injured officers.

Malone's nomination letter described Irizarry's life-saving actions during the crisis:

"On April 29th of 2024, Det. Irizarry was challenged once again in one of the worst incidents that a law enforcement officer could ever be involved in and likely one of the worst incidents in the state of North Carolina history. The USMS were tasked to execute an arrest warrant on a violent state offender in the Charlotte area.

"An operation that the USMS have done time and time again on multiple occasions. Det. Irizarry and the team, while attempting to arrest the defendant, came under a barrage of gun fire at the residence. The typical law enforcement shooting lasts mere seconds to a few minutes, but in this instance the USMS were pinned down by the suspect for close to an hour while several law enforcement officers were shot from the suspect's high ground position.

"During the gunfight the suspect attempted to take an offensive position at a different location at the residence when he encountered Det. Irizarry. You can call it luck of the draw, divine intervention, or fate that Det. Irizarry was holding cover at a position that the suspect presented himself.

"Without due regard for his own safety, Det. Irizarry engaged the suspect and was able to stop the threat. As a result of the long-term gunfight, Det. Irizarry is credited with ending the horrific gunfight with the suspect and potentially saving many more lives."

The importance of a PBA membership was demonstrated to Irizarry following this event.

"It was recommended to all of us upon graduation to become a member," he said. "I always thought it was a good idea, just in case. You never know what could happen in this profession, and I will be forever grateful to the PBA for how I was treated after my OIS. I'll forever be an advocate for the PBA." Irizarry was born in New York

City and moved to Miami, Fla., when he was 6.

"The best thing about growing up in Miami is the diversity," he said. "People from all walks of life live in Miami and I was blessed to be exposed to them."

He speaks Spanish and French and is trying to learn Italian. He also knows a few words of Breton, a dialect of French originating from the region of France where his mother is from.

After his graduation from Coral Reef Senior High in 2002, Irizarry attended Miami-Dade College and earned an associate degree.

He has been with his wife, Camille, for four years, which Irizarry calls the best years of his life.

"She's also in public service, working as a paramedic at Union EMS," he said. "(As LEO) we put our spouses through a lot, and she's been right there with me every step of the way. Her only rule is do what makes you happy."

To relax and unwind, Irizarry goes to the gym regularly. He also enjoys playing guitar and has a motorcycle that he rides "from time to time."

Irizarry named two leaders in his life who he considers his favorite and most influential: "The first is Shilo Garner. He was the team leader in Union County SRT when I joined as a medic back in 2013. Besides being very tactically

proficient, he cared about each and every one of us on the team. He would routinely say that he couldn't sleep at all before a search warrant because he was concerned about all his planning, concerned about us.

"The second is now-Chief Rhett Bolen with Monroe PD," he continued. "When I first started in patrol, he was my lieutenant. He would always watch us patrol officers from a distance. He would let us do our job, but we always knew he was there and that he had our back. He had the reputation of being an amazing officer and to this day has a certain 'presence.' But I don't know one officer that doesn't aspire to be like him one day, myself included. He truly cared about his people and continues that to this day. He still has our back, and I know that for a fact."

Malone summed up his nomination of Irizarry this way: "If there is one phrase that stands out to me regarding Det. Irizarry's career and his actions on April 29, 2024, it would be a military phrase used by, and associated to, the United States Air Force Special Tactics Pararescue Jumpers known to many as 'PJs.' The phrase is 'Do no harm, do know harm.'"

"These highly trained individuals have a vast medical background to save lives in the battlefield, but are known to take the fight to the enemy if need be, with their extensive training and tactics."



Irizarry accepts his 2024 Officer of the Year Award

DIGITAL DETOX



If you're vacationing to a remote location or simply steering clear of your inbox for a weekend, you might have thought about grabbing a magazine or three. Studies have shown that readers both retain information and recognize branding through printed material much more than through digital media. Plus, you never have to worry about forgetting a power cord.

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3 REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN THE SSPBA



1. THE LEGAL REPRESENTATION WE OFFER OUR MEMBERS IS THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS!

The PBA provides an attorney to contact you regarding on-duty shootings or serious injuries arising from your law enforcement duties, going to the scene if necessary. The PBA provides an attorney to protect your individual interests if you are named as defendant in any civil or criminal action arising out of your duties as a law enforcement officer. NO CAP or LIMIT. Other organizations say they can match our legal benefits, but in the end, the PBA stands alone on this one.

2. THE PBA TAKES A STAND ON LEGISLATIVE MATTERS THAT AFFECT OUR MEMBERS!

The PBA maintains a professional staff of lobbyists to aid in obtaining legislation beneficial to the law enforcement profession. If there is critical legislation out there that will affect your job as a law enforcement professional, the PBA is ready to take action and let your voice be heard.

3. THE PBA PROVIDES YOUR LOVED ONES WITH THE SECURITY OF ONE OF THE BEST ACCIDENTAL DEATH BENEFIT PLANS IN THE INDUSTRY IN THE EVENT YOU ARE LOST IN THE LINE OF DUTY.

We believe that our accidental death benefit is the most generous of any such plan in our service area. Your beneficiary will receive: (1) your base salary for one year if you are killed in the performance of your law enforcement duties (maximum payment: \$70,000), or (2) \$10,000 if an accidental, non-occupational death, or to retired and reserve members, in accordance with the terms and limitations of our insurance policy which underwrites the benefit.

*A full description of these benefits and all others that come with a PBA membership can be found by visiting www.sspba.org.

OFFICER SURVIVAL

**YOU HAVE SWORN TO PROTECT AND SERVE THE PUBLIC.
TO GO HOME SAFE TO YOUR FAMILY IS THE GOAL.**

- **WATCH THEIR HANDS!**
- **KEEP YOUR GUN HAND FREE**
- **HEAD ON A SWIVEL**
- **WATCH YOUR BACK**
- **WAIT FOR BACK-UP**
- **BLADED BODY/INTERVIEW STANCE**
- **CARRY A FLASHLIGHT EVEN IN THE DAYTIME**
- **PRACTICE WITH YOUR FIREARM AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT. IT DOES!**

**NRA LAW
ENFORCEMENT
DIVISION**



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