



A publication of the Southern States PBA

BLUERVIEW

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE PBA IN 2025 & 2026, ISSUE 19

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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:

- Don't panic! Calm down and compose yourself.
- Don't rush into making a statement.
- Call the PBA Hotline: 1-800-233-3506.
- 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.

As a PBA member, you're not alone.
The PBA is there to protect your rights.



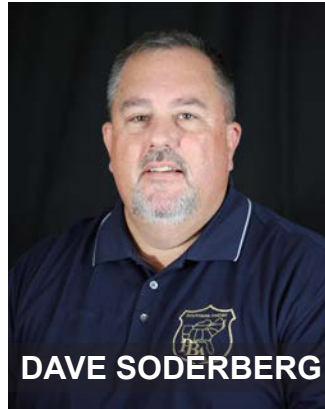
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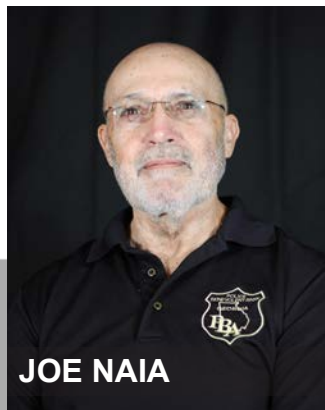
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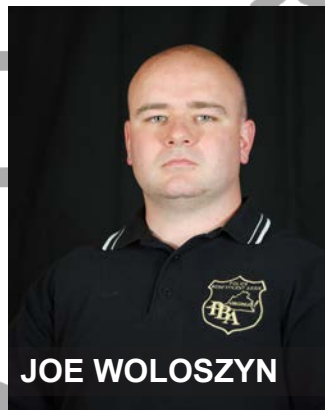
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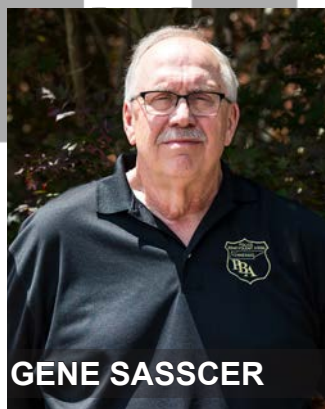
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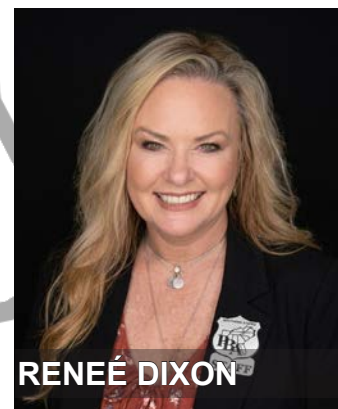
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RENEE DIXON

SSPBA CEO

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RENEE DIXON: SSPBA CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Renee Dixon's dedicated journey with the Southern State's Police Benevolent Association (SSPBA) spans nearly 40 years. Her career began humbly in 1987 as part of a high school vocational office training program. Because of her steady work ethic and deep commitment to the association's mission, SSPBA founder Jack Roberts identified her as a leader, and her responsibilities within the organization grew accordingly.

She was promoted to office manager in 1993 and became director of administrative services six years later in 1999. Renee was named chief operating officer in 2003. In 2015, Roberts entrusted Renee with overseeing the day-to-day operations under his direction of the company. June 2026, the SSPBA board of directors elected her chief executive officer.

Throughout nearly four decades of service, Renee has viewed her work not merely as a career, but as a part of her life. She remains focused on serving the law enforcement community with professionalism, care and gratitude. Outside of her leadership role at the SSPBA, she is the proud mother of three children: her son, Blake, and twin daughters Brittini and Brandi.

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(1966-2022)
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A LEGACY CONTINUES: 2026 SSPBA BOARD MEETING

By Brandi Dixon
Project Coordinator

By Joni Fletcher Cawthon
Senior Director of Legal Services

On June 5, 2026, the annual Southern States PBA and PBF Board meeting was held in McDonough, Ga., and it's certain to say, history was made.

Many important matters were addressed in the meeting, including legal, financial, operations, communications and federal legislative reports as well as the approval of lifetime memberships.

Also, notably, Tim Rutledge was presented with the accolade of honorary membership in SSPBA. By definition in the SSPBA Constitution, "Honorary members shall be those persons who are not eligible for active membership in the Association, but who have shown outstanding support for this Association and its members." The SSPBA Board deemed Rutledge to be worthy of this honor because of his extensive work and commitment to the mental health of law enforcement officers as demonstrated by his involvement and leadership in the PBF Behind the Badge seminars. This award was presented to Rutledge by SSPBA President Chris Skinner and Director of Foundation and Media Relations Randy Byrd.

Since 2023, Tim Rutledge, a retired Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics officer, has been the lead speaker for 20 Behind the Badge seminars. His passion for his profession of law enforcement has helped countless officers and their families find strategies and support to deal with the cumulative weight that a career in law enforcement can place on an individual.

There was also a particularly momentous vote by the SSPBA Board on the amendment to Article IV, Section 3 of the constitution which will have a lasting impact on the organization.

Jack Roberts, who has faithfully served



Jack Roberts and Renée Dixon show off new titles at SSPBA Board meeting.



Longtime CEO Jack Roberts announces he's stepping down at SSPBA meeting.

the SSPBA for over 40 years, was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award to acknowledge his unabating dedication and commitment to the SSPBA over the course of his life. His wife, Linda, was also recognized for the sacrifices their family made to effect change in the lives of officers all over the Southeast over the last four decades. To commemorate the award, Tim Rutledge presented Roberts with a custom gun box which held inscribed handcuffs and an engraved Glock 19.

Additionally, Roberts announced that he would be stepping down from his position as CEO mid-term and handing off the torch to Chief Operating Officer Renée Dixon. This was a bittersweet yet resolute decision for Roberts, and it was a well-deserved and accoladed moment to reflect upon his long and remarkable career. Roberts extended his gratitude to the audience at the board meeting.

"Everybody in this room and everyone who is listening to me — no matter what their positions are — you've been a great help to this organization," Roberts said. "It's the reason it's gotten to the point it's gotten to with 75,000 members

"Thank all of you very much for all you've done for this organization. You're the reason it's here. I was lucky enough to start it, and it's yours for the future. So, take care of it."

Renée Dixon, who has worked dutifully at the SSPBA for almost 40 years, was unanimously voted in as chief executive officer by the board of directors. She vowed to dedicate her life to continuing Roberts' legacy utilizing the values he instilled in her and to carrying the SSPBA forward with great pride, energy and commitment.

"First of all, I want you all to know

how much I appreciate your vote of confidence," said Dixon. "It's been a long time coming. There's a Terry Business School at the University of Georgia that my son attended, but I've been in the Jack Roberts Business School for 39 years — and I don't think I'll ever graduate.

"I vow to the board, and I vow to you, Jack Roberts, that I'm going to take your legacy, and I'm going to carry it out as long as I'm alive," she continued. "You sacrificed your life, your family, your children, your grandchildren, to do what you did for us. And not only did you teach me a set of business skills, but you taught me a set of life skills. I know we joke and we argue all the time, but I will never be able to thank you enough for what you've done for me as a person and for my family and for this organization.

"To Linda, thank you for your sacrifice and for letting him come and build this organization for 75,000-plus members and for over 100 families that are employed here. You made that sacrifice, and I appreciate that.

"I vow to you all that I'll do the best that I can do. Chris (Skinner, SSPBA president) and I are going to get in there and do the right thing. I am here to take Jack's legacy and carry it on. I want to keep doing what we're doing, add to what we have and carry this organization into the future with this wonderful board and this wonderful group of employees."

Dixon's first order of business and act as CEO was appointing Roberts as SSPBA senior advisor. She stated that it is essential to her that Roberts continue to play a key role in imparting his wisdom and acumen to the organization as she leads and takes the SSPBA to the next level.

We will be releasing a comprehensive in-depth article in our next issue of the Blue Review that will honor the dedication and legacy of Mr. Jack L. Roberts, the history of the career of Reneé Dixon, the effect Tim Rutledge has had on the Behind the Badge series and the milestone of 75,000-plus in membership.



New CEO Reneé Dixon addresses the SSPBA Board after being voted in to lead the organization.



Above, at left, Tim Rutledge presents Jack Roberts with a custom-made Lifetime Achievement Award. Right, incoming CEO Reneé Dixon watches Roberts address the board.



Photo at left, Jack Roberts addresses board while Reneé and others listen. At right, Jack and Linda Roberts with honorary member Tim Rutledge. Below, a cake to celebrate passing the 75,000 member milestone.



NCPBA DIVISION PRESIDENT DAVID ROSE HANGS UP UNIFORM

By Cindy Baugher
Assistant to Communications
Director

After 32 years of service, David Rose, president of the NCPBA Division, has decided to hang up his badge and retire from his duties as assistant chief of the Winston-Salem Police Department.

As he begins his retirement, his son, Austin, aptly described just who his dad is.

“My dad, David Rose, was an outstanding police officer who consistently put the safety and well-being of the citizens of Winston-Salem first, approaching every shift with professionalism, courage and a strong sense of duty that earned him respect from colleagues and the public,” he said.

“Beyond the badge, he was an exceptional dad managing a challenging career with being present, supportive and loving at home,” continued Austin. “He taught valuable lessons about integrity, responsibility and kindness through his actions every day, serving as a true role model for me and my brother. I am incredibly proud of the man he is and the legacy he’s built.”

Born in the North Georgia small town of Fort Oglethorpe, Rose also lived in Ringgold, Ga., near Chattanooga, Tenn. He later moved, around age 9, to another small town called Clintwood, Va.

Kingsport, Tenn., was the next stop for the family, and it was there that he graduated from Kingsport Christian School in 1989. It’s the town he still calls home.

After graduation, it was on to Piedmont Bible College, in Winston-Salem, N.C., where he played basketball and majored in physical education. It was at Piedmont Bible College that he met his wife, Nichole Rose.



Retired Assistant Chief David Rose

“Being the wife of the ‘badge’ was not even on my radar when I met my future husband in college,” she said. “We were both athletes, and he was majoring in physical education. It literally was a month after we were married that he told me it was his childhood dream to be a police officer.”

“I was excited to support him on this journey because his passion was so intoxicating,” continued Nichole. “Never did I imagine what that would mean for our future family.”

With Nichole working as a teacher, her husband was searching for any full-time opportunity to work in law enforcement.

“People just didn’t leave law enforcement at that time,” David Rose said. “East Tennessee, southwest Virginia, you had to wait for somebody to retire and hope you could get the job. It seemed that everybody there wanted either a college degree or prior military before they would hire you.”

“So, I decided that I would go in the

military, and while I was there, I could finish my degree, and when I came out, I’d be marketable,” he continued. “So, we literally put everything in a storage building in Tennessee, and I was getting ready to join the Air Force. I moved my wife and son, Tyler, back to Winston-Salem so she could stay with her parents while I was in basic training.”

Before he officially joined the Air Force, however, he received a phone call from the Winston-Salem Police Department offering him a position.

“I had put in an application there a year earlier,” he said, “and had not heard anything back from them. So, they called me and asked if I’m still interested in the job.”

After attending rookie school in North Carolina, Rose became a patrol officer, then went to a foot patrol unit/street crimes unit for two years and then was transferred to the detective division for several years.

A promotion to sergeant was next. He later became a narcotic sergeant for about seven years, followed by a promotion to lieutenant, and then back to narcotics.

Of course, there were memorable points along the way. Rose said one in particular happened when he and his partner, both detectives, earned a commendation from the FBI. They had arrested the most prolific serial bank robber in North Carolina. “That was a pretty big deal,” Rose said.

Around the time COVID hit in 2020, Rose got an interesting opportunity. For the better part of two years, he worked on an innocence case. North Carolina is the only state in America that has an innocence inquiry commission.

Several people who had been charged with homicide claimed that they were not guilty, and the case ended up in the

hands of the commission. By working on the inquiry commission, he got to know the ins and outs of how that process worked. Eventually, the case went in front of a three-judge panel, where it was affirmed unanimously. Following that, Rose went back as a patrol lieutenant for a while and later was promoted to captain. As captain, he was put back in over criminal investigations, supervising about 45 detectives.

The legal benefits that come with a PBA membership are well-known, and it was these legal benefits that first convinced Rose to become a member. However, he didn't stop with merely maintaining his membership for the legal coverage.

"I'm that hokey old guy that would sit around and think about our city politics and how we could do better and help take care of some of these law enforcement issues," he said. "We had a DA here who was very engaged in politics, and he challenged me. 'Why don't you call the PBA? I bet they have something.'"

"I called the PBA and Randy Byrd (then NCPBA Division president) answered the phone and I felt like I'd known Randy for 30 years," said David Rose. "I asked him, 'How do we do this?' because I thought there was a lot more we could be doing. And he starts telling me everything that was being done. And I felt like I'd had my head buried in the sand for 20 years."

Byrd invited Rose to an upcoming political screening.

"I don't think I made it to lunchtime of that screening before I figured out that this is what we need to be doing in Winston-Salem," he said.

Knowing that he wanted to become active at the local chapter level, Rose relied on help from Byrd and John Midgett, NCPBA executive director, to revive the Winston-Salem chapter, bringing it out of receivership.

"We had to set up a steering committee, and we had visions of where we wanted to take it," said David Rose. "I think John and Randy probably got tired of taking my calls that first year, but they were so

gracious in helping us set this thing up and get it off the ground.

"Then we started doing screenings on the local level," continued Rose. "Anytime we'd have a screening, I'd go to it. Then, because of my position as a chapter president, I could go to the board meetings. And there I saw the SSPBA, this room full of people. I, jokingly and sincerely, said then that the PBA is the Chick-fil-A of our industry. These folks just seemed happy about helping cops. You call them on the phone, they help. They showed up at this board meeting in droves, and we did the leadership training, and so, my eyes were opened. I realized that somebody 40 years ago saw what the possibilities were, and I was all in at that point."

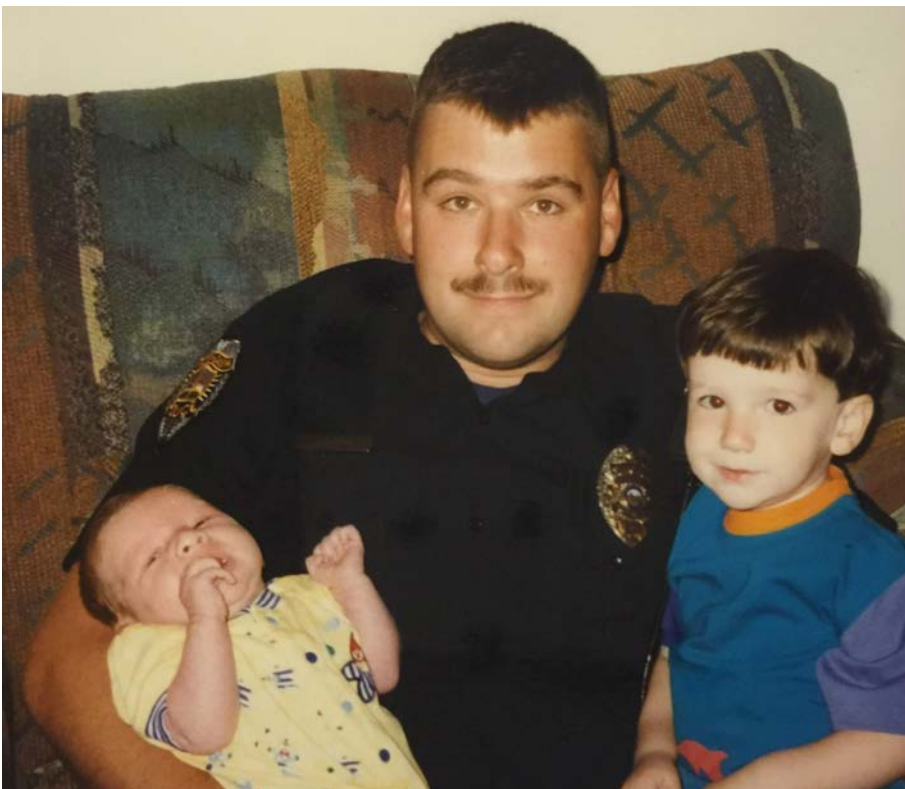
After becoming "all in" with the PBA, Rose realized he enjoyed the legislative side of things — such as getting 25-year retirement bills passed and Giglio due process legislation approved. Calling it frustrating and monotonous at times, he also said, "It's a long game."

As he rose through the ranks of the WSPD from sergeant to assistant chief, David became more active with the PBA and served as an invaluable PBA leader. Rose said getting involved with the PBA was the most profound thing for him personally in his law enforcement career.

He also remembered the chapter's wins along the way, some of them simple things the members wanted to do, and others with a much larger impact for officers in the area.

"For example, 'No Shave November' was suggested to raise money for charities," he said. "And we convinced the chief to let us do that (clean shaven was the norm at the time), so we donated about \$10,000 to the Brenner Children's Hospital from that initiative.

"Also, at my very first meeting with a police chief as a chapter president, we went in asking for very simple things, like expanding the take home car program," he continued, "and later, in a subsequent meeting about pay raises, the chief told me, 'I'm not asking them for anything. I'll



Rose as a young police officer with his boys, Tyler and Austin



N.C. State Rep. Jeff Zenger (l) with David Rose

tell them how bad it is, but I'm not asking for anything.”

Under Rose’s leadership, Winston-Salem officers received their highest-ever pay raises, and civil service due process procedures that had been sought after for more than 30 years were also established.

“To see Winston-Salem end up being the highest paid department in the region, and to see Winston-Salem have a take home car program that allows you to live up to 60 miles from the city center — those were big wins,” said David Rose. “Out of six agencies, we were ranked sixth in pay when we started the chapter, and within about five years, we were ranked No. 1 in pay.”

Rose credited the victories of his chapter to the dedication of the eight or so members who show up every month for the meeting and do the work with local decision makers.

“They were willing to give a little bit of time and move the ball for a whole lot of people,” he said.

In 2019, Rose was elected NC Division

secretary and served in that role until he was elected division president in January 2022.

“It really came out of the blue, and the timing couldn't have been better,” said Rose of the presidential win. “The time I spent with my PBA work is more gratifying than the law enforcement career I had, and I'm one of the few people in America that always knew what they wanted to do and got to do that. So, my policing career was extremely gratifying, but the PBA work is just at another level.”

Rose became a lifetime member of the SSPBA on Aug. 26, 2022, and was appointed to the SSPBA board in June 2023.

During his years in law enforcement, Rose was a member of several boards. The attorney general appointed him to the North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission. He has served on this board for nine years. This commission is important, Rose said, because it sets the standards and training for Basic Law Enforcement Training and

decides disciplinary issues regarding certification. Within that commission, he has served on three of the four committees.

“And that's a big deal for the PBA,” Rose said. “We'd been asking for a permanent seat on that commission for about a decade. Randy Byrd and I started out on the board together in 2017. He had an appointment, I had an appointment, and we've been able to keep one of those appointments now for nine years. That's probably the pinnacle achievement. And that's really not a personal achievement — that's a PBA achievement.”

Byrd is director of Foundation and Media Relations for SSPBA and served as NC Division president for many years before passing the mantle to David Rose in 2022. Byrd said he called Midgette about his earlier conversations with David.

“I think I have found the real deal,” Byrd said of Rose.

These words would become somewhat prophetic through the years as David embraced the PBA and rebuilt the Winston-Salem Triad Chapter and, in the process, made long-lasting changes for members through the political process.

“Succession planning was at the forefront of my mind for several years,” said Byrd. “Our board had made so much progress in 12 years, and the work needed to continue.

“David presented dynamic leadership skills that I knew would take us farther down the road and move us into a new era of success in North Carolina,” he continued. “I wasn't mistaken. David has moved the bar.”

After years of working with him, Midgette shared Byrd’s sentiments about Rose.

“Mark Twain once said, ‘The most important two days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why,’” Midgette said. “David

Rose has figured out the why — as a police officer, father, husband, son, friend and PBA leader. Through this gift, David has mastered the responsibilities of leadership with the needs and understandings of the working cop. While all too rare, such integrity and courage are essential for the future of the law enforcement profession and ensures the continued mission of service to our members.”

Rose’s impact on law enforcement was obvious at his retirement party. Several legislators, all of the area superior court judges and the district attorney paid tribute.

One of those N.C. representatives, Jeff Zenger, described his experiences with Rose.

“David is great to work with,” said Zenger. “He understands how things work in Raleigh, which helps as we strategize for a solution that can get through the legislative process. David’s greatest strength is educating others on the issues.

“When you get in the trenches and do the heavy lifting, you get to know the character of folks,” Zenger continued. “You have to have folks that you can not only trust but depend on. Dave is that guy. The PBA could not have a better guy as an advocate, and, as a legislator, I could not have a better friend to work with.”

Looking back on 30 years of service with law enforcement and PBA, the high points are special to Rose. However, his family is what he is most proud of — all four are public servants. Nichole is now a retired teacher and administrator from the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System. Tyler is a police officer with the city of King, N.C. Austin is a firefighter with the Winston-Salem Fire Department.

“I’m very proud to be in a family where all of us are spending our lives in public service,” Rose said. “I believe it’s somewhere around 80 years of service so far from our family.”

His family’s record of public service is a point of pride for Rose.

“I think my biggest accomplishment is doing all that I’ve done while staying married to the same person,” said David Rose. “It really speaks highly of the woman I married.”

Nichole is happy to speak of her husband’s achievements.

“Through the WSPD, he not only was an amazing police officer, he was an amazing husband, father and friend who created an extended family for our family,” she said. “That was God’s plan. I am so proud of him and thankful that he chose me to join him on this journey from a small-town volunteer police officer to the assistant chief of the Winston-Salem Police Department.”

Together, the couple has four grandchildren who will undoubtedly take up a lot of Rose’s free time in retirement, along with another favorite pastime, driving his racecar. He’s also hoping to find time to play a little more golf.

Shooting some hoops with the family may be in the mix as well, given that his family has more than just public service in common. Each of the four Roses

played basketball in college, and all four can dunk a basketball.

“That’s on a 10-foot goal, too,” David Rose said.

Never one to do anything halfway, and given his devotion to PBA causes, Rose intends to stay busy with the PBA even though he has retired from policing.

Tyler sums up how many feel about his dad.

“From T-ball to ‘the trenches,’ he has been my role model and mentor, setting the standard for hard work, discipline and doing the right thing, even when no one is watching,” he said.

“He is one of the hardest-working men I know — a devoted husband to my mother, a steady father to my brother and I, a proud father-in-law to my wife, and a loving grandfather to our two children,” Tyler continued. “He’s the kind of man people look up to daily, sometimes literally, when he’s standing in the way with advice no one asked for but everyone needed. These days he’s traded the badge for a racecar, and while his driving ability is still ‘improving,’ his determination remains championship-level.”



David Rose (r) and Randy Byrd served together on the North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission.

In 2025, 115 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 seven 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 who you left behind. May He bring them peace and strength to continue on their journey.



Lt. Mark Meadows
Irondale (Ala.) Police Department
End of Watch: Jan. 6, 2025



Officer Jeremy R. Labonte
Roswell (Ga.) Police Department
End of Watch: Feb. 7, 2025



Capt. Helio A. Garcia III
South Fulton (Ga.) Police Department
End of Watch: April 16, 2025



Deputy Brandon Ray Sikes
Columbia County (Ga.) Sheriff's Office
End of Watch: April 26, 2025



Officer David Rose
DeKalb County (Ga.) Police Department
End of Watch: Aug. 8, 2025



Officer Charles Riley
Iberville Parish (La.) Police Department
End of Watch: Oct. 6, 2025



Deputy Justin Bradford Mowery
Blount County (Tenn.) Sheriff's Office
End of Watch: Dec. 28, 2025

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

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 injured in the line of duty.

Last year, the PBF assisted numerous members with recovery and memorial funds!

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 its 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



PBA'S LEGAL TEAM SECURES FREEDOM FOR VA MEMBER SHIFFLETT

By Cindy Baugher
Assistant to Communications
Director

On Feb. 22, 2023, VAPBA member and Fairfax County police Officer Wesley Shifflett was working a regular duty day when his life changed because of a fatal shooting.

A suspect stole merchandise from a store in the mall and proceeded to run on foot. Officers pursued him. The subject fell, turned to Shifflett and reached into his clothing in a move that looked like he was about to pull a gun. The encounter ended with officers discharging their firearms and the subject dead.

A fellow PBA member called in to SSPBA on behalf of Shifflett. An attorney from Simms Showers LLP law firm responded and headed to the scene to assist Shifflett and the other PBA member who was also involved.

Shifflett and his attorneys had concerns about the George Soros-funded commonwealth attorney and how this would affect the case. On April 17, 2023, the grand jury no-billed — voted to not to indict — the case. But the worry was that the commonwealth attorney would try to present the case to another grand jury, which is exactly what happened.

On Oct. 13, 2023, the special grand jury indicted Shifflett on two felony counts, reckless handling of a firearm and involuntary manslaughter. The criminal trial was scheduled for September 2024. Further complicating and delaying matters, the commonwealth prosecutor had a heart attack during trial. As preparations for the trial got underway, the attorneys working on Shifflett's behalf were hopeful that using a psychology expert witness and a use of force expert would help to strengthen their case. The added expense for the proficiency of these witnesses was authorized by the PBA.

On Oct. 9, 2024, the jury returned with a split decision. Shifflett was found not



(L-r) Attorney Matt Noel, Fairfax Chapter President Monahan, Wesley Shifflett and Simms Showers LLP partner Caleb Kershner

guilty of involuntary manslaughter but guilty of reckless handling of a firearm. Wasting no time, PBA authorized post-trial motions and an appeal.

Shifflett was sentenced to five years with three to serve on Feb. 28, 2025, and was immediately taken to jail. PBA then launched an email campaign blast urging members to contact the Virginia governor asking him to pardon Shifflett. Shifflett's fellow PBA members jumped into action and emailed the governor. So, on March 2, 2025, Gov. Youngkin commuted Shifflett's sentence with a conditional pardon, and he was released from jail.

Meanwhile, the PBA continued its appeal efforts, and on Jan. 15, 2026, those efforts resulted in Youngkin issuing a complete pardon of Shifflett. Almost immediately after the initial incident, Shifflett was terminated from his job due to allegations of untruthfulness. Again, the PBA was in his corner on this issue, too, as the Simms Showers attorneys also managed his disciplinary appeal. The PBA authorized the appeal of Shifflett's termination — all the way up to the Supreme Court of Virginia — and provided representation related to his civil defense and certification issues.

Caleb Kershner, one of Shifflett's attorneys, mentioned several unique aspects in dealing with this case, with the main issue being that it took place in an area that is not particularly pro-law enforcement, so therefore, the makeup of the jury is difficult to predict. There

was also an issue with the prosecution who brought in a questionable "expert" witness, and there were some things that were not turned over to the grand jury as they should have been. Kershner shared his advice for PBA members who may find themselves in a comparable situation, although this was not an issue in Shifflett's case.

"Whenever you're in a use of force situation, just don't make statements until you've had an opportunity to speak with your lawyer," he said. "Just don't make statements."

Kershner also imparted a message as an active attorney to those who serve.

"Truthfully, I would never be a law enforcement officer without being a member of the PBA," Kershner continued. "They do such a tremendous job backing their officers. And honestly, in this case, we had a lot of people who worked really hard with the governor's office, and the PBA played a role in that to ultimately get that pardon on behalf of Mr. Shifflett. He was given three years by the judge, and we walked him out two days later. So, that's the kind of people that the PBA finds to work on behalf of law enforcement — people like me within the jurisdiction, who work hard, who have those contacts and don't spare any necessary resources to ensure good representation, because we had to bring in several different experts. And they all went to bat for Mr. Shifflett."

After all that he has been through related

to this shooting, Shifflett is no longer serving in law enforcement. He said he misses it greatly.

“When I was in law enforcement, the teamwork and camaraderie were my favorite part,” Shifflett said. “I played team sports from childhood through college, so police work was a great nexus to the same qualities learned in sports. It was also meaningful to make a positive impact in my community and improve the lives of victims of crimes.”

Given that this shooting and the resulting legal battle has taken over three years, Shifflett has had plenty of time to reflect on the ordeal. He reminded his law enforcement peers of the importance of acting in accordance with their training, calling it “paramount.”

“When your actions are under a microscope, the execution of your training is the one thing that you will be judged by,” he said. “Your integrity is just as important. Stick to what you know and believe in, even when you’re accused of things that you know are not true. Eventually, the truth prevails.”

As one might expect, Shifflett said he is not the same person he was before the shooting.

“My perspective on life has changed completely,” he said. “The last three years have been incredibly difficult, and looking back on it, I’m not quite sure how I got through it. The adversity forced me to have a level of toughness I never would have sought on my own. I also recognize that life and freedom are precious, and God, family and friends mean more than any career.

“I hope I can use my experiences to support others that are going through a tough time,” continued Shifflett. “I want to give back and continue to serve. I’ve learned to take life literally one day at a time, making the smallest steps forward, even when things are the hardest. Staying stagnant causes additional fear, anxiety and depression, and that can be a spiraling hole to go down. Keeping hope is essential in being resilient. I also have more gratitude and

appreciation for life. Being in a jail cell is life changing, losing all of the simple luxuries in life, and being cut off from the outside world is really hard. I have a whole new perspective on the criminal justice system.”

When he discovered he was going to be released, Shifflett said he was in shock. He could not believe it was real, calling it a true blessing and “a collaborative effort between so many different people.” He expressed gratitude to Youngkin and his team for giving him back his freedom and said he feels humbled to begin this new chapter in his life.

Shifflett was a “huge advocate” of the SSPBA before this shooting, even serving on the board of VAPBA’s Fairfax Chapter. But now, he’s an even bigger proponent, considering all the time, energy and expense that have gone toward supporting him through this legal battle.

“Since the incident to present, the SSPBA has stood by my side without question and defended me to the fullest extent,” he said. “Words can’t describe the gratitude I have for the SSPBA. I would not have been able to afford the legal services if I didn’t have coverage from the SSPBA. I can’t emphasize enough to anyone how important it is to be covered. I am an SSPBA advocate for life.”

More than just legal coverage, the support of the PBA network happened on a personal level as well, with members “walking the talk” to show support to their peers. Fairfax Chapter President Steve Monahan said chapter members were honored to support Shifflett.

“The Fairfax County Chapter was proud to stand with Wes every step of the way,” he said. “Board members were on scene within minutes, we were present in the courtroom, and we advocated tirelessly on his behalf until the very end, never wavering in our support.

“We are especially grateful for the dedication of his attorneys, who worked tirelessly up to the final moment, and to Gov. Glenn Youngkin, whose actions made a profound difference to all law

enforcement officers in Virginia,” he continued.

For those considering a career in law enforcement, Shifflett shared some of his hard-earned advice.

“Always hold yourself to the highest standards and level of professionalism,” he said. “It’s more challenging than ever to be a police officer, and if you’re involved in a critical incident, everything about your personal and professional life, both past and present, will be examined with a magnifying glass.

“We’re in an age where everything you do is discoverable, so live your life with integrity and honor,” continued Shifflett. “Your reputation and the way you conduct yourself will speak volumes on the kind of police officer and person you are.”

Now, as Shifflett looks towards his next steps, there’s a saying he keeps in mind to help him cope with all that’s happened.

“Forgive yourself for not knowing what you didn’t know until you lived through it,” he said. “Honor your path. Trust your journey. Learn, grow, evolve, become.”

Trying to embody this constructive advice, Shifflett found that spending time with his family and friends brings him the greatest joy. Staying active by working out, playing sports and traveling is all-important to him. He also realized that he is social and finds happiness connecting with others and hopes to learn about and experience parts of the world that are new to him.

Like others who wear the badge, Shifflett entered law enforcement out of a desire to help others. And now, thanks to the representation made possible by his PBA membership and the positive outcome of his court case, he’s able to picture working in a similar role.

“I’m excited for this next chapter in my life,” he said. “I don’t know what my future holds, but I know that I will continue to do what I’ve always done best, and that is serving others.”

HARD WORK PAYS OFF FOR JONESBORO AR POLICE SERGEANT

By Brandi Dixon
Project Coordinator

Have you ever been told you couldn't achieve your goals because of your age, health condition or another perceived limitation?

Sgt. Keith Baggett of the Jonesboro (Ark.) Police Department has built a lifelong career that proves those assumptions wrong, while also fighting and beating colon cancer.

In 2025, Officer Baggett was promoted to a patrol sergeant on the delta shift. He also serves as an FTO, LEO instructor and Crisis Intervention Team instructor. Prior to his promotion, Baggett spent 13 years assigned to the patrol division and the department's Honor Guard. According to Sgt. Baggett, the transition into the new leadership position has been a significant change.

"Going from street officer to supervisor has been a bit of a challenge because for years, I didn't wait for someone to tell me what to do, I just did the job," he said. "I now must allow others to do the work that I used to jump in on, but I understand how important my position is, making sure that things are done correctly."

Despite the challenge, Baggett has risen to the occasion and committed himself to excellence. He has been named Officer of the Month twice in his career and holds a Senior Law Enforcement Certificate. What motivates this level of professional merit?

"The best part of this job is getting to interact with kids and presenting a positive image of the police and, hopefully, keeping them from making bad decisions as they get older," said Baggett.

A noteworthy career which stands the test of time doesn't start from just anywhere. Sgt. Baggett began his career serving the city of Jonesboro in 1996 as a 911 dispatcher. In March 2009, he was



Sgt. Baggett (l) with JPD Chief Rick Elliott

hired as a patrol officer. He graduated from LETA at Black River Technical College with the class of 2009-B. Sgt. Baggett also attended Arkansas State University for almost two years before moving to Black River Technical College where he graduated with an associate's degree in criminal justice in 2015.

Before he was a 911 dispatcher, Sgt. Baggett initially served Jonesboro as an emergency medical technician. He became an EMT in 1989 and spent his entire EMS career working for the Emerson Ambulance Service in Jonesboro before retiring in 2020. Three faithful careers as a first responder are an immeasurable service and a lifetime achievement. The roots to the city of Jonesboro run deep for Sgt. Baggett.

Born and raised in Jonesboro, Sgt. Baggett holds this community close to his badge. He graduated from Jonesboro High School in 1981. His parents are James and Flossie Baggett, and he has a brother, Kelly, and a sister, Kara, along with an extended family of nieces and nephews. Notably, Sgt. Baggett's brother, Kelly, was an officer with JPD and retired with a career of over 30 years with the department.

"He is a big reason I decided to become an officer," said Sgt. Baggett.

Sgt. Baggett has been married to his wife, Connie, for almost 33 years. They have two children: their son, Patrick, who is married to Marianna, and their daughter, Deanna, who is married to Austin. He has two stepsons, Michael and Bryan. Sgt. Baggett and his wife have a grandson named PJ and a granddaughter named Ellie. In addition to the joy of his grandchildren, Sgt. Baggett loves to be around animals. He and his wife have two cats, Salem and Calico. He finds animals of all kinds to be a form of stress relief from the job.

Other ways Baggett enjoys spending his time when he is not working are gardening, building models, working on genealogy and listening to music. He enjoys history and understanding more about the people and events that shape society, locally and nationally.

It is difficult to say who has shaped whom more — the city of Jonesboro or Sgt. Baggett.

While he has left an indelible impact on the city through the careers he has

accomplished and the life he has led, it is safe to say the city has shaped his character as well.

“I’ve always been one to step in and help people in need, so it seems only natural that I chose three professions that allowed me to serve in that capacity,” he said. “My parents raised me to be respectful, and I translated that to my job. I do get a lot of positive compliments about how I treat people, and I give all the credit to them.”

Sgt. Baggett has been no stranger to his share of adversity in addition to meeting the demands and dangers that come with the job of first responder. In March 2020, while locals were dealing with the onset effects of COVID, an F-3 tornado struck Jonesboro, damaging the city severely and affecting the hearts and minds of its residents as well.

In September of that same year, Sgt. Baggett was diagnosed with colon cancer. He went through surgery and chemotherapy and has, thankfully, been cleared. He does, however, suffer a few minor side effects from the treatments, but they have yet to slow him down.

In fact, there is not a perceivable

limitation that has slowed down Sgt. Baggett. He describes his decision to make a career change after over 12 years in 911 into law enforcement at the age of 46.

“I began my LE career when most officers that age are winding theirs down,” he said. “I never felt that my age was a hindrance but rather an advantage, and I use that a lot.”

Whether age, health challenges, or public or private crises such as COVID or cancer, nothing has hindered Sgt. Baggett from attaining his goals or kept him from achieving a lifelong career as a distinguished leader in his community. These triumphs have, rather, made him an asset.

His plan is to retire in 2029 when he will have had a total of over 32 years with the City of Jonesboro and 20 years as an officer. Until that time, Baggett is a proud member of the Southern States PBA. He joined the Police Benevolent Association as soon as he was hired.

“The PBA rep came and spoke to us, and I knew right away that was something I needed to have,” said Baggett. “Thankfully, I’ve only had to



Sgt. Baggett with Bam Bam

use the services once or twice, but it was well worth the cost of a few dollars a month. I encourage the new hires to join because during this day and age, the chances are greater that they will need legal representation at some point in their career, especially if they plan on staying for a long time.”



One of Sgt. Baggett's final Honor Guard events in May 2023 — a memorial service for a retired JPD officer.

RETIRED GEORGIA POLICE CHIEF LAUDED IN NEW BOOK CAREER

By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

Author Gary M. Roberts grew up on a farm in Chatham County, taking care of his family's animals and soaking up the vast nature of southeast Georgia.

His childhood was enjoyed before social media so every day was an outdoor odyssey.

"Much of my childhood was spent hunting, fishing and horseback riding," said Roberts, who graduated from Groves High School in 1975. "My family vacations were always spent camping by the river and enjoying the outdoors. Even when we were not vacationing, every day was an adventure, be it caring for our horses, cows and pigs, or helping my father in the garden. It was a wonderful place and time to be a kid."

However, Roberts also indulged a passion for writing.

"I enjoyed writing stories even as a child, and that enjoyment grew as I got older," he said. "My first published work was a short story published in the magazine, 'Modern Maturity,' when I was in the military in 1978.

"Since that time, I have written and published 16 books, and I am very close to publishing another one," continued Roberts. "Most are historical fiction that are set in the south, during the Reconstruction Era. They are what I like to call 'westerns set in the south.'"

One of his most recent works, "Ginny: A Yearning to Belong," drew the attention of OneTribune Media, an Australian publication. The publication bestowed on him The Narrative Voyager Award. Roberts said the award recognizes the transformative power of storytelling and highlights works that "inspire empathy, challenge conventions and foster connections across borders — be they physical, cultural or emotional."

Prior to beginning his fascination with historical fiction writing, Roberts joined the Army, serving his country until 1978,



Authors Gary and Carol Roberts

including a year-and-a-half in Germany.

While in the army he worked as an armorer, Jeep driver, supply custodian, typist and financial procurement officer. He was honorably discharged from the military in 1978.

"After the army, I tried several jobs, trying to find the right fit — everything from carpenter to delivery person," said Roberts. "I missed the discipline of the military. However, I did not want to leave home again."

Like a lot of military veterans looking to start over on the civilian side, Roberts discovered law enforcement as a comparable profession.

"It was then, in 1980, I decided to look toward law enforcement," he said. "No one in my family had been in law enforcement nor did I know anyone in law enforcement at the time. I must admit it was the uniform and discipline that drew me in."

He served with Savannah Police Department from 1980 until 2000. During his tenure there, he served in many capacities such as detective, special operations and bicycle patrol. He was a member of the riot squad and of the use of force oversight board, and served as a field training officer.

Roberts left the PD in 2000, and he and his wife, Carol, started a medical transcriptionist business. The two have been married for more than 35 years, raising five children and enjoying seven grandchildren.

The two are partners in love and life — and writing.

"Carol has been a major part of my writing from the beginning, and recently, we have begun co-writing historical romance novels," he said.

In addition to the family business, Roberts opted to sojourn into theology.

"After I left in 2000 to work with my wife in our business, I also served as the pastor of a small church for 10 years," he said. "At night, I attended a satellite college for Covington Theological Seminary where I earned a degree in education and a doctorate in theology. I went on to teach at the seminary for five years."

A downturn in the economy ended the transcriptionist business, and Roberts returned to law enforcement and the Savannah PD in 2009.

After retiring 10 years later, Roberts was appointed chief at Brooklet PD, 48 miles from Savannah, serving from 2019 until 2024. He is a member of South Carolina Retired Officer Chapter of SCPBA.

In retirement, Roberts said he is free to devote all his time to writing. His award-winning book is a novel based on his mother's true story.

"This is fitting as she was instrumental in influencing me to have a love for books," he said. "Although, having only two years of school herself, she taught herself to read and spent hours reading to me. In the book, although set in a different era, it is taken from her life. Much of what happened to Ginny happened to my mother."

For their next project, Roberts and his wife have just finished the sequel to their latest book, "The Captive's Heart," set in 1837 in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

"It is about a young girl being taken in by a Cherokee tribe," he said. "The second book entitled, 'For the Heart of Adohi,' should be out soon. After that, I am planning a third installment that will center around the Trail of Tears and our heroine's involvement."

PBA PREVAILS OVER MDOC, GETS OT BACK PAY FOR MEMBER

**By Jason M. Kirschberg and
Jeffrey P. Reynolds
PBA Panel Attorneys
REYNOLDS|KIRSCHBERG
Jackson, Miss.**

For most law enforcement officers working probation and parole jobs, the job does not end when the shift does.

Phones stay on. Radios stay close. And when a call comes in — no matter the hour — officers respond.

That reality was at the heart of a recent case in which we had the privilege of representing Mary “Kathleen” Hoyt, a longtime Probation and Parole officer with the Mississippi Department of Corrections, who MDOC required be available 24/7 and, at times, to work around the clock.

When it came to overtime wages, however, MDOC claimed it owed nothing, regardless of the actual time worked beyond regular work hours.

This case matters not just because Officer Hoyt ultimately prevailed. It demonstrates something critical for every law enforcement officer in Mississippi and elsewhere:

When a governmental employer refuses to honor its obligations, the courts are available — and the Police Benevolent Association can make accountability possible.

The role of the Police Benevolent Association

Officer Hoyt was able to pursue justice for one simple reason: She paid her PBA dues. Governmental employers often believe they can avoid accountability because many officers lack the resources to seek competent counsel to litigate their claims, especially in light of the statutory immunity afforded against many claims.

So, when Officer Hoyt decided to fight back against the MDOC’s unlawful



Officer Hoyt with PBA attorneys Kirschberg (l) and Reynolds

refusal to pay her overtime wages, the PBA stepped up and hired our firm — Reynolds | Kirschberg — to represent her. Without that backing, many officers would have no practical way to challenge a state agency. Litigation is expensive, time-consuming and intimidating when the defendant is the state itself. The PBA leveled the playing field.

Officer Hoyt’s job and the reality of off-duty work

Officer Hoyt served for decades as an agent in MDOC’s Intensive Supervision Program. ISP officers supervise offenders on house arrest using electronic monitoring devices. When those devices signal a problem — tampering, battery failure, exclusion zone violations — the ISP officer receives an automated, electronic notification and must respond immediately.

These alerts do not respect business hours. Officer Hoyt was required to remain on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. She received alerts late at night, early in the morning, on weekends, holidays and even while on leave. She began suffering from sleepless nights due to the fear that her sleep would be interrupted by yet another call or text.

For years, MDOC paid ISP officers overtime wages for after-hours work when their hours exceeded 171 in a 28-day period. Without changing the job requirements or any formal payment policy, MDOC stopped paying. The work did not stop. The pay did.

The lawsuit: enforcing a promise the State made

In May 2022, Officer Hoyt filed suit against MDOC in the County Court of Hinds County, Mississippi. The case was

not about “overtime” in the abstract. It was about a contract and the MDOC’s breach of that contract. Strict immunity statutes in Mississippi render state agencies like MDOC immune from garden-variety lawsuits seeking backpay. Thus, as Officer Hoyt’s lawyers, we had to get creative and look to an exception to the state’s sovereign immunity: a claim for breach of contract.

Officer Hoyt thus alleged that MDOC had promised — through its policies, procedures and pay structure — to compensate ISP officers for work performed outside regular hours, including time spent responding to after-hours alerts regarding electronic monitoring devices.

Officer Hoyt did exactly what the job required. MDOC accepted the benefit of her labor. It just refused to pay for it.

We supported Officer Hoyt’s claims with hard evidence, including a detailed analysis from a forensic accountant who, based on Officer Hoyt’s phone records, determined that from April 30, 2019, through April 25, 2022, Officer Hoyt worked hundreds of hours of unpaid after-hours time responding to mandatory alerts, for which Officer Hoyt had earned \$52,948.36 in overtime wages.

Officer Hoyt is granted summary judgment

Officer Hoyt, backed by a forensic accountant’s report and testimony from her former supervisor, moved for summary judgment. MDOC, which had no evidence in opposition, did not bother responding. Instead, it moved for its own summary judgment, asserting sovereign immunity.

In April 2025, the County Court granted summary judgment in Officer Hoyt’s favor, denied MDOC’s summary judgment motion and awarded Officer Hoyt \$52,948.36 in unpaid wages — the entire amount calculated by our forensic accountant. The Court found that MDOC had breached its express employment agreement and that Officer Hoyt was entitled to be paid for the after-

hours work she performed.

For most litigants, that would have been the end of the story.

It was not.

A frivolous appeal — and no follow-through

Instead of paying the judgment, MDOC filed a notice of appeal. Then it did ... nothing.

MDOC failed to designate the appellate record. It failed to pay costs. It failed to prosecute the appeal in any way. Months passed. Officer Hoyt still had not been paid.

We moved to dismiss the appeal. MDOC did not bother to respond.

In September 2025, the Court dismissed MDOC’s appeal with prejudice for failure to prosecute. The Court recognized what was obvious: The appeal existed only to delay payment. After the appeal was dismissed, we demanded that MDOC issue payment in full to Officer Hoyt. It did not.

Attempts to enforce the judgment

At first, we attempted to collect the judgment through ordinary means. Emails were sent, then garnishments were issued. Nothing worked. So, we noticed a judgment debtor examination of MDOC Commissioner Burl Cain.

Mr. Cain was served with a deposition subpoena to appear and explain, among other things, why the judgment had not been paid.

The subpoena was properly issued. Properly served. Properly noticed. No one from MDOC bothered to appear.

The contempt order and accountability at last

By failing to pay the judgment (despite its ability to pay), filing a frivolous appeal, and blowing off a properly issued and served subpoena, MDOC finally crossed

a line.

We moved to hold the MDOC in contempt of court and, on Jan. 23, 2026, the County Court entered an Order of Civil Contempt against MDOC. The Court found that MDOC had willfully ignored the Court’s authority and Officer Hoyt’s lawful efforts to collect her judgment.

The Court ordered MDOC to pay not only the underlying judgment of \$52,948.36 within seven business days, but also ordered MDOC to reimburse \$11,425.00 in attorneys’ fees that the PBA incurred as a direct result of MDOC’s misconduct. The Court also warned MDOC that, should it fail to make timely payment, the Court would require MDOC to show cause as to why the Court should not incarcerate Mr. Cain until MDOC paid the judgment and attorneys’ fees in full.

The message was unmistakable: Court orders apply to state agencies too; they ignore them at their peril.

Once the contempt order was issued, MDOC suddenly started communicating with us again. On Monday, Jan. 26, 2026 (three days after the contempt order issued), an attorney with the Mississippi Office of the Attorney General (which is tasked with defending state agencies such as MDOC) contacted us to advise that full payment would be made as soon as possible.

Two days later, on Jan. 28, 2026, we received payment in full for the \$64,373.36. Officer Hoyt was finally paid \$52,948.36, which is every cent she sought in unpaid overtime wages, and the PBA was reimbursed \$11,425.00, the bulk of attorneys’ fees associated with seeking to enforce the judgment and hold MDOC in contempt.

Why this case matters to every officer

This case is not just about one officer’s pay. It is about respect for law enforcement professionals and the rule of law itself.

Officer Hoyt did what officers are trained to do: She followed policy, responded to calls and fulfilled her duties without complaint. When the state refused to honor its obligations, she relied on the PBA — and the courts — to enforce accountability. The Court reaffirmed the bedrock principle that no one, including the State, is above the law.

The lesson is simple but important:

- Pay attention to your benefits and protections.
- Do not accept that State sovereign immunity leaves you without rights
- Understand that your PBA dues matter.
- Know that, when the system fails you, you are not alone – the PBA has your back.

A final word

We were honored to represent Officer Hoyt, a hardworking law enforcement officer who deserved—and ultimately achieved—better. But for the PBA and Officer Hoyt’s willingness to take on the State, she might have ultimately gone unpaid. But the PBA answered her call for help and spared no expense in seeing that justice prevailed. This

case reaffirmed a basic principle: No employer—public or private—gets to demand unpaid labor from law enforcement officers. The badge carries responsibility. It also carries rights. And sometimes, enforcing those rights takes persistence, patience and a willingness to fight.

Footnotes

The State also argued that Officer Hoyt failed to exhaust her administrative remedies by not filing a claim with Mississippi’s Employee Appeals Board even though, as MDOC conceded, Officer Hoyt’s claim was clearly not “grievable” under EAB rules, and thus the EAB lacked jurisdiction.

But, according to MDOC, this meant that Officer Hoyt had no remedy whatsoever, while we argued it allowed Officer Hoyt to pursue her claims directly from the courts.

MDOC made a similar argument in a case involving PBA member Tiffany McClure, which we litigated all the way to the Mississippi Supreme Court. In *Miss. Dep’t of Corr. v. McClure*, 386 So. 3d 372 (Miss. 2024), the Miss. Supreme Court rejected MDOC’s argument. (We wrote an article about the McClure case in issue No. 18 of *Blue Review Magazine*.)

About the authors

Jason Kirschberg and Jeff Reynolds are partners at Reynolds | Kirschberg, a Mississippi-based law firm practicing in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and California. Mr. Reynolds, a wholehearted litigator, has extensive experience in Oil & Gas/Environmental Litigation, Corporate Litigation, Commercial Litigation on behalf of Creditors, Construction Litigation, Administrative Law and professional and governmental liability. Mr. Reynolds also serves as an arbitrator for the American Arbitration Association, where he sits on the Commercial and Consumer Panels.

Mr. Kirschberg holds licenses to practice law in Mississippi, Alabama and California, where he has focused his practice on Commercial Litigation, Corporate Litigation, Appellate Advocacy, Professional Liability, Construction Litigation, Administrative Law, Creditors’ Rights and Insurance Coverage Analysis for complex commercial insuring agreements and attendant Bad Faith Litigation. Both Messrs. Reynolds and Kirschberg are rated AV-Preeminent by Martindale Hubbell.



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ALPBA'S MEMBER OF THE YEAR: STEVEN MILLS

By Cindy Baugher
Assistant to Communications
Director

Steven Mills, officer with the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles, was recently named 2025 ALPBA Member of the Year.

Jon Riley, senior vice president of the ALPBA, nominated him. In his nomination letter, Riley shared why Mills deserved this honor:

“Steven Mills never asks for or expects the spotlight. However, when he is called upon, Steven provides very good insight into matters of political activity, membership recruitment, and service to membership. Steven has consistently displayed good judgment and provided sound advice year after year at both the chapter and division levels.

Steven currently serves as an officer for the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Parole. He is a U.S. Army combat veteran, a former patrol supervisor, field training officer, and S.W.A.T. instructor. Steven Mills consistently displays character, professionalism, and humility in his capacity as both a law enforcement officer and PBA leader. It is accordingly my honor to nominate Steven Mills for Alabama PBA 2025 Member of the Year.”

Mills is quick to praise the ALPBA organization and its members.

“I am so thankful over the years for the mentoring, brotherhood, fellowship and support I have received from those in my PBA chapters,” he stated.

As a 20-year veteran of law enforcement, Mills has encountered many people and situations in his career. He realizes the challenges, as well as internal rewards, that come with serving his community in this capacity. That perspective makes this award even more meaningful.

“I would say I am humbled and honored to have been chosen for Member of the



Steven on a trip to Alaska last year

Year, but even having been nominated was hard to imagine,” he said. “I say that because I know my peer group of active members serving in the various chapters around the state are some of the hardest-working, most caring and supportive groups within the law enforcement community, and there are so many worthy of being ‘member of the year’ – I imagine the selection committee/group each year has a tough job.

“From calling an attorney for someone at 2 a.m. to guidance and advice on personnel or law enforcement issues, to just fun fellowship, the PBA has always been there for me,” Mills continued. “I suppose my willingness to do all those things for others after having them done for me throughout the years is not so much a reflection of me being an outstanding member, but of the ones before me that invested so much in my development.”

Throughout his years of working in law enforcement, Mills has made it a priority to keep his SSPBA membership current. And as for his chapter volunteer work, he first became active serving in his local chapter when he began working with

the Lee County Sheriff’s Office. Since there was no active local chapter at that time, Mills and another officer were instrumental in getting the Lee County Chapter started, with assistance from ALPBA Executive Director JD Hobbie.

He served in multiple roles with that chapter, including as president. When he switched employers and started with the State of Alabama, Mills became a member of the State Law Enforcement Chapter and immediately volunteered to serve. He handles the role of secretary for his chapter.

Mills is assigned to Russell County in east central Alabama. He said his favorite part about serving in law enforcement is “the ability to make my community and home a better and safer place.”

“Having worked most of my career in patrol at a sheriff’s office, I would say the biggest difference in my current role is that I get to see a few more success stories of those that have gotten off drugs, mended their families and changed their lives for the better,” he continued. “My primary job is to supervise probationers and parolees through drug screening, home visits, investigations, and electronic

monitoring to ensure compliance with any court conditions, to help their rehabilitation and, ultimately, to keep our communities safe.

“On any given day you might find me counseling someone in my office, serving a warrant with our local law enforcement partners, or testifying about a probation violation or case to a judge or board,” continued Mills.

Born in Bethesda, Md., where his father was stationed at the time, he said he would not consider it his hometown and cannot even recall the last time he visited. Instead, he said, his “home throughout my childhood was simply wherever we lived, normally at or around a military base.”

After his own time serving in the military, he settled down in the east central part of Alabama and called it the closest thing he knows to home, after living there for about 20 years now.

Mills attended Chattahoochee Valley Community College in Phenix City, Ala., after graduating from Grace Christian School in 1995. He joined the Army and served both on active duty and in the Alabama National Guard. While in the Army he was in the military police.

“I was fortunate to have been able to serve in Honduras, Italy and several locations in the Middle East,” he said. “I did a combat tour in Iraq in 2003 and 2004. After separating from the military, I went back to Iraq as a contractor working with the Civilian Police Assist Training Team where I served as an instructor in firearms, SWAT and several other capacities for the Iraqi Police.”

With an abundance of real-life experience in the field under his belt, he later completed both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees at Troy University in criminal justice.

Three different law enforcement certifications enhance Mills’ resume. In 1996, he graduated from U.S. Army Military Police School, in Ft. McLellan, Ala. In 1998, he became certified in Georgia, having attended

the police academy in Columbus and finally, in 2006, he earned an additional certification in Alabama upon graduation from Jefferson County Sheriff’s Training Center in Fultondale.

He began his career in the Army and served in several locations around the world. Next, he embarked on a civilian career with the Columbus Police Department, where he worked for about five years before being called back to active duty in Iraq. After his military service in Iraq, he worked overseas as an international police trainer, mostly in Iraq.

The Lee County Sheriff’s Office in Opelika was his next stop, where he worked until he accepted his position in 2017 with the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles.

Along his career path, Mills has received accolades for his work, including a letter of commendation from the Georgia Metro Narcotics Task Force for information and support with a significant methamphetamine seizure.

He was also commended for his service as secretary, vice president and later president of the Central Alabama Law Enforcement Committee. Mills has also worked in specialty assignments – including firearms instructor, field training officer and patrol supervisor.

At the Lee County Sheriff’s Office, he was the department representative for the CALEC for traffic enforcement programs and served on the board. The sheriff nominated him to attend, and Mills graduated from Leadership Lee County, a nine-month leadership course for leader development.

Leadership skills were not the only thing Mills gained while serving with Lee County Sheriff’s Office. It was there that he met his wife, Lauren. The two have been married for 14 years and have two daughters who are 9 and 6.

Spending time with his family is where you will find Mills in his spare time. Going to his daughter’s rodeos, dance recitals and taking trips together keeps

them all busy, as does his work in the children’s ministry and as a deacon in his church. One of the greatest influences in Mills’ life was a man he met through church and work. His name was Tatum Fowler, who retired from the Army and from Muscogee County Sheriff’s Office.

“I got to know him as he was in his final years of service as a sergeant, and I was just starting my career,” said Mills. “I knew him at work and because we went to church together. His commitment to his church, wife and family, and his work at the sheriff’s office and in the community stood out and have been something I have tried to emulate over the years.

“He is now deceased, but his example of faithfulness lives on through me and many others that were privileged to serve alongside him,” he continued.

Mills’ advice for those who are considering a career in law enforcement is compelling.

“If it is your calling to serve in law enforcement, don’t use your talents anywhere else,” he said. “This job has so many challenges, and difficult moments, but I believe if you put all that this career brings on a scale, the good moments of camaraderie, helping others and service to community significantly outweigh anything you might experience anywhere else.”

As an officer who loves his career, ALPBA’s Member of the Year wanted to encourage other LEOs to go a step further than just being a PBA member and to become involved in their local PBA chapters. He explained his personal takeaway from assuming a deeper role in his chapter: “I enjoy being a part of something bigger,” said Mills. “You regularly get to hear about the needs of other officers, the upcoming changes at the various agencies, the legal issues and legislation that are pending affecting law enforcement. The political screenings provide an opportunity to have a say-so in the greater law enforcement world than what you would be able to do in your official capacity at your agency.”

MALONE PUSHES TNPBA MEMBERSHIP PAST 10,000

By Griffin Fletcher
Operations Manager

In April 2025, the Tennessee Division of the SSPBA reached a historic milestone when it joined Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia as the only SSPBA divisions with more than 10,000 members.

Joseph “Bailey” Malone, a detective in the Criminal Investigation Division of the Kingsport Police Department, was one of the officers who pushed the TNPBA past the 10,000-member threshold. I had the privilege of getting to know Malone a bit, and he, both as an officer and as a person, serves as a quintessential example of the kind of member that the association is proud to represent each and every day.

Kingsport, Tenn. — on the Holston River near the Virginia border — is said to be the birthplace of the Long Island iced tea, a popular alcoholic cocktail.

It is also the birthplace of Bailey Malone. He was raised by his father, who worked, and still does, at the Eastman Chemical Company — the largest employer in Kingsport — and his stepmother, who worked, and still does, at a local hospital, in a household with two brothers and two stepbrothers.

Early in his life, there were already indications that a career in policing may lie in his future.

“From a young age, I always enjoyed seeing cops and firefighters doing their job, or even just seeing them drive down the road,” he said.

In his time at Dobyns-Bennett High School, Malone’s pathway to law enforcement took shape.

“I played football and baseball,” he said. “I firmly believe that football teaches kids a lot of life skills. My football coach, Graham Clark, had a big influence on my decision to become a police officer. Coach Clark was always talking about giving back to your community and not

forgetting where you came from.”

But if Coach Clark nudged Bailey in the direction of police work, there were a few other role models who gave him a full-fledged shove.

“As a young teenage kid, I got close to some officers who worked at the Kingsport Police Department and some deputies who worked at the Sullivan County Sheriff’s Office,” said Malone. “Hearing their stories helped me decide that I wanted to pursue a career in law enforcement.”

In March 2016, not long after he graduated, Malone took the first step by taking a job as a dispatcher at the Sullivan County Sheriff’s Office before transferring to the Kingsport PD in the same role a year and a half later.

In August 2019, Bailey Malone was sworn in as an officer of the Kingsport Police Department, and after 12 weeks in the academy and eight more in the department’s training program, he became one of those officers he had admired as a child.

Officer Malone spent five and a half years



Detective Bailey Malone

on the road, and established himself as a rising star within the Kingsport PD. In that relatively short period of time on patrol, Malone served as a field training officer and earned awards and recognitions for proactive policing, traffic enforcement and excellence in arresting



Detective Malone with his twins



Sunday morning breakfast with zone partners

suspects and dangerous wanted fugitives.

He was awarded the State Seatbelt Enforcement Award from the Tennessee Highway Safety Office in both 2023 and 2024.

He was also awarded the Police Purple Heart. It came as the result of an encounter that Officer Malone will always carry with him.

“We all have had those calls that we wish we could unsee, or wish they had never happened,” he said. “On March 15, 2022, I was working the road on night shift. I got into a physical altercation with a juvenile suspect. The suspect attempted to take my service pistol from my holster.

“The suspect was able to fire my weapon, which resulted in me getting struck in my lower right leg,” Malone continued. “By the grace of God, I was able to stay alert and fight back until backup arrived.”

Despite the harrowing experience he had endured and the serious injury he had sustained – he had large entrance and exit wounds between his ankle and his calf — Malone wasn’t sidelined for long.

“I spent approximately two months off work,” he said. “I went to wound care three times a week and physical therapy

twice a week. I then spent a little over a month on light duty while the holes closed up.”

By March 2025, Malone’s excellence and bravery on the road had earned him a promotion to detective in Kingsport’s Criminal Investigation Division. His latest assignment has him working on property crimes and fraud, and he enjoys regular eight-hour shifts Monday through Friday.

His weekends are spent with his family and friends — he has twin babies at home who he says “are perfect in every way” — and he gets outside as much as he can, preferably in the mountains or on the water. On Saturdays in the fall, Detective Malone trades his badge for an orange “T” as he roots on his Tennessee Volunteers.

On one thing Detective Malone is absolutely clear: he loves his job.

“Every day in law enforcement is something new and different,” he told me. “The old saying, ‘Law enforcement is a front-row seat to the greatest show on Earth,’ is so true.”

There’s no doubt about Malone’s intentions as an officer, either.

“We didn’t sign up to be the police to

sit in the parking lots with our zone buddies,” he said. “We signed up to be the police to put bad guys away.”

Malone offered thoughtful and practical advice to incoming officers:

1. Find an outlet — someone you can trust and talk to.
2. Learn how to communicate. Don’t be afraid to get out of your car and talk to people.
3. Find a way to stay active and effective.
4. Don’t be afraid to be the police. Keep fighting the good fight.

Shortly after being promoted to detective, Malone joined SSPBA because he saw firsthand the value that the association offers its members.

“I joined,” he said, “because I witnessed the organization help officers I know personally in time of need.”

Though there are now more than 10,000 other officers in Tennessee — and more than 70,000 across all the states that the SSPBA serves — who are also members, the association remains dedicated to serving each officer as if he or she is the top priority.

LOUISIANA SEES HEROISM FROM GREAT HEIGHTS IN PEARL RIVER

By Brandi Dixon
Project Coordinator

Jan. 13, Pearl River, La. A 31-year-old man climbed atop a 400-foot municipal water tower around 5 p.m.

A crowd surrounded the area, and police were dispatched within a couple of hours.

The incident shut down the water tower and put the town of Pearl River under a water boil advisory. Mayor Joe Lee announced the water safety measure around 7:16 p.m., saying the alert was required by Louisiana state officials.

Slidell police Sgt. Jason Walden and Detective Sara Cranford, also LAPBA members, used advanced drone technology in a first response to effectively communicate with the man and safely get him down at about 8:30 p.m.

For their expert skills in negotiation and first response, Walden and Cranford were awarded by Slidell Police Department with the Chief's Commendation Award. Their hard work and dedication to the people of Pearl River does not go unnoticed.

Walden began his career in law enforcement in 2009 as a deputy with St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office. He served in criminal patrol on a motorcycle and as a K9 officer from 2016 to 2017. In 2019, he transferred to Slidell Police Department and became an officer.

Since then, he has worked in traffic enforcement and crash investigation and is also certified in crash reconstruction, drone operation and is an adjunct instructor at a regional police academy.

Walden is also an official hostage crisis negotiator. In August 2024, he was promoted to sergeant.

Initially drawn to law enforcement because he "wanted to make sure he



Sgt. Walden

had a nice place for his kids to grow up," Walden has built a career full of accomplishments which has only just begun.

The Pearl River water tower incident was a highlight in Walden's career.

"Every negotiation has its set of circumstances," he said. "No negotiation is the same. I was contacted because Pearl River Police Department was in need of a drone that had the capability of communicating with individuals. They also needed a negotiator. I informed them that I was able to provide both.

"So, I was the primary negotiator, and Detective Cranford was contacted to be the second chair," continued Walden. "As a team, we went out and deployed the drone and broadcasted a message to the individual. He gave us a thumbs up that he received the message.

"We were then able to build a rapport. We talked through what was going on in his life and, through negotiations, he then surrendered peacefully, and no one was harmed."

This was a success for not only the negotiators, but the police departments of Slidell and Pearl River, and the residents of Pearl River as well. Such a feat would not have been possible in the same timely manner without the use of



Detective Cranford

this sort of advanced technology.

Walden addressed the relationship between the advancement of technology and law enforcement.

"We put ourselves at a disadvantage if we're not willing to advance with technology," he said.

Walden added that the use of drone technology isprecedented.

"This is not the first time we have used drones," he said. "We used them for foot pursuits, cases of missing children, elderly, mentally disabled, domestic disputes, etc. We have sent them into residents' homes ahead of SWAT teams to prevent harm — we prefer property damage to risking the lives of members of our police department — and set up a tactical advantage.

"We try to utilize technology like this as much as we can," continued Walden. "The cost of drones is way cheaper than the price of old school robots, so, it's more fiscally responsible and it gives you a bird's eye view. It saves lives."

This is the work in a community considered heroic, exceptional and deserving of the award bestowed on the two officers.

"It's an honor," said Walden. "I didn't get

into this job for recognition — I did it to make a difference. That's my job — what I was called to do and what I enjoy doing. I would first like to thank God who gives me the strength to do what I do. I want to thank my wife, Taylor, for holding down the fort while I'm away, as well as my two daughters, Elliot and Sawyer. I would also like to thank the people I work with who make a hard job easy."

Police work can be high risk or even life-threatening, which is why Walden wanted to take the time to address the reason why he is grateful for his PBA membership.

"It gives me peace of mind on the legal end, and if anything happens to me, I know my wife and kids are taken care of financially," he said.

He also commended the residents he serves.

"We appreciate the continued support from our community," said Walden. "Just like the bad publicity of us doesn't represent the police as a whole, it doesn't fully represent the public either, and we appreciate you."

Cranford began her career at Slidell Police Department in 2013 in corrections, where she served until 2015. She worked in patrol until 2021.

Since then, she has served in criminal investigation and major crimes, becoming a SWAT negotiator over the last year like her father before her.

Cranford would say she was "born into law enforcement." Her mother, father, grandfather and uncle worked for Slidell PD.

"People ask me why I haven't gone anywhere and I tell them — Slidell is home. I don't want to go anywhere else," said Cranford.

The ending proves there is no question Pearl River made the call to the right individuals that night of Jan. 13. With her diverse background and skills, Cranford made the ideal second chair to Walden in this crisis negotiation.



DJI Mavic 3T Drone from Slidell Police Department

"I got a call that Pearl River needed a negotiator — someone was on top of the water tower," she said. "Jason and I came up with a game plan. There are two spots in a negotiation — first chair and second chair. I was the second chair. I assisted Sgt. Walden with intel and strategy.

"We were thinking — how can we get a cell phone up there?" continued Cranford. "So, we decided to use a drone to bring a phone up there. We ended up not having to deliver the cell phone because the individual had one in his possession, so Sgt. Walden provided the subject via the drone speaker with his cell phone number, and the subject called him which is when negotiations began. The conversation was about five or 10 minutes. The individual said he just wanted to watch the sunset. Sgt. Walden was able to talk him down off the water tower peacefully."

No one was harmed during the negotiations, thanks to the insightful strategies of Walden and Cranford. It's hard to imagine being in that second chair and experiencing the adrenaline and the feeling of receiving the call to be the one assisting in the negotiations with an individual whose life may be in danger.

"My first main concern was the subject's safety," she said. "I wanted to act quickly and gather the facts knowing this person's life could be in danger if this was a mental health concern or if this

was just a man on a water tower. I wanted to keep him out of harm's way."

All precautions were taken, and the life-threatening situation was treated with the utmost respect and care. Upon receiving the award, Cranford expressed her gratitude and shared her appreciation for the recognition.

"It felt like an honor to receive this award," said Cranford. "It's nice to be recognized in a positive light. I would like to thank Sgt. Walden for being a good leader and mentor during a crisis situation. I would also like to thank Chief Seuzeneau for acknowledging our work and presenting us with this award."

Cranford also acknowledged the role played by SSPBA.

"The PBA is an extra layer of protection and support," she said. "Knowing there's an organization there to support you is a good feeling to have. It gives you confidence in doing the job — like a safety net. It also supports your family if something happens to you on the job. That night was high risk, and it was good to know that I had a safety net in that situation and to know that I wasn't alone.

"This can be a very stressful job that most people don't understand, but being able to help people on what could be the worst day of their lives completely outweighs the stress of the job and makes it all worth it," continued Cranford.

SAVANNAH PD MOTHERS PROMPT MAJOR POLICY CHANGE

By Jordan Mitten
Senior Legal Assistant

On July 14, 2025, the Southern States PBA was pleased to receive notice from panel attorney W. Keith Barber that officers with the Savannah Police Department had been accommodated to be tested and assessed for the sergeant exam for the department.

However, a key factor for these officers involved — they were all seeking accommodations due to pregnancy.

Corporals Molly McConaughy, Courtney Franz and others contacted the PBA as early as February 2025 in regard to a promotional exam that fell near their due dates. With an understanding that they could be accommodated for being unable to attend the exam due to their pregnancies, the officers submitted their request. In response, a department-wide memorandum was sent out stating that no alternative dates would be provided, and that candidates eligible to progress through the promotional process must be present for the written exam and assessment center.

McConaughy, the first officer to contact the PBA on this matter, said that she had previously taken a university course focusing on human resources for law enforcement agencies, and within the curriculum of this course was case law focusing on employees' rights regarding pregnancy and those under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

With her prior knowledge on such issues, McConaughy contacted Cpl. Franz and discussed the matter with her. They ultimately decided they would follow the chain of command and, as said by McConaughy, “handle it the right way.” McConaughy said that, to her, it was not just a matter of being pregnant and being afforded her rights under those circumstances — it was about rights that are in place for those under any situation.

In addition to the rights afforded to the department's employees under the



Savannah police Cpl. McConaughy with a fan cooling off with a cone

FMLA, the City of Savannah's ADA Reasonable Accommodation Policy specifically mentions adhering to the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act. Passed and put into effect in June 2023, the PWFA generally requires a covered employer to provide a “reasonable accommodation” to a qualified employee's or applicant's known limitations related to, affected by, or arising out of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. While the PWFA assists in providing accommodations to those still working while pregnant, the FMLA provides protection for employees for prenatal care or when a pregnant employee is unable to work due to her pregnancy.

PBA panel attorney W. Keith Barber was assigned to assist these officers in March 2025, and within a matter of two months, Barber reported direct confirmation back to the PBA that the officers' requested accommodation had been reviewed and approved by the city's HR department.

Shortly after, in July 2025, Barber reported further that each of the officers had been accommodated to be tested and assessed for the sergeant exam. He was also able to confirm that the city policy for promotional processes was amended

to account for “authorized absences” for employees under circumstances, including military leave, FMLA leave and mandatory court appearances.

Barber said that such a great result was directly due to the officers' working in conjunction with each other and providing their voices and thorough research. Barber also said that the situation was handled smoothly via regular communication and cooperation among him, the officers involved, the police chief, city councilmembers and the director of the city's HR department.

McConaughy told PBA that this situation was “near and dear to her heart,” as she wished to be both a law enforcement officer and to have her own family. Much is afforded to the residents of this country through the laws put in place on their behalf, and the most effective way to exercise these rights is to know them.

Source links:

<https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-pregnant-workers-fairness-act>

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla>

PBF SCHOLARSHIP HELPS WV STUDENT FOCUS ON HER FUTURE

**By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor**

Vaylee Olack's chosen career of optometry began to take shape when she was a compassionate fourth-grader.

"My interest in vision care stems from a personal experience," she said. "My fourth-grade teacher has an eye condition that limits movement in one of her eyes and currently has no cure. Her condition inspired me to dedicate my future to finding solutions that could help her and countless others."

A native of Martinsburg, W.Va., Vaylee Olack is a daughter of First Sgt. Dean Olack of the West Virginia State Police, who retired in 2023 after 30 years. She is pursuing her nursing degree at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Va., with the goal of becoming an optometrist.

Her dad's background in law enforcement and his membership with SSPBA made Vaylee eligible for a PBF scholarship. She is one of 19 students awarded this year.

"Receiving the PBF scholarship is such incredible honor and a tremendous help as I pursue these goals," she said. "For me, this scholarship represents more than financial support — it is a recognition of the values I have worked hard to uphold: integrity, service and leadership. It allows me to focus on my studies and continued community involvement."

Vaylee said she was "significantly influenced" by her dad.

"Growing up, I saw the sacrifices my dad made to protect our community, and I learned lessons in integrity, courage and empathy that continue to guide me," she said. "Conversations taught me that true strength lies in compassion and service. I did go on a few rides with him throughout his time serving."

In fact, Vaylee said her dad has made



Vaylee with parents Amy and Dan

the greatest impact on her life and future plans.

"If I had to identify one person who has had the greatest impact on my journey, it would be my dad," she said. "As a law enforcement officer, he has always led by example, showing me what it means to be selfless and dedicated to something bigger than yourself. His work ethic, integrity and unwavering commitment to serving others inspire me every day to pursue my dreams with the same determination and to lead with compassion in all I do."

Vaylee graduated at the top of her senior class with a 5.0 GPA. She was dual-enrolled in three colleges and served as president of the National Honor Society and president of the Youth Leadership Association.

"Leadership and service have always been at the heart of who I am," she said. "I co-founded and served as PR of the Healthcare Club, giving students opportunities to explore careers in medicine. I was treasurer of the Tri-M Music Society, a Peer Leader in Sources of Strength and public relations officer for a Mental Health Club, where I coordinated guest speakers and activities. Beyond leadership, I played varsity soccer for four years on the high school team."

Community service has been a defining part of her life. In 2013, she launched Feel Better Friend, a project that began with making bracelets for sick children

which evolved into Mission: Change Allows Kindness to Evolve focused on spreading kindness and supporting those in need.

"I have packed food boxes for Meals on Wheels, delivered Thanksgiving meals through the Rotary Club, provided clothing through The Blessing Closet, and mentored middle school students through The Bridge Program," said Vaylee. "My Girl Scout Gold Award project, the Feel Better Box, aims to address hygiene insecurity by providing free access to basic hygiene items while also tackling the root causes of the issue through education and advocacy."

Her dad, who transitioned after retirement to director of School Safety for Berkeley County, W.Va., School System, said he is "incredibly" proud of Vaylee's past and future endeavors.

"I am incredibly proud of my daughter and all she has achieved in high school," he said. "She has maintained an outstanding GPA while balancing dual enrollment, leadership roles and countless community service projects."

"Through her initiatives, such as 'Feel Better Friend' and Mission C.A.K.E., as well as her involvement in healthcare clubs, she has demonstrated compassion, leadership and a genuine desire to help others," continued Olack. "Her determination, hard work and kind heart inspire not only me but everyone around her, and I know she will continue to do amazing things in the future."



Vaylee and sister Lexza

CROCKETT PROGENY BRINGS ACCLAIM, HONOR TO HERITAGE

By Cindy Baugher
Assistant to Communications
Director

In his 31 years in law enforcement, Christopher Crockett, colonel/director of Kentucky's State Parks Ranger Division, has served many roles.

He comes to his line of work honestly — Crockett is related to the “king of the wild frontier,” Davy Crockett.

Crockett has worked as a uniformed trooper, detective, governor's security detail officer, electronic crime branch commander, Internet Crimes Against Children task force commander, assistant operations post commander, assistant governor's security detail commander, governor's security detail commander and FBI special agent.

Each of these stops on his career path has enabled Crockett to hone his skills in the law enforcement field and qualified him for his role with the ranger division. He is responsible for overseeing all law enforcement operational, administrative and strategic functions within Kentucky State Parks.

Much of his time is spent in Frankfort at the central office. There he is responsible for reviewing and developing division policies and procedures and collaborating with all aspects of leadership: ranger division, parks, cabinet and legal.

He also manages the division's budget, including reviewing and approving expenditures. He handles all of this while building and maintaining interagency relationships, such as collaborating with Kentucky Emergency Management.

Crockett said that while he is typically busy with administrative duties, his work often takes him outdoors.

“I periodically travel to parks across the commonwealth to experience firsthand the day-to-day life of a Kentucky State Park ranger—an experience as diverse as



Col. Crockett near a waterfall inside a Kentucky State Park

the parks themselves," said Crockett.

He added that a typical day for a ranger often begins with patrolling their assigned park — by truck, foot, UTV or bicycle — ensuring that every area remains safe, secure and welcoming for both guests and employees.

"Rangers are responsible for enforcing state laws and park regulations, protecting our natural and cultural resources, and responding to both emergency and non-emergency calls for service," said Crockett.

Beyond these law enforcement duties, rangers also proudly serve as ambassadors of Kentucky State Parks, engaging with guests, answering questions and promoting a positive visitor experience, he added.

"Whether managing traffic and safety during special events or assisting a family in need, each day provides new opportunities to uphold the values of public service, safety and stewardship

that define our mission," continued Crockett.

Echoing a sentiment held by so many others in the field of law enforcement, Crockett said the best part of being director is helping people and making a difference in the community.

His favorite part is “serving the citizens and guests of Kentucky by ensuring our parks are safe, secure and welcoming.” His hope is this will create an experience they will remember.

Originally from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., his family relocated multiple times in his childhood because of his dad's work with a hospital corporation, but he always felt an attachment to the outdoors.

He thoroughly enjoyed exploring creeks, walking through the woods, fishing and being active in sports.

“Some of my fondest memories,” he said, “involve family visits to state parks throughout Florida and Kentucky.”

After graduating from Ballard High School in Louisville, Ky., in 1989, Crockett received his bachelor of science in police administration from Eastern Kentucky University and completed his rookie school at the Kentucky State Police Academy and FBI Academy.

He began his law enforcement career with the Kentucky State Police in 1994, serving as a trooper until 2001, when he was accepted into the FBI Academy.

"Following graduation from the FBI Academy, I served as a special agent assigned to the New Orleans Field Office, where I investigated counterterrorism, bank robberies and fugitive apprehensions," Crockett said.

After the events of Sept. 11, along with pending overseas assignments, Crockett said he contacted the Kentucky State Police and was offered an opportunity to return. He accepted the offer and went on to serve an additional 17 years.

"Upon retiring from the State Police, I continued to serve as a contract employee before accepting a position with the Kentucky State Parks Ranger Division as a regional captain," he said. "Shortly thereafter, I was honored to receive a governor's appointment to lead the division as its director — a position I have held since 2022."

Crockett has earned many awards for his work during his career, including: Kentucky State Police Trooper of the Year (1999, 2005, 2007), Detective of the Year (2004), Trooper's Medal – Lifesaving (1999), Commissioner's Commendation Medals (2004, 2006, 2007) and the Certificate of Appreciation from the U.S. Attorney's Office (2005).

Considering the various law enforcement roles that Crockett has had over the past 31 years, the advice he shares for those who may be considering a profession in law enforcement is understandable.

"Continue your education and explore all the law enforcement opportunities available to find what best suits your interest," he said.



Col. Crockett at Dale Hollow Lake State Park



Kentucky State Parks ranger vehicle

Crockett and his wife, Diana, met in college and have been married for 28 years. They have two children, Ben, 22, and Lauren, 19.

Ben graduated from Notre Dame and is employed with JP Morgan and lives in Manhattan, N.Y. Lauren is a sophomore at the University of Cincinnati, pursuing a biology degree with aspirations of attending medical school and becoming a pediatric surgeon.

Crockett, when he can find the time, enjoys running, weightlifting and travel. He names his grandfather as the greatest influence on his career, and a former co-worker as the reason he joined the PBA.

He cited American novelist and short story writer known for depicting Kentucky culture and dialect, James Lane Allen, as the origin of his favorite quote, "Adversity does not build character, it reveals it."

VETERAN LEO HEADS UP REVITALIZATION OF SCPBA CHAPTER

By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

PBA fundraisers, candidate screenings, car shows and PTSD seminars don't organize themselves — they take the hard work and dedication of SSPBA chapter members devoted to their profession and the well-being of fellow officers.

When a chapter wanes, through attrition, time constraints or just increased responsibilities, PBA counts on other members to fill the vacuum to keep up activities and camaraderie among officers.

For a variety of reasons — including COVID — the SCPBA Greenville County Chapter needed resuscitation. Enter a handful of jump-starters, led by Greenville County sheriff's Deputy Sgt. Michael Mangum.

Mangum is in his third decade of law enforcement, spurred on by his sister, a renowned officer in her own right.

"My introduction and inspiration to a career in law enforcement came from my sister, Lisa Mangum," he said. "She worked for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department for 30 years. I have always respected her work ethic and success in her career. She went on to become the chief for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Police Department."

Michael Mangum was born and raised in Charlotte, N.C. When he was 15, his family moved to Pageland, S.C., and he graduated from Pageland Central High School.

After graduating high school, he attended North Greenville University in Greenville, S.C., where he earned an associate degree in science. He continued his college education at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.



Greenville County sheriff's Deputy Sgt. Michael Mangum

While attending college, Mangum said he was fortunate to do an internship with the Greenville County Sheriff's Office. He was hired as a deputy May 5, 1997, and attended South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy.

"I loved working the road and answering calls for service, and was assigned to the Uniform Patrol division for 18.5 years," he said. "Following my time on the road, I transferred to the Judicial Services Division where I was one of four sergeants who supervised the day-to-day operations of the multiple courthouses.

"Most recently, I was transferred to the extradition and transport unit within the Judicial Services Division," continued Mangum.

He is a sergeant within the Judicial Services Division's Extradition and Transport unit. This unit is responsible for the transport and extradition of wanted people who flee to various states and other jurisdictions.

The Judicial Services Division comprises 115 employees. The Greenville County Sheriff's Office has over 600 sworn deputies and covers 795 square miles.

The population of Greenville County is over 600,000 people.

A few years after Mangum began carving out his impressive career, he joined PBA. In fact, 2026 is his 25th anniversary with the organization.

"For me, the PBA has always been that peace of mind if I found myself in a bad situation," he said. "Knowing that the PBA was there to help and provide me with legal counsel was instrumental in me being a member for 25 years.

"I have also had to use the PBA legal services in the past, and knowing that the PBA was looking into my best interest was well worth any membership dues," Mangum continued.

The Greenville County Chapter lost leadership when President Daniel Peninger retired from Simpsonville Police Department, said Patrick Cullinan, executive director of SCPBA and PBAGA. Scott Gray is PBAGA and SCPBA staff representative.

Mangum was serving as senior vice president under Peninger.

"Scott and I went to South Carolina, and we reached out to Mike to ask if he was still interested in being involved," said Cullinan. "President Peninger retired and can't be elected but is still on the board as immediate past president."

Cullinan said Mangum "has all the qualities as president of a chapter."

"He brought us members to make a chapter, and he showed up with way more," said Cullinan.

The chapter board is set with David Messinger as senior vice president and Greenville sheriff's deputies Lisandra Piercy as vice president and Donald Bishop as secretary.

New board members include Paule Fazio and David Ur.

"(Mangum's) first meeting of revitalizing, all those showed up," Cullinan said. "They said 'We want to be active, not just meeting.' We said, 'Great, that's what we want.'"

Mangum has high hopes for the revitalized chapter and its capacity for member involvement and activity.

"I am fortunate to work with some really intelligent, talented and caring people," said Mangum. "The board of the Greenville County PBA chapter is just that. Each person truly cares about their colleagues and makes sure that they are taken care of."

"We all share a mindset of serving our fellow law enforcement members," he continued. "Our board is made up of many years of experience in various aspects of law enforcement. This collaborative effort and the individual skills that the board has will lead to future success."

Chapter members were eager to get started on their first project — hosting a Behind the Badge PTSD and Suicide Prevention Seminar in spring 2026.

"It was originally suggested by Patrick Cullinan," said Mangum. "After researching the class and seeing its effects on officers that have attended, we decided that we needed to host it in the Upstate South Carolina region."

"If this class can help just one officer who is having difficulty with PTSD or suicidal thoughts, then we feel it is our duty to host this class," he said.

With members breathing new life into the Greenville Chapter, Cullinan has high hopes for its continued success and the success of other flagging chapters in South Carolina.

"We're in the process of reviving Low Country, Piedmont and Columbia," said Cullinan. "We want to use the Greenville model to bring these back one at a time. We want members to know that you don't need a title to be a leader."

"When you have people like that, you

have chapters that host car shows, seminars and other projects," he continued.

Toward that end, PBA also hired a new SCPBA staff representative, Chris Chavous.

Mangum emphasized the need to offer classes for LEOs that help them learn occupational coping skills.

"The Greenville County Chapter is looking to put on additional training classes to help officers in their professional careers cope with the dangers of the job," he said. "If we don't take care of our brothers and sisters in law enforcement, then no one will. It's up to us to make sure that we are looking out for the well-being of our co-workers."

Mangum expressed support for the revitalization campaign.

"I would highly encourage other PBA chapters that are thinking about getting their chapter up and running to jump in with both feet," he said.

"In today's world, we need all the support and training that is available to help us be successful in our law enforcement career. It's more than just a chapter meeting — it's an opportunity to build friendships and make lasting change for the men and women of law enforcement," continued Mangum.



The Police Benevolent Foundation is proud to have developed a long-term relationship with Bear Creek Arsenal in Sanford, N.C.

This relationship is the product of several months of discussion between the PBF and Bear Creek, and it pairs two groups that are passionate about serving law enforcement officers.

Bear Creek's support will provide financial assistance to the loved ones of officers who lose their lives in the line of duty, scholarships to children of officers, aid for officers impacted by natural disasters and funding for the PBF's Behind the Badge seminars, which educate officers on PTSD and suicide prevention.

POLICE SERGEANT FULLY EXONERATED AFTER 5-YEAR LEGAL BATTLE

**By Micaelah Gale
Staff Attorney**

On Nov. 12, 2025, the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled in favor of PBA member Sgt. Charles Johnson III, concluding the five-year long legal battle that ensued after Johnson was terminated from the Monroe Police Department.

Johnson was accused of delaying turning over an excessive force investigation to Louisiana State Police for political motivations in an alleged attempt to throw the 2020 mayoral election in Monroe. Johnson's PBA attorney, Joseph Beck III, said that this case was driven by a political agenda from the beginning.

Johnson, a public information officer and defensive tactics instructor for MPD, was informed by the Internal Affairs Division about an excessive use of force incident in which an MPD officer was seen on body cam footage repeatedly kicking a male in the head while he was on the ground and being handcuffed by another officer.

The individual involved in the incident filed an excessive use of force complaint against the officers. Johnson, Interim Chief Reginald Brown, Monroe City Attorney Angie Sturdivant and Assistant City Attorney Brandon Creekbaum, had a telephone conference July 6, 2020, to further discuss the incident and the excessive force complaint.

The City alleged that Johnson was instructed to report the complaint to the Louisiana State Police due to it being a criminal matter. However, Johnson maintained that he never received such orders during this conference.

The following week, on July 13, 2020, Johnson contacted LSP to report the excessive force complaint. Shortly after, on Sept. 4, 2020, Johnson was notified that he was being investigated for potential misconduct.

The City alleged to have cause to believe that Johnson intentionally delayed



Monroe police Sgt. Charles Johnson III

turning over the excessive use of force investigation to LSP as an effort to influence the mayoral election on July 11, 2020. The City based this allegation on the fact that the election took place only two days before Johnson contacted LSP.

On Oct. 8, 2020, Johnson and Beck attended an investigative interview during which Johnson confirmed that he learned of the excessive force complaint July 6 but denied receiving instructions to report the complaint to LSP.

It was alleged that Johnson's answers during this interview were inconsistent and evasive, so he was ordered to take a polygraph exam.

However, Johnson and Beck later learned through Freedom of Information Act requests that the polygraph exam had been scheduled several weeks before Johnson's interview ever took place.

The polygraph exam was administered three days after the interview. Johnson

was asked several questions specifically related to whether someone instructed him to delay reporting the use of force incident to LSP until after the mayoral election had concluded. Johnson maintained that he had not delayed reporting to LSP because of the election.

However, the polygraph examiner concluded that Johnson's responses during the exam were deceptive. This conclusion came as no surprise to Beck as he was aware of the ploy that was revealing itself in this case.

Johnson's pre-disciplinary hearing was held in November, during which the City contended that Johnson had not provided any evidence to support that MPD should not take any disciplinary action against him. Johnson was subsequently terminated on Nov. 23, 2020.

Johnson's termination letter outlined his alleged untruthfulness during the Internal Affairs investigation as a reason for his termination, specifically referring

to Johnson's alleged untruthfulness during the polygraph exam.

Johnson and Beck used the appeal process available to Louisiana civil service employees and appealed the termination to the Monroe Municipal Fire and Police Civil Service Board. A five-day hearing was held on the issue of Johnson's termination, but the Board ultimately upheld his termination.

Despite the Board's affirmation of Johnson's termination, Johnson and Beck did not give up hope. Beck was determined to right the injustice committed against Johnson and to uncover the ruse that had been affecting the jobs and lives of many Louisiana officers and civil service employees.

Beck did not back down or become intimidated by the City or the high-profile law firm he and Johnson were up against.

"He remained a 'calm through the storm,'" said Johnson, "even though Joe was against a team of five attorneys and a city administration."

The next step in this battle was to appeal

Johnson's case to the Fourth Judicial District Court, which is exactly what Beck and Johnson successfully did. On July 10, 2024, the Fourth Judicial District Court for the Parish of Ouachita entered a judgment that reversed the Board's and the City's termination of Johnson. The judgment effectively reinstated Johnson with all rights, privileges, benefits and backpay from the date of his termination.

This win was massive not only for Johnson and Beck, but also for civil service employees statewide. Civil service employees are afforded many protections under the Civil Service Act, including protections against firing decisions based on partisan politics.

Johnson, like many officers, chose a civil service municipality when entering law enforcement believing that civil service was a protection for employees from politically motivated agendas. However, this turned out not to be the case for Johnson.

"I learned municipalities have deep pockets, of taxpayer dollars, and time is usually on the side of the municipality," said Johnson. "I discovered in my case,

one of the strategies municipalities utilize is to financially bleed out the employee, until they have no choice but to give up the fight and walk away."

Through litigating Johnson's case, Beck successfully unraveled a scheme in which employers had discovered a way to circumvent civil service requirements and terminate civil service employees without any meaningful cause.

Beck discovered that agencies statewide were terminating officers for political reasons and then covering up the civil service violations by basing their terminations on alleged untruthfulness.

Beck said an agency would first create allegations against an officer and then claim that the matter needed to be investigated further. During said investigation, the officer would be asked to take a polygraph examination. The agency would then hire polygraph examiners who would conduct the polygraph exams in a manner that made it impossible for officers to pass the exam.

Once the officer failed the polygraph exam, the agency would then have grounds to terminate the officer based on untruthfulness during the investigation. This often resulted in terminations that had nothing to do with the initial allegations made against an officer.

Discovering this was only half of the battle, though. Beck and Johnson still had to prove to the court that this was what happened in Johnson's case. The most effective way to do so was through expert testimony, which can be costly.

Understanding that this testimony was crucial to the success of Johnson's case, PBA agreed to provide an expert to support Beck's assertion that the polygraph exam had been rigged. A former employee at the polygraph center for the FBI provided expert testimony confirming that, based upon the way the polygraph exam was conducted, it would be impossible for anyone to pass the test.

After Beck and Johnson's success in the district court, the City of Monroe applied for a supervisory writ with the Court of



PBA attorney Joseph Beck III



The Johnson family

Appeal for the Second Circuit seeking review of the district court's reversal of Johnson's termination.

A supervisory writ allows a higher court to review and correct decisions made by a lower court. A supervisory writ is typically requested when an appeal is not available or would not provide sufficient relief under the circumstances.

In Louisiana, the courts of appeal have both supervisory jurisdiction and appellate jurisdiction over cases that arise within their respective circuits.

The difference between supervisory jurisdiction and appellate jurisdiction is that appellate jurisdiction can be invoked by a litigant as a matter of right while supervisory jurisdiction is discretionary. In other words, supervisory writs differ from appeals in that courts can grant or deny a request for supervisory writ whereas appeal requests typically must be granted.

The Court of Appeal for the Second Circuit denied the City's application for supervisory writ on Jan. 16, 2025, stating that an exercise of the court's supervisory jurisdiction was not warranted under the

circumstances.

The City then took their request for supervisory writ to the Supreme Court of Louisiana for review. In a 6-1 ruling, the matter finally came to a long-awaited conclusion in which the court denied the City's writ application. The court issued its opinion on Nov. 12, 2025, just over five years after the start of the case, and Johnson was fully exonerated.

Johnson was awarded over \$400,000 in back pay. The court also held that the City violated the Louisiana Police Officers' Bill of Rights which rendered the termination an absolute nullity.

Litigation is still ongoing to determine whether Johnson will be entitled to promotions he would have earned during the ordinary course of his employment had the termination not occurred. Beck is prepared to argue that Johnson should be entitled to these promotions to be made fully whole.

This case has had a huge impact on Johnson's career and has the potential to affect officers all over.

"It is hard to win cases against city

boards and agencies because the courts usually side with them over the officers, so this really is a big deal for police officers and for the future rights of civil service employees," said Beck.

Beck also noted that, without PBA's assistance, litigation of this case would have been unfeasible and nearly impossible due to the substantial legal fees incurred for a case of this duration and magnitude.

Another officer involved in the case, Reginald Brown, shared with PBA how this case affected him and why he is now an advocate for the association and its mission.

Brown was serving as the interim police chief at the time this case began. Brown and Johnson were two of four candidates that had been approved to sit for the Civil Service examination for the permanent police chief position before they were both terminated. It was alleged that Brown was a co-conspirator with Johnson in attempting to influence the mayoral election.

Brown was not a PBA member at the time and had to navigate the legal hurdles of this case on his own.

"At the time of my termination, I was not a PBA member and personally incurred nearly \$80,000 in legal expenses over the course of five years," he said. "In contrast, Mr. Johnson, as a PBA member, received full representation with no out-of-pocket legal expense. The side-by-side contrast between our experiences provides a clear, measurable example of the practical value of PBA membership."

Brown has since become a PBA member and willingly shares his experience to stress the importance of proactive membership. Johnson also weighed in on how grateful he is for PBA's assistance.

"I am deeply grateful for the PBA's commitment and legal expertise," he said. "Without the services of the PBA, the financial and emotional toll on me and my family would have been devastating. The PBA membership proved not just beneficial, but essential for the case."

CHOA PATIENTS TREATED TO FUN, THANKS TO PBF PROJECTS

By Cindy Baugher
Assistant to Communications
Director

Jeffrey Burchell is a busy guy.

In his official role as an instructor with the Georgia Department of Corrections Academy, he teaches specialized classes for field agents' certification. He is also an active member of the PBA, serving as not only vice president of the PBAGA Division, but also as president of the COBA Chapter of the PBAGA for the past eight years.

Recently, he was able to combine the resources available through the PBF with the manpower of a class of officers for a fun and meaningful experience for hospitalized children.

For each iteration of the training classes that Burchell conducts, the officers in the group collectively select a service project to give back to their communities.

In October, Burchell's students opted to work with Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at two of their campuses, Arthur Blank Children's Hospital and Scottish Rite Hospital. The officers wanted to provide a fun distraction for the patients of the two hospitals by visiting in a space the hospital calls "The Zone." This area is a place for patients to hang out and get away from the concerns of being a hospital patient.

During their visit, the agents provided arts and crafts, games, puzzles, and books for the patients. Even better, the officers worked and played alongside the kids — chatting, laughing and just being silly as they enjoyed painting, creating pieces of jewelry and putting together LEGO sets. Determining who had more fun at the event, the officers or the patients, was not easy.

The CHOA organization and its donors make significant efforts on both campuses to ensure The Zone areas are a welcome respite for their young patients. Burchell and the officers noticed on their



Officers and a CHOA patient enjoy a challenging round of Jenga

arrival that the mission to keep The Zone's atmosphere upbeat is successful. This cheerful feeling was enhanced by the eager group of volunteer officers spending time with the kids.

It was clear from the smiles of the patients how much they relished the time to just be a kid and talk to the officers about their jobs, rather than think about being sick. Parents and siblings who participated alongside the patients and officers seemed to appreciate the afternoon as well.

With the help of funds from the PBF, the officers were also able to pack goodie bags for the patients to take back with them, so they could have fun in their hospital rooms or back home. The bags were in addition to the games, puzzles and crafting materials that were donated to remain in The Zone.

As an active PBA member in elected positions, Burchell has worked to stretch the ways that the PBA membership and chapters can be valuable. This volunteer visit is just one example.

"I feel like my experience with PBA has been very unique, because I've been able to kind of focus on the way that we assist our members with things like

this (CHOA hospital) event and getting out in the corrections community with staff appreciation events," said Burchell. "Participating in ways like that and seeing those opportunities and kind of growing it that way has been rewarding. I've been very fortunate with that. Also, it's been good to be able to spend a lot of time in the (Georgia State) capitol supporting our members there."

Thanks to the involvement of the PBF, the volunteer group of agents was able to assemble take home goodie bags for the patients, donate resources to The Zone and send officers to two separate CHOA hospitals on the same day.

Burchell's experience and affiliation with the PBA enabled him to find help for a worthwhile volunteer project — a project that arose from his professional role teaching the field agents' recertification classes. This successful intersection of work and membership to bring about a positive outcome is a prime example of the PBA at its best.

(About this story: The writer accompanied this volunteer group, including Burchell and his student field agents, during a recent visit to CHOA to witness firsthand their service projects.)

BEHIND THE BADGE SEMINARS HELP OFFICERS IN FOUR STATES

By Savannah Grubb
Legal Case Associate
By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

Imagine standing on the front lines, witnessing trauma firsthand and seeing the worst of humanity day after day. Now imagine carrying that weight in silence, keeping it all in — what you saw and experienced and how it made you feel.

For many law enforcement officers, this is the reality. In a profession that demands strength, vulnerability is suppressed, leaving officers to internalize the emotional toll they go through daily. Now, more than ever, it is important to acknowledge the unseen struggles and to create space for open and honest conversations about mental health and support — conversations that initiatives like our Behind the Badge seminars were designed to bring to the forefront.

In 2025, the PBF hosted seven Behind the Badge seminars across four divisions — Georgia, Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina — reaching more than 300 officers.

These efforts come at a time when a sobering reality continues to impact the law enforcement community.

More officers die each year by suicide than by being killed in the line of duty. Despite this, the topic of suicide is still too often overlooked or left unspoken within many agencies, creating a dangerous gap in awareness, support and prevention.

Each day, an officer somewhere faces the internal struggle that can lead to the decision to take their own life. The impact of these tragedies extends far beyond the individual, leaving lasting emotional and psychological effects on their families, colleagues and entire departments.

Addressing law enforcement suicide is not just about statistics — it's about breaking the silence, fostering open dialogue and ensuring officers know they are not alone in the battles they face.



Capt. Tammy Lee Booth



Special Agent Jeremy Peterson

Columbus, Ga. **Behind the Badge Seminar**

Lee County, Ala., sheriff's Capt. Tammy Lee Booth has put in 30 years serving her community. She remembers the days of working out the losses of fallen officers pretty much on her own.

Special Agent Jeremy Peterson of the Alabama State Bureau of Investigation is closing in on 25 years in law enforcement. Prior to going to Alabama in 2005, Peterson spent five years in Simpsonville, S.C.

"There was no peer support in 2007," Peterson said. "We didn't know what to do. We had lost three officers up to that

point. We created memorial bracelets to memorialize and never forget them. It was our coping mechanism."

Booth experienced similar treatment and knew "the old school way wasn't working."

"Back then, we talked amongst ourselves and were supposed to go on," she said. "It's changed a lot for the better."

Booth said she sees an improved future for rookie LEOs struggling to handle stress and thoughts of suicide.

"This gives us hope for females and younger officers who don't have to be told to just 'toughen up,'" she said. "Officers can be willing to get out of their heads and ask for help."

Peterson praised presenter Tim Rutledge's approach to teaching.

"The classes are helpful," he said. "He uses humor to get the message through."



Capt. Lazaro Ramos **Wilmington, N.C.** **Behind the Badge Seminar**

Lazaro Ramos didn't come easily to law enforcement, but he was somewhat prepared for the struggles and harsh side of life that goes hand in hand with the challenging profession.

Capt. Ramos is the senior vice president of the NCPBA Southeastern Chapter, after joining Pender County Sheriff's

Office in 2002. He was born in Cuba but left in 1986, at the age of 14, for a better life in America.

"I started as a road deputy," said Ramos. "There was a reckless driver who hit two cars and kept going. We got into a chase, and it turned out the driver had two handguns. After he fired at me several times, he shot himself. He'd killed two people prior and was involved in drugs."

Ramos was one of dozens of LEOs who attended a Behind the Badge Seminar in Wilmington, N.C., in 2025. Ramos was pleased with the class, presented by Tim Rutledge.

"The class is awesome," he said. "You really can't sit and ponder the things you see, you try not to. We see things normal people don't see."



Lt. Stephen C. Haines
Morgantown, W.Va.
Behind the Badge Seminar

There is such a stigma attached to depression, PTSD symptoms and suicidal thoughts in the ranks of law enforcement that help isn't often discussed, let alone sought, especially by older veterans.

"I wouldn't wish these things on other officers, especially the younger ones just hiring on, but, undoubtedly, they will take a front seat to human suffering," said Lt. Stephen C. Haines.

He began his career in 1998 as an

Indiana conservation officer. He spent time as a Weirton city patrolman from 2007 to 2010. He is now a 15-year veteran at the West Virginia Natural Resources Police, his dream job from age 12.

He is former president of WVPBA Natural Resources Chapter.

In 2017, Haines plunged into a dark depressive state from witnessing tragic and toxic people and events.

"I weigh 198 today but I got down to 165," he said. "I couldn't eat, I slept 10 hours a day. No one knew, and I didn't know others were hurting."

Haines sought treatment, and it was in therapy that he learned a valuable lesson.

"I realized it was OK to feel depleted, helpless, not have an appetite," he said. "It was the greatest thing I learned. I was worn out and tired, and that was OK, it was acceptable."

He said once he started connecting the dots, he thanked God for PBF and the PTSD training. "I learned about not allowing my cup to get too full," said Haines. "I hope I never go back to that."



Lt. Larry Bracken
Augusta, Ga.
Behind the Badge Seminar

Lt. Larry Bracken began his law enforcement career in 1996 and now

serves with the Richmond County Marshal's Office in Augusta, Ga.

Raised in a military family and influenced by his grandfather, a retired Army sergeant major and military police officer, he said those values led him to the profession. During his career, he has worked locally and overseas, including time in Afghanistan, training Afghan National Police and conducting patrols alongside Army units. Those experiences exposed him to the kind of trauma many officers quietly carry.

"When I came up in the 90s, we were taught to lock it up," Bracken said, "but now we know that's not the right answer."

Bracken wants everyone in the law enforcement community to have the opportunity to hear about the resources the Behind the Badge seminar provides to law enforcement officers.

"I have seen and done some things, and this class opened my eyes," he said. "I wanted some of the law enforcement in this area to have the same opportunity I had hearing the speakers."

He said he believes the biggest source of trauma for many in the profession comes not from high-profile incidents, but from the everyday reality of being first on scene to tragedies and difficult calls.

"Behind the Badge Seminar gives officers another tool in the toolbox," Bracken said. "If someone is sitting in that classroom having a hard time because of what they've experienced, and this training gives them even one outlet for support, then it's worth it."

After decades in the profession, Bracken sees officer wellness as an important shift in law enforcement culture, one that encourages open conversations about mental health and ensures officers have the resources they need to cope with the realities of the job.

For more information about the PBF Behind the Badge seminars, access pbfi.org or contact PBF at 800-233-3506.

SGT CODY MANDERS HONORED WITH TN HOUSE RESOLUTION

By Cindy Baugher
Assistant to Communications
Director

On Aug. 2, 2024, the smooth daily operations Sgt. Cody Manders was used to took an alarming turn that put him at the forefront of preventing tragedy and saving lives.

"I make sure that the daily operations at the courthouse run smoothly," said Manders, a TNPBA member and court sergeant with Monroe County Sheriff's Office. "This includes security of the building and safety for the judges."

At 8:22 a.m., a man arrived at the Monroe County Justice Center armed with a Ruger Mini 14 .223 caliber rifle and fired several rounds into the building.

The gunman walked to the entrance of the justice center and fired another round through the glass door. At this time, deputies observed the individual entering the building armed with a rifle, said Manders.

Upon realizing this, an on-duty deputy shouted "Gun!" while also helping another deputy to clear the lobby and an adjacent training room. The gunman aimed at the front desk area where officers are stationed.

When Manders heard the first deputy yell "Gun!", he pulled his service weapon and fired, neutralizing the threat.

For their timely actions in response to the shooter, three deputies on duty that day were presented with Deputy of the Month and Life Saver awards.

In addition, Sgt. Manders received Deputy of the Year 2024, a Life Saving Award, Medal of Valor, and on March 19, 2025, the Tennessee General Assembly passed House Joint Resolution No. 359 in his honor. The resolution reads, in part:

"WHEREAS, Sergeant Cody Manders placed himself directly in harm's way and



Manders in the Tennessee House chambers at the time of the proclamation

performed his role as a law enforcement officer to his highest ability, nearly sacrificing himself to save others; and

WHEREAS, Sergeant Manders exhibits integrity, probity, and valor in his public life as a law enforcement officer, compassion and loyalty in private life, and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and WHEREAS, it is fitting that we should recognize and commend this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor Sergeant Cody Manders of the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to public service."

As a lifelong Tennessean who was raised in Englewood, Manders appreciated the recognition. He shared advice for those who might consider a law enforcement career.

"The job is dangerous, but rewarding at the same time. Always keep your head on a swivel," he said.

Manders lives in Englewood, along with his wife, Amanda, son Wyatt and daughter Jocelyn. In 2010, he graduated from nearby Cleveland State Police Academy as part of class #50. He began his career with McMinn Sheriff's office and has also worked with the Englewood Police Department as a patrol sergeant and as a park ranger for Hamilton County. For about 10 years, Manders has served in law enforcement in the southeast region of Tennessee.

At the time of the shooting, Manders had only been a PBA member for about nine months. Thinking back to the support and legal benefits offered by the PBA, he said, "PBA was quick to act after this incident, and I'm very grateful."

Steve Ward was the attorney provided via Manders's PBA membership, and Manders was most appreciative of his guidance.

There is a quote by Guy de Maupassant which comes to mind as Manders is policing, "You've never lived until you've almost died. For those who have fought for it, life has a flavor the protected shall never know."

MEET VAPBA REGIONAL DIRECTOR BRIAN SMITH

By Cindy Baugher
Assistant to Communications
Director

Brian Smith, lieutenant and SWAT team commander with the Lynchburg Police Department, has served in an active, elected position with the Blue Ridge VAPBA chapter in various capacities since 2009.

He began his career in law enforcement with the LPD, and, except for a “brief and proud stint” as a deputy in the Amherst County Sheriff’s Office, he has served with LPD for the better part of 23 years.

Smith completed his academy instruction in 2003 at the Central Virginia Criminal Justice Academy in Lynchburg, where he was certified and sworn in as a LEO. As a proud PBA member since then, he has spent most of his time serving as a member of the local chapter board as a senior VP and president before moving into the VAPBA regional director’s position.

“I have enjoyed academy instruction and leadership positions within law enforcement because of the opportunity to mentor and help equip LEOs to face the many challenges of this profession,” he said.

Born into a second-generation Roman Catholic Italian-Irish home, Smith was surrounded with family in his younger years.

“Two brothers and two sisters and innumerable cousins, aunts, and uncles,” said Smith. “Growing up more with the Italian side of the family, we were very close and had the best food. I was born and raised in New York in a lower-middle class neighborhood. It was a tough neighborhood but definitely set the foundation to prepare me for what I would eventually face in my professional career.”

He graduated from William Floyd High School in 1995 and then attended



Lt. Brian Smith

community college in New York for two years, eventually completing his B.S. in criminal justice at Liberty University, Virginia in 2014.

“My main activity in high school and early college years was trying to not get kicked out for my adolescent shenanigans,” he said.

Firefighting was Smith’s first step into the world of public service. He was familiar with the profession since his father was a firefighter. Going to the firehouse with his dad — often as a spend-the-night occasion for his birthday, and even getting to ride along on calls — is a fond memory for him.

Starting out in the field, he volunteered with a local firefighting department before pursuing professionally paid fire/EMS departments. Being a fireman felt like a natural fit for him, and Smith gained all types of experience in his time working in and around Brooklyn. Unfortunately, treating gunshot wounds and stabbing victims was par for the course in the densely populated area that he served. Notably, he also helped deliver twenty-one babies during his time on duty in and around Brooklyn.

On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, while Smith was wrapping up a shift, the Twin Towers were attacked.

Below, in his own words, is his compelling story of how everything unfolded for him that day:

Before I moved to Virginia and began my law enforcement career, my public service started in New York in Firefighting and EMS. I worked for the FDNY in downtown Brooklyn as an Emergency Medical Specialist/Hazardous Materials Technician assigned to a Special Operations Haz-Tac unit.

Our unit provided BLS and ALS capability trauma and medical care, and handled a wide range of special operations responsibilities, including technical rescue and confined space work. We were also a citywide response unit for major incidents, including two-alarm fires and above, and for terrorist-related events involving biological, chemical, explosive, radioactive and nuclear hazards. We supported the squads, rescue units and HazMat 1.

I had worked the tour leading into the morning of September 11, 2001. I was preparing to leave the station when I heard and saw the first explosion in lower Manhattan. My partner, Brian Gordon, and I ran back inside and told our lieutenant what we had just witnessed. We

immediately got back into service and notified Central Dispatch that we were available with a full Haz-Tac crew.

We were deployed to the World Trade Center complex and assigned to One World Trade at the command post area. We crossed the East River and entered Manhattan as the incident rapidly escalated. While we were trying to locate our staging area, we were directed to the quarters of Engine 10 and Ladder 10, the Ten House, directly across from the South Tower.

It was there that the second attack happened. The South Tower was struck by the second plane right in front of us. The scene instantly became an even bigger mass casualty operation. We moved to triage and treatment and started doing what we were trained to do. We treated patients with serious trauma injuries caused by the impacts and falling debris and we also treated severe burn patients who had been burned by ignited jet fuel. The injuries were extensive, and the volume of patients was overwhelming. While we were managing patients, we were alerted that a firefighter outside had been struck by falling debris and needed help. Two other firefighters and I grabbed a Stokes basket and went outside to locate him. Even outside, the danger never stopped. Debris continued to fall steadily. People were still jumping from the building, and multiple jumpers came down in close proximity to where I was standing. We pushed forward through the chaotic scene and biological debris until we reached the area where the downed firefighter had been located, but other firefighters were already carrying him away. It was obvious he had sustained a mortal head wound and there was nothing we could do that would change the outcome.

We started back toward the Ten House, and that is when the South Tower began to collapse. As it



Smith competing in a Spartan event

came down toward us, we ran for the apparatus bay doors of Engine 10 and Ladder 10 to find shelter. We were caught in the collapse, I suffered injuries, and the conditions inside were brutal. Visibility dropped to almost nothing. The air was thick with dust and debris. Everything was loud, chaotic and disorienting. Through those conditions, I heard Brian Gordon transmit a mayday on the radio. I moved toward his transmission and was, thankfully, able to find him. Once I located Gordy, we began treating other first responders and civilians who were trapped inside the firehouse with us. We provided trauma care under confined, hazardous conditions, doing what we could with what we had, while trying to account for people and get them out. Eventually, we contacted personnel outside and were able to evacuate the majority of those sheltering inside. At that point, only four of us remained inside: a Chinese businessman with a pelvic fracture, Brian Gordon, Capt. Kelty from that firehouse and me. We began a final sweep of the building to make sure nobody else was left behind and during that sweep, the terrifying sound came back again. The North Tower was collapsing. Gordy, the captain and I ran into a bathroom and huddled on the floor in a corner. The sound was deafening

and then it stopped, and the silence afterward was almost worse.

When we were able, the four of us self-evacuated. After carrying the injured for several blocks, we flagged down a police car and got the injured businessman transported to the hospital. Gordy and I made our way down to the piers, where the largest maritime evacuation ever documented was underway. NYPD Harbor Patrol got us a ride off Manhattan to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and security personnel there helped get us back to our station. FDNY had issued a mandatory recall. When Gordy and I walked back into our station, our coworkers were preparing equipment and vehicles to return to operations. They had us listed as missing, and to the shock and relief of those inside, we walked in bloodied, covered in dust, exhausted and injured. They immediately called an ambulance, and we were transported to Kings County Medical Center in Brooklyn, a trauma center, and admitted.

Later that night, I learned my father, Kevin J. Smith, an FDNY firefighter assigned to HazMat 1, was also listed as missing. The next day, after I was released from the hospital, one of my lieutenants drove me to my dad's firehouse. I spoke with the captain there. He told me he had many missing personnel, including my father. He also told me the last radio transmission they received from my dad's group was from the 11th floor of the North Tower and immediately after that transmission, the tower collapsed. My dad's firehouse sustained the single greatest loss of life for any FDNY station on 9/11. Nineteen firefighters were killed there, including 11 from HazMat 1 and eight from Squad 288.

In the days, weeks, and months that followed, I returned to work and I worked regular tours at Ground Zero during the recovery phase. It was gruesome at times. It was exhausting. But it felt like something tangible I could do to help. I also knew, without

question, that if our roles were reversed, my dad would have worked that site until I was recovered and because it was a direct way to keep serving and to honor those we lost.

In the years since the tremendous tragedy of that day, Smith has had some health issues in the aftermath. "I must go through routine annual screenings in NYC to make sure others haven't developed," he continues, "(But) thankfully, by the grace of God, I am largely healthy." Smith's decision to move from New York to Virginia ultimately came down to three main things: warmer winters, cheaper taxes and a shorter commute to work. When it comes to making the change from firefighting to policing, he shares that he has been blessed with many influential leaders and role models through his law enforcement career. But, he said, "If I had to pick one who inspired me to join this profession

above all others though, it would be Frank Poncherello."

Surely not the only LEO who was inspired by the "CHiPS" television series that ran from 1977-1983, Smith said that his career shift to law enforcement from firefighting was a culture shock in many ways. "I transitioned to responding to emergency calls for service where most people were happy to see me to dealing with a part of the population who hated me by the nature of the job and badge I wore." After spending time in patrol, Smith was assigned to the Street Crimes Team before being promoted to detective in the narcotics unit. He was then promoted to sergeant while in narcotics, and after a total of eight years in that unit, began supervising in various assignments such as K9, street crimes, FTO program, field operations, and personnel and recruiting. "I was assigned as an operator to my agency's Tactical

Unit in 2004 and have held various titles there as a grenadier, assistant team leader, team leader and after promoting to lieutenant in 2019, assigned as Team Commander," he said. Smith cites Deuteronomy 31:6 as his favorite quote, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." He also advises those interested in working in law enforcement: "Make sure you build a strong support system to help sustain you through the challenging times that will assuredly visit you during your career."

When he is not busy with policing and his PBA volunteer duties, Smith enjoys baseball, softball and reading. But his favorite thing to do is spend time with his wife, Appomattox County sheriff's Deputy Kasey Smith, herself a 14-year PBA member, and their children.

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LT. VANESSA SMITH: A LIFE OF SERVICE, LEADERSHIP AND FAITH

By Steve Anthony
NCPBA Staff Representative

Born in Lexington, S.C., and raised in the small town of Gilbert, Lt. Vanessa Smith grew up surrounded by family, faith and community.

With two younger brothers, supportive parents and a childhood full of animals, homegrown gardens and high school football games, she described her hometown as “small and perfect for growing up.”

Music played a big role in her early years. Throughout middle and high school, she immersed herself in band and chorus — performing with the marching band, concert choir, concert band and flute choir.

Although she admits sports weren’t her strong suit, she excelled musically, earning letters in both band and chorus. During her senior year at Gilbert High School, she joined the Lexington County Sheriff’s Department Explorer program — an experience that would shape her life’s direction.

“Ever since then, I knew what I wanted to do,” she said.

After graduating from Gilbert High School in 2000, Smith continued her education in criminal justice — earning her associate’s degree from Midlands Technical College in 2002, a bachelor of science in criminal justice business from Liberty University in 2016, and her master’s in criminal justice leadership in 2025.

Although she never served in the military, her family’s dedication to the armed forces runs deep. Her brothers served in the Navy and Air Force, her sister-in-law in the Army, and her husband, Brad, retired from the Marine Corps.

“We had almost all the branches covered,” she laughs.



Smith is honored with Female Officer of the Year in 2022.

Her law enforcement career began with the Lexington County Sheriff’s Department in 2003, where she served four years before relocating to North Carolina when her husband was stationed at Camp Lejeune. There, she joined the Jacksonville Police Department, where she has served ever since — now totaling nearly 21 years in law enforcement.

Over the years, Smith has built an impressive résumé of accomplishments and firsts. She became Jacksonville PD’s first female traffic crash reconstructionist and crash data retrieval analyst, as well as one of only four female RADAR instructors in the state.

She is also certified as a general instructor, LIDAR Instructor, SFST instructor, physical fitness instructor, and compliance and control techniques instructor, and a nationally certified personal trainer through the National Academy of Sports Medicine.

Her excellence has been recognized. She earned Jacksonville-Onslow Chamber of Commerce’s Officer of the Year in 2018 and was named Female Officer of the Year by the N.C. Law Enforcement Women’s Association in 2022.

Smith also serves on the state advisory

group for the RADAR/LIDAR program — the first female ever to do so — and helps teach SFST instructor development classes across North Carolina.

Beyond the badge, Smith has a heart for service and community. She leads Jacksonville PD’s annual “Running with the Law” fundraiser for Special Olympics North Carolina, which reached a record 580 runners in 2025. She also participated in the Dancing with the Stars of Onslow fundraiser in 2022, raising \$5,000 for the local domestic violence center.

In March 2025, she was promoted to lieutenant and now leads a patrol squad, bringing her leadership and mentorship full circle.

“I want to leave this profession better than I found it,” she said — a mindset that also guides her work with the Police Benevolent Association.

Smith first joined the PBA for its legal protection benefits but quickly became more involved. After volunteering with the Crystal Coast Chapter, she eventually stepped up as chapter president.

“I love this career and the PBA,” she said. “They’ve helped me in times of need, and I want to give back. I hope to bring

creativity to the role and new ways to get people involved.”

Outside of work, Smith stays busy with her family and many passions. Married for 21 years, she and her husband, Brad, share a love of the outdoors — spending time on the water whenever possible. Brad runs Gunny B Outdoors, his fishing and duck hunting charter business, while Lt. Smith balances her career, fitness and life as mom to their 2-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Haley. After years of unexplained infertility, Haley was born through IVF — a journey that makes her “absolutely worth the wait.”

When she’s not working or parenting, Smith enjoys running — having completed eight half-marathons — gardening, and cooking with her beloved sourdough starter “Betty,” named after both her grandmothers. She’s also an avid USC Gamecock football fan and season ticket holder. Lt. Smith credits her success to faith and the mentors who shaped her along the way — retired leaders Phillip Williams, Sean Magill, Devon Bryan and Eric Sweden. Her favorite scripture, Proverbs 31:25-26, sums up her outlook on life and leadership:

“Bold power and glorious majesty are wrapped around her as she laughs with joy over the latter days. Her teachings are filled with wisdom and kindness as loving instruction pours from her lips.”

With over two decades of dedication, pioneering spirit and unwavering faith, Smith continues to set the bar high — not only for women in law enforcement, but for anyone striving to serve with integrity, purpose and heart. NCPBA Executive Director John Midgette said: “We are looking forward to what Lt. Smith can do not only for the chapter, but the entire division.”

NC Division President David Rose said of her leadership, “This is the future of our association — having strong leaders and board officers of all ranks that are committed not only to the agencies they serve, but to the profession they take so much pride in.”



Brad and Vanessa Smith with their miracle baby, Haley.



Smith is an avid marathon enthusiast.

THREE EXPERTS WEIGH IN ON GIGLIO LAW PASSED IN GEORGIA

By Brandi Dixon
Project Coordinator

In May 2025, House Bill 288 was signed into law, creating statewide rules for how Georgia prosecutors manage “Giglio lists.”

These lists are purportedly used to identify law enforcement officers whose credibility issues must be disclosed in criminal cases. Some believe they are used to unduly attack officers to punish or malign them and end their careers.

The term “Giglio” comes from a 1972 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, *Giglio v. United States*. The decision requires prosecutors to share information that could affect the credibility of a government witness, including a police officer.

This information may involve past findings of dishonesty, bias or misconduct that could influence a jury against a particular officer.

Prior to May 2025, there were no uniform standards as to how Giglio lists were created or maintained. This is why the passing of House Bill 288 was so essential.

One of the biggest problems is that officers were being placed on the Giglio lists without any notice. This bill set up a system to address this and other problems concerning Giglio issues. Another major issue is that even when an officer found themselves on a Giglio list, there was no way to address the allegation(s) and to be removed from a list once placed on it.

Being placed on a Giglio list limits an officer’s ability to testify and, in some cases, can affect work assignments and/or employment, potentially ending an officer’s career.

Without a formal Giglio framework, officers lacked due process protection, leading to concerns about fairness

and consistency. Such uncertainty undermines officers’ confidence in the system.

District attorneys and solicitor generals could and would place officers on Giglio lists with no way for an officer to object to their determinations. A lot of these situations were misunderstandings or miscommunications between the prosecutors and officers with no way to clear these matters up.

The issue also carries long-term implications for law enforcement staffing and career sustainability within the broader community.

In addition, inconsistent Giglio decisions increase the risk of civil liability for prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, and local governments, particularly in cases where an officer can demonstrate arbitrary or retaliatory placement on a Giglio list.

Under the new law, prosecutors must give written notice to an officer and the officer’s agency before adding the officer to a Giglio list. This is a significant development for officers’ rights because the notice must explain the factual basis for the decision and inform the officer of the right to request access to the materials used to support it.

Previously, officers would rarely receive any notice at all. This provision was much needed and a major advancement in officers’ due process rights. This was necessary to ensure transparency, disclosure and fairness when dealing with Giglio issues.

The Giglio law also creates a formal review process. This offers law enforcement officers a formal appeal mechanism for those who believe they were unfairly listed. Officers or their agencies have 30 days to ask for reconsideration of a Giglio determination.

If the request is denied, prosecutors must provide a written explanation.

The Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council is authorized to review whether the factual basis for the listing meets certain standards to ensure fairness.

This legislative revision meaningfully improves procedural protections for officers by giving them a defined opportunity to be heard in decisions with serious professional implications.

House Bill 288 limits how agencies can use Giglio information. An officer cannot be fired or disciplined solely because they appear on a Giglio list unless there is a separate, independent reason for action. Giglio lists are also kept out of the public eye. Prosecutors are granted immunity in these matters unless malice is proven.

The Giglio provisions of House Bill 288 took effect immediately upon the governor’s signature.

SSPBA panel attorney Keith Barber, PBAGA Executive Director Patrick Cullinan, SSPBA General Counsel Jim Wright and many other individuals were active in getting this Giglio bill signed into law. It is still a work in progress and the work to strengthen this issue will go on.

Keith Barber is an attorney in Statesboro, Ga., and sits part-time as the judge in the Statesboro Municipal Court. He has been an attorney since 1992 and has held his position as judge since 2010. Previously, he served in law enforcement for more than 10 years.

“I truly have a heart for those who choose to put their life out on the line for others every day,” he said.

From a man who personally understands the sacrifices required of law enforcement officers, this was his response when asked about what getting placed on a Giglio list meant to any law enforcement officer: “It’s the kiss of death.”

There is, however, added Barber, good news.



PBA Panel Attorney Keith Barber

“The State of Georgia is, and has always been, very supportive of law enforcement officers, and there are many hard-working people getting behind the Giglio bill,” said Barber. “The legislature got it passed the first time, and Gov. Kemp was kind enough to sign it.”

This is a prime example of good people getting together and working hard to get good things accomplished for all dedicated law enforcement professionals.

“Officers now will be able to sit down and talk to the district attorney or state solicitor and get some of these matters cleared up and resolved in the officers’ favor,” he said. “If it needs to go further, they can get a hearing with Georgia POST. This is a big step forward in adding protections for all involved.”

Given the opportunity to offer final remarks, Barber wished to tip his hat to SSPBA’s PBA of Georgia Executive Director Patrick Cullinan for his unwavering efforts to advocate for the rights of law enforcement officers not only in Georgia but for officers wherever they may be. Cullinan is also the executive director of South Carolina Police Benevolent Association. He retired from Richmond County and Columbia



PBAGA and SCPBA Executive Director Patrick Cullinan

County sheriff’s offices where he began his law enforcement career in 1992.

Cullinan spent 34 years serving his community behind the badge. Twenty-four of those years were in fulltime law enforcement, most of that time was spent in the K-9 unit.

Before law enforcement, he served as a firefighter and EMT in Augusta starting in 1989. Cullinan described what always drew him to his career in law enforcement and his heart to serve.

“I love the adrenaline rush, and I love people,” said Cullinan. “I want to make a difference in people’s lives and make the community safe. A lot of people going into this field say they want to help people, which is true, but I hate the bad guys. I want to get the guns out of their hands.”

Cullinan is a man with authentic experience in the world of law enforcement, and not only that, he knows first-hand what it is to fill the shoes of an officer in a day of the life before and after House Bill 288. With his acumen, he can speak on how he and other officers came to feel and understand what it meant to have or not have your name on the



SSPBA General Counsel Jim Wright

infamous Giglio list.

“You did not want to get on this list,” he said. “It was a career killer. “After coming to the PBA, I saw officers getting letters who were not being untruthful around the time of radical movements like ‘Defund the Police,’ etc., and I realized anti-law enforcement prosecutors were targeting officers, and it was ending their careers.

“There was no due process,” Cullinan continued. “We had to do something about this — and it was going to have to be through legislation. So, really, it all (the Giglio bill) started through a conversation.”

So how was House Bill 288 passed? Fearless leaders in law enforcement, such as Cullinan, petitioned for officer’s rights. Undeniably, the Giglio bill would not have passed without him and other chapter board members who perform political screenings and attend meetings taking it to the Capitol.

“First you must make the bill,” said Cullinan, “sponsor the bill, co-sponsor the bill, take the bill to the House of Representatives, then to the Senate, the governor’s desk, and then, thankfully,

the bill was passed and signed in May of 2025.”

Cullinan shared the credit for passage.

“State Rep. Houston Gaines out of Athens, Ga., played a critical role in the passing of the Giglio bill,” he said. “The PBA pushed hard for it, but it took other law enforcement associations to come along beside us as well to work together because getting a law passed is not easy.”

Jim Wright, general counsel for the SSPBA for nearly 10 years and retired district attorney of Henry County from 2012-2016, knew he wanted a career in law enforcement early in life.

In 1981, he began his law enforcement career as a patrolman at Henry County Police Department. There he was promoted to sergeant and eventually became a lieutenant over the course of just five years in the uniform patrol division.

In 1986, he became an investigator at the District Attorney’s Office where he made the decision he wanted to attend law school. He attended Valdosta State University and majored in criminal justice, then attended Atlanta Law School for three years and graduated in 1991 and became a prosecuting attorney.

In June 1991, he became assistant district attorney. In 2003, he was promoted to senior assistant district attorney.

In 2012, he was elected by the citizens he served his entire career as district attorney of the Flint Judicial Circuit. Wright gave the parameters of Giglio bill through the perspective of a prosecutor.

“Some prosecutors use the term ‘Brady’ interchangeably with Giglio,” said Wright. “Giglio and Brady are two U.S. Supreme Court cases that require prosecutors to provide exculpatory evidence or information involving a witness that the prosecutor intends to call during a trial. It created an ethical obligation by prosecutors to provide that exculpatory information to the defendant who was being prosecuted for a criminal offense.

“Being ‘Giglio’d/Brady’d’ by a prosecutor was a very serious matter because it had the potential to affect your career as a police officer,” he continued.

Wright makes the comparison between prosecution for an officer before and after Georgia’s House Bill 288.

“Prior to Georgia’s new legislation, the prosecutor could make his or her decision to put an officer on the Giglio or

Brady list without informing the officer or without them having the ability to challenge the prosecution’s decision,” Wright said. “Now, the new legislation requires a prosecutor to provide notice to the officer who has been placed on a Giglio or Brady list and an opportunity to challenge the prosecutor’s decision to do so.”

The Giglio bill is going to have an unquestionable impact on the lives of those serving in law enforcement now that there is a form of due process in place for those being prosecuted for criminal offenses. Consequently, this will affect public safety and the supply and quality of service for the men and women in whom they put their trust. This feat would not have been possible without certain parties that deserve express credit, said Wright.

“Georgia’s new Giglio/Brady legislation passed and became law because of the cooperation between Georgia’s Prosecuting Attorney’s Council and other police associations due to all organizations and agencies recognizing the serious effect a Giglio/Brady designation has on a police officer,” he said. “As for the PBA, Giglio/Brady will always be a matter that the PBA will be assisting with and advocating for our members.”



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ALPBA'S J.D. HOBBIE LOOKS TOWARD SECOND RETIREMENT

By Cindy Baugher
Assistant to Communications
Director

Many people can say that they have completed a successful career. To be able to say that they've completed two successful careers, especially careers dedicated to service to others, is much less common an achievement.

J. D. Hobbie can say that his history reflects a lifetime of service over two careers, plus a stint serving his country in the military and his community as a firefighter. But given his humble nature, you likely won't hear him mention all that he has achieved.

After growing up in Montgomery, Ala., Hobbie began his working life serving in the Navy for three years. Once he had completed his term of enlistment, he became a route salesman for an Alabama bakery, Holsum Bread Co.

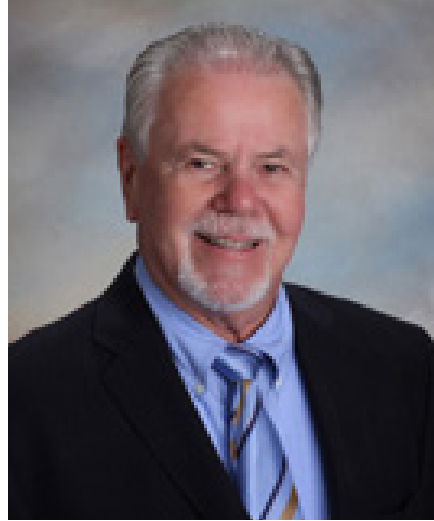
Fighting fires was next for Hobbie, serving his community as a fireman. It was while working at the firehouse that he met law enforcement officers who occasionally stopped by.

A few of these were Alabama state troopers who talked with Hobbie about the day-to-day duties of a trooper. The more he heard about their careers, the more he thought it was a position he'd enjoy.

"So, I applied for it," he explained, "and lo and behold, I jumped through all the hoops and managed to pass a test and got hired."

While working as a state trooper, Hobbie attended Troy University at Montgomery, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in criminal justice. His favorite part of being a state trooper, as many in the law enforcement profession confirm, was serving the public.

Hobbie was an early member of SSPBA but still recalls how he decided to join.



ALPBA Executive Director
J.D. Hobbie

"Well, my partner that I worked with when I was a trooper at Alabama Bureau of Investigation was Perry Beasley, and he brought it to my attention," said Hobbie. "One day, we were in the office, and he asked me if I knew anything about the PBA. So, he told me about it, and then we got in touch with (SSPBA CEO) Jack Roberts.

"And Jack came by Montgomery and talked with us about the PBA, and we joined up. And so, we started the chapter here in Alabama and started recruiting members."

Hobbie, who, as a chapter member himself, was instrumental in increasing the number of members in Alabama, recalled that his favorite part of being involved with the PBA was dealing with the membership.

"I really enjoyed talking with the members and trying to help them out on any problems they may have or may not have," he said. "But that was the best part about it, talking to see if you could, hopefully, help somebody."

Once he retired after his years as an investigator and state trooper sergeant, he was hired in 1990 by SSPBA to be the ALPBA executive director.

"Well, there was no real transition," said Hobbie of moving from trooper to executive director. "Jack Roberts appointed me executive director of PBA (for Alabama), and it went from there. So basically, it started out that way. It's good to be on the ground floor of the operation, I guess."

Hobbie was later appointed as staff representative and worked diligently recruiting members and building chapters in Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas for several years before returning to his original role.

Hobbie worked earnestly for SSPBA for 35 years. Now, Gary Cooper is his successor as the Alabama executive director. Cooper had nothing but praise for the man who has now wrapped up two laudable careers in his lifetime.

"J.D. truly believed in the PBA and its mission," said Cooper. "He didn't just support it, he lived it. He fought tirelessly for every member and always stood up for what was right and fair. To many of us, he wasn't just a leader.

"He was a mentor and a trusted friend who took the time to invest in people and pass along his deep knowledge of the organization," Cooper continued. "His influence on the PBA and on those he mentored will be felt for generations."

Hobbie has advice for those who are thinking of becoming a law enforcement officer.

"Well, the first thing they need to do is investigate an organization that will watch their back, and PBA is the best," said Hobbie. "I'd tell them they need to join the PBA immediately if they go into law enforcement and stay a member, because the PBA — the PBA does what they say they'll do."

As Hobbie reminisced about his PBA career, it is only natural to think of the personal connections that he has made along the way. He elaborates about two of the people whom he values a great deal.

"I just really appreciate Jack Roberts and Reneé Dixon," he said. "Over the years, they've been — I guess you could call them — the best friends and best employers I've ever had. I can always count on them to pitch in and give me advice and be there when I needed them."

Looking back, Hobbie also expressed relief and gratitude for being at this point in his work life. He admitted to being somewhat surprised that he's lasted as long as he has.

"I'm just glad to be on this side of things, glad I made it to my full retirement, and I don't plan to go to work anywhere else," he jokingly said.

Donald Scott, who has worked with Hobbie in his capacity as vice president of the SSPBA Board and as president of the Alabama Division, expressed high praise for Hobbie.

"JD Hobbie worked faithfully for SSPBA and for the members who he served in a manner that reflects dedication and integrity," Scott said.

Completely 100% retired now, Hobbie will be dedicating himself to some well-deserved downtime.

"I'm looking forward to the relationship with my wife, Patricia," he said, "So we can go and do some traveling, go to some places we've always wanted to go but couldn't because of my job and that type thing.

"I'll just be glad to enjoy, hopefully, a long-term retirement, and to just spend it with her and do things we've always wanted to do."

As the interview neared its end, this writer remarked to Hobbie, "Wow. That's a lifetime of service in a lot of distinct roles."

Hobbie agreed.

"So that is true, very true," he said. "It's definitely been very rewarding, and there have been some ups and downs, that's for sure. But I can imagine, all in all, it was a pretty good trip, and now just hoping the trip lasts a little bit longer."



Hobbie with SSPBA President Chris Skinner



Hobbie addresses ALPBA Division board

PBA HELPS FREE VIRGINIA LEO IN ALLEGED USE OF FORCE CASE

By Brandi Dixon
Project Coordinator

It was April 2022 when Warren County, Va., sheriff's Deputy Zachary Fadely arrived on the scene after what turned into a police chase involving an elderly driver.

Fadely suspected the case was a DUI as the subject was driving recklessly and noncompliant to pull over, but it turned out he was suffering from dementia.

"The vehicle wouldn't stop," he said. "We assumed it was probably a drunk driver. The stakes of the situation were getting higher and higher. The driver was weaving all over the road. I put myself in route. I knew this was a high-risk traffic stop."

The driver pulled his truck into a gas station and exited his vehicle but failed to follow verbal commands and continued to walk toward the deputies and K-9 present. At this point, Fadely used force and went behind the man, and a fellow deputy put him against the rear of the truck. They all went to the ground, and the subject sustained cuts during the use of force.

"I arrive at the gas station and see him start walking toward the officers holding him at gun point," he said. "A fellow deputy was struggling with him. We got tangled up in a truck hitch on the back of his truck and fell to the ground."

The subject was taken to the hospital following the incident. On April 15, 14 days later, he died in hospice care. The case was turned over to the state police for a criminal investigation, and PBA attorney William Bassler was assigned to the case.

"I felt terribly about what Fadely was going through" said Bassler. "I felt sincerely and knew that he wasn't intending to hurt anybody. This was a specific intent crime, and you had someone trying to do their job in a



Deputy Zachary Fadely

very stressful, high-risk, felony-traffic situation. I was truly hoping the decision would be made not to charge him. In my opinion, he should not have been charged."

There were no criminal charges until May 2023. Charges filed against Fadely, a PBA member, included malicious wounding (inflicting bodily injury with intent to maim, disfigure, disable or kill). Bassler requested a use of force expert, which PBA authorized. He described the level support of PBA.

"The PBA really surprised me with what they were willing to approve," said Bassler. "The PBA surprised me with the extent of the resources they were willing to extend and the help they gave me with defending Zachary Fadely."

Fadely also spoke on the generosity of the PBA in supporting his case throughout the trial.

"Without the PBA, I wouldn't have been able to afford legal representation, not to

the standard that I had," said Fadely.

In May of the following year, commonwealth attorney Matthew J. Sweet added the charge of murder against Fadely, and the state found an expert who gave the opinion that there was a causal connection between the incident and death. Bassler requested approval for a medical expert, which PBA authorized, as well as expenses for a trial expert and a focus group.

"I believe Fadely followed protocol," Bassler said. "He was investigating a minor traffic infraction at the time which he had to abandon because this case took precedence, and he arrived on a chaotic scene. Fadely was trying to secure (the elderly subject) for the protection of the public as well as the law enforcement officers, and I believed he did everything in his training.

"It's unfortunate what happened," he continued. "This individual should not have been out on the road. Fadely was the kind of individual that was there to help people. It's my belief that the injuries sustained based on the medical records did not lead to (the subject's) death. According to the testimony of the experts at the trial, his existing condition of dementia was such that it would ultimately lead to his death."

Fadely reiterated Bassler's sentiment.

"It's difficult for the public to understand what a high-risk traffic stop entails," he said. "This wasn't just a normal traffic stop. We weren't just trying to put our hands on somebody. We followed protocol and did what we were supposed to do based on what we were seeing."

The trial took place in February 2025. Prosecutors moved to dismiss the homicide charges against Fadely based on the limitations surrounding expert testimony intended to link the subject's head injury to his death. Judge Clark A. Ritchie granted the motion and dismissed the homicide charges. Defense attorneys did not object. Fadely



Attorney William Bassler

was found not guilty of the malicious wounding charge, concluding the trial Feb. 11, 2025.

“As an attorney, I read about these incidents, but the police, they’re there,” said Bassler. “They see the chaos and have to maneuver in it, often while people are trying to injure them. They don’t get to sit in an office and study the situation before making a decision. This dynamic aspect of police work is

something that I don’t think was lost on the jury. One thing I saw in this case, that I haven’t seen in any other, was a jury member walk up and shake Fadely’s hand. You don’t typically see that kind of confirmation.”

Fadely emphasized the importance of PBA membership to new officers. “They need to be a member,” Fadely said. “I’m glad that’s one of the first things I was told to do.”

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Total Requests for Service Opened in 2025:

2274

MOST COMMON REQUESTS BY CATEGORY

Disciplinary	310
Grievance	23
Serious Accident	86
Criminal Investigation	351
Lawsuit	584
Death in Custody	142
Shooting	507
Legal Opinion	87
Certification	106

RECRUITER WORKSHOP: RECOGNIZING THE FACE OF SSPBA

By Griffin Fletcher
Operations Manager

On just about any given day, SSPBA's recruiters are spread out across the southeastern United States, but once a year, they all gather in one place for the SSPBA recruiter workshop.

The 2025 workshop was held Oct. 29 and provided an opportunity for PBA staff to get together with the recruiting division to share updates, recognize accomplishments and discuss plans for the future.

Chief Executive Officer Reneé Dixon welcomed the recruiters to the meeting, which was held in McDonough, Ga. SSPBA directors provided updates on the company from the perspective of each individual department.

Notably, Senior Operations Director Kris Jarvis was pleased to share with the recruiters that, thanks to their tireless efforts in addition to the support of SSPBA staff and division leadership, membership totals had reached a new record of more than 73,000 in October 2025.

"I enjoyed hearing about how the organization is doing as well as how far we have come over the years," said Tennessee and Kentucky recruiter Mark Runnion. "Hearing Reneé's stories about how much PBA has evolved was the most memorable."

Recruiting Manager Tommy McKoon shared a more in-depth analysis of membership trends, highlighting membership changes in each division.

Finally, Dixon and Jarvis made a special point of making clear the SSPBA's appreciation for each of its recruiters. McKoon was recognized for 15 years of service, while Georgia recruiter Nick Meadows was honored for recruiting the most members over the past year.

An additional benefit of the annual



McKoon (c) accepts an award for 15 years of service to the SSPBA from Jarvis and Dixon.



Meadows was honored for recruiting the most members over the past year

recruiter workshop is the fellowship among the recruiters that it facilitates. Good recruiters are rarely at a loss for words — SSPBA's are no exception, and the conversations they share with each other provide them with opportunities to hone their skills.

"I enjoyed spending time with the other recruiters," said Runnion. "We were able to share thoughts and ideas about ways to recruit. Each recruiter has a little different way of recruiting, and learning from others is a way to improve."

Jarvis was a recruiter for 11 years before transitioning to his role, which includes oversight of the recruiting division's daily operations. The workshop gave him an opportunity to reflect on the unique perspective that his experiences have provided.

"All SSPBA employees work hand-in-hand to deliver the level of service that our members deserve, but the recruiter position is unique," he said.

"The recruiters serve as the first point of contact for prospective PBA members — they make the first impression and set the standard for service that the association is responsible for providing. Together, they are truly the face of the SSPBA.

"Though I now assist members from within the organization, my experiences on the road have given me tremendous gratitude for our members and a deep appreciation for our mission."

Jarvis also shared his gratitude for the pioneers of the recruiting program.

"I can't thank (retired CEO) Jack Roberts and Reneé enough for their wisdom and foresight in establishing the recruiting division. Without that, I wouldn't be here and wouldn't have had the opportunity to form such strong bonds with the rest of the recruiting team, but, more importantly, fewer officers in the Southeast would have the protection that the SSPBA offers."



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Isaiah Oates

Hannah Williams

South Carolina

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Vaylee Olack

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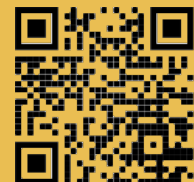
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MS SCHOLARSHIP WINNER EYES CAREER IN ENGINEERING

By Griffin Fletcher Operations Manager

High school was easy for Caleb Cockrell of Tupelo, Miss. In ninth grade, he was named Freshman Student of the Year at Tupelo High School. A year later, he was recognized as Sophomore Student of the Year. As a junior, he was — you guessed it — Junior Student of the Year, and finally, on graduation night in 2024, he addressed his class of 440 students as valedictorian.

While a student at Tupelo High, Caleb was a member of too many clubs to list on top of doing volunteer work and playing on the varsity football and soccer teams. His AP chemistry teacher commended his “genuine intellectual curiosity” and the “maturity and quiet leadership” that he brought to the classroom.

It’s no surprise that Caleb’s excellent high school achievements earned him admission to Mississippi State University. This impressive resume, in addition to a stellar freshman year during which he maintained a 4.0 GPA and made the President’s List, also earned him a PBF Division Scholarship to help him on his collegiate journey.

Caleb credited much of his success to the support he has received from his family. Caleb’s stepfather is PBA member Chief Joel Spellins of the Sherman Police Department, and Caleb said that Chief Spellins “provides (him) with an example of putting others before yourself on a daily basis and leading those around you to do the same.”

Caleb’s mother, Suzanne Spellins, is a second-grade teacher who has provided Caleb a foundation of love throughout his life.

“She prioritizes the happiness of her children,” said Caleb, “and always seeks out ways to spend time with us.”

Caleb also has three siblings — brother JP and sisters Hayden and Ally Grace — and the four have always been



Caleb with elephant during mission trip to Bangkok, Thailand

able to depend on one another for encouragement and support.

Caleb also credits his father, Scott, for shaping much of the man that he has become. Scott works as a sales manager and a Baptist pastor, and Caleb emphasized that he remembers his father, throughout his childhood, “leading a Godly life and providing a great Christ-like example for myself and my siblings.”

Caleb added that his father taught him and his siblings good values and the importance of hard work “while also keeping things fun and light-hearted.”

Guided by his father’s leadership, Caleb’s faith became the central pillar of his life. He quoted 2 Corinthians 5:7 — “For we walk by faith, not by sight” — and

explained that his faith has allowed him to remain confident and assured amid uncertainty and difficulty.

“Placing my faith in Jesus Christ,” Caleb said, “has shaped me into someone confident in their identity and allowed me to actively live a purposeful life.”

Though he’s only in his sophomore year at Mississippi State, Caleb is blessed to already know the direction he wants to take his career in.

“I am majoring in chemical engineering. I enjoy problem-solving, and chemical engineering allows me to explore that,” he said. “Ideally, I will be able to co-op while still in college to gain some work experience in my field and possibly work full-time with the same company when I graduate.”

He appreciates the versatility of a chemical engineering degree, as he could see himself enjoying work in manufacturing, oil and gas, the energy sector or environmental engineering.

When he’s not in class or studying, Caleb enjoys athletic activity — especially pickleball with his roommates — and watching movies. He cited Russell Crowe’s performance as Maximus in *Gladiator* (2000) as a personal favorite, noting his appreciation for the character’s “determination and drive” amid terrible circumstances.

Despite the grind of an engineering student, Caleb also makes sure to attend Bible studies and worship services at his church. Caleb expressed his appreciation for the scholarship that the PBF awarded him.

“I feel I am very blessed to receive this scholarship,” he said. “Without it, I would have needed to take out student loans this semester, so it has truly been an amazing gift for me.”

Chief Spellins put it best: “Caleb is very driven and will go far in life.”

PBA HELPS TN MEMBER IN HIGH-PROFILE LEGAL BATTLE

By Joni Fletcher Cawthon
Senior Legal Services Director

By the end of January 2023, it's likely that most adults who consumed any type of news media were familiar with the name Tyre Nichols.

Many had seen video of the interaction between Nichols and Memphis police. Most were aware that Nichols had died after his run-in with law enforcement.

President Joe Biden had spoken about Nichols at his State of the Union address with Nichols' mother present in the gallery. Vice President Kamala Harris and the Rev. Al Sharpton had spoken at Nichols' funeral.

But the PBA legal department had a different perspective on the situation. A PBA member from the Memphis Police Department, Justin Smith, had contacted PBA requesting legal service in the event he needed it. Smith was one of the officers in the videos, and he explained his role in the incident.

Smith had been called to assist another officer who had given a help call. When Smith arrived, the subject (Nichols) was still fighting and attempting to run away. Smith tried to get Nichols under control, eventually using pepper spray.

Nichols was finally handcuffed, and EMTs were called. Nichols was transported to the hospital and passed away a few days later.

Upon speaking with Smith, PBA assigned Memphis attorney Martin Zummach to represent Smith in the pending criminal and internal investigations of the incident.

Zummach has been representing law enforcement officers for 37 years.

"I initially told Justin after viewing the videos that he would just receive some light discipline because he hadn't done anything wrong," Zummach recounted. "I didn't expect him to get fired, which shows my naivete about Memphis



PBA attorney Martin Zummach and member Justin Smith

politics at the time."

According to Zummach, the media didn't know about the incident until Nichols was about to die. The City of Memphis then decided they were going to be "transparent" and released videos to the media, and the national uproar began. Zummach said he's never seen evidence released in such a manner to the media when a criminal investigation was ongoing.

The incident had occurred on Jan. 7, and on Jan. 20, Smith and four other Memphis officers were terminated. By Feb. 1, they were all indicted by the state on seven charges, including second-degree murder.

As attorney Zummach proceeded with defending Smith, he requested authorization from PBA for the hiring of necessary experts, such as a forensic pathologist, a use of force expert and a forensic biomechanical engineering consultant.

In the meantime, prosecutors for the state repeatedly said that a federal indictment of the officers was coming.

By Sept. 12, 2023, that federal indictment was a reality. Justin and the other officers were indicted on four federal charges: deprivation of rights/excessive force causing death and failure to intervene, deprivation of rights/deliberate

indifference, conspiracy to witness tamper and obstruction of justice — witness tampering.

Justin Smith had been in law enforcement with Memphis PD for four years at the time of the incident, having spent one year in patrol and three years in the Organized Crime Unit.

On the night in question, Smith wasn't supposed to be working because of an injured knee. He chose to go in to work that night because the department was short-staffed. He had joined PBA four months before that night because of a conversation he had with a friend who worked with the Shelby County Sheriff's Office.

"It was late 2022, and I had just gotten back from paternity leave," Smith recalled. "I was talking with my friend about how things were seeming to get worse on the streets in terms of lawlessness. My friend asked me if I had PBA, but I didn't really know what it was. A PBA recruiter had given a presentation when I was in the academy, but the trainers just brushed it off as unnecessary, so I didn't think I needed it. My friend said, 'You need PBA today,' so I went online and joined."

Smith said that after he joined PBA online, he forgot about it. On Jan. 5, 2023, he realized he had not paid his dues in a while, so he went online to make a

payment. In less than a week, he was calling in to PBA and requesting legal service.

Smith contacted the PBA legal department on Jan. 10 requesting assistance in regard to the death in custody incident. PBA assigned Zummach to the case on Jan. 11. Shortly afterward, Smith was told by the department that if he would resign, the departmental investigation and disciplinary charges would all go away. Smith and his wife had a 6-month-old baby at the time, and Smith couldn't and wouldn't quit his job. Within days, Smith and the other officers were terminated.

"I was still trying to deal with getting fired when I got a call from Martin," said Smith. "I was in my in-laws' driveway with my baby in the back seat. Martin told me he had received information from the district attorney that I was going to be charged. I was confused and couldn't understand what I was being charged with."

As the case and the media swirling around it continued to gain momentum, Smith said he was consumed by what was happening to him. "Everyone believes the first story that comes out," he says. "They don't pay attention when the truth comes out later."

Compounding Smith's confusion and anger was frustration because he couldn't speak about the case. In addition, he couldn't live in his house for six months because he was targeted by media and others.

"I didn't eat — I just wanted to sleep," he said. "I was in bad shape. I've been with my wife since I was 16 years old, and she had never seen me like this. I had always figured everything out, but I couldn't figure this out."

Smith leaned on his faith and the comfort of a small church that his family introduced him to.

"They treated me like I was a real person," he said.

Meanwhile, Zummach was preparing for trial. Initially, there was a question as to

which case would go to trial first, the state or federal charges. Zummach and the other defense attorneys made the decision to tackle the federal fight first.

We knew that it would be the tougher fight because of U.S. attorneys out of the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., prosecuting it, as well as a much lower standard of proof, but in the event of a conviction, we also knew that it would be better and safer for Justin to be in federal custody."

Zummach said that the state was more than happy to let the federal case proceed first because they were confident that the feds would get convictions.

In another noteworthy coincidence, Zummach had pared back about 90 percent of his client load in the months prior to Smith's case as he had his sights set on semi-retirement including plenty of golf and travel. Because of this reduced caseload, Zummach could devote almost all of his worktime to defending Smith.

"God said it wasn't time for me to retire," Zummach said.

The federal case went to trial in September 2024. On Oct. 4, Smith was found not guilty on counts 1, 2 and 3 but guilty on count 4 (obstruction of justice — witness tampering). Prosecutors requested that Smith's bond be revoked pending sentencing. A detention hearing was held, and Smith was released on his original bond with an ankle monitor.

The state case then proceeded to trial in April 2025 for three of the officers involved, including Smith. As a result of the efforts of attorney Zummach, the jury pool for the trial was selected from Chattanooga rather than Memphis. On May 7, all three officers were found not guilty of all charges.

Zummach filed a motion for new trial in the federal case because of prejudicial statements made by the judge about Memphis police officers in a separate case. On Aug. 8, 2025, Zummach's motion for a new trial was granted. The government has appealed the granting of a new trial on the one remaining federal

charge.

Although Justin Smith's ordeal is not over, he has never spent a night in jail, despite the efforts of so many to seek vengeance against him. Smith credited Zummach for his successful defense.

"Martin is who you want in your corner," he said. "He will definitely go to bat for you."

As for PBA, Smith recognizes the value. "Thank God my friend made me join," he said.

PBA staff attorney Jeana Johnson was Smith's primary contact at PBA. "Jeana Johnson was amazing," he said. "She was so professional and so sympathetic. She didn't judge me, and she was just trying to get me help. You can't buy that — someone who shows care for someone who the whole world hates."

"That's why officers should get PBA," Smith said.

As for Zummach, he's been a PBA attorney for over 30 years. It all began when a PBA staff representative reached out to him to ask him to consider being a PBA attorney. "I said 'Sure,'" said Zummach. "I think cops, teachers and nurses are so overworked, underappreciated and underpaid. They don't have lawyer fees built into their budgets."

As for working with PBA to defend Smith, Zummach said, "Without a doubt, this was the biggest civil rights death case that's ever gone to trial — not once but twice, and, likely, a third time. Justin never had to worry about financial ruin. PBA takes away that worry of financial devastation."

Justin Smith's son is now almost 4. "Maybe God wanted me to be here with my son instead of working," he said. "I've been able to be a great dad to him."

Because of the efforts of Smith's friend at the SO, the work of Zummach and the support of PBA, Smith is optimistic about watching his son grow up.

NOT-SO-GREAT DAYS: CONVICTED OFFICER'S WIFE TELLS HER SIDE

By Griffin Fletcher
Operations Manager

In 2007, Officer Robert “Chip” Olsen III approached his wife, Kathy, with a proposition.

He had just graduated from Georgia’s DeKalb County Police Academy, so he was a brand-new officer, even though he wasn’t exactly a young one. At 45, Olsen had been the second-oldest member of his academy class.

He handed Kathy an SSPBA flyer.

“We have to sign up for this,” he said.

Kathy wasn’t so sure. Money was tight for the Olsens. Around the time they started dating in late 2000, Chip had left a job at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and gone to work for a college friend’s business in audio/visual design.

That didn’t work out, so he bounced from job to job for several years, trying to figure out what he wanted to do. Chip sought action. He wanted a career that offered a different experience every day, and he felt gripped by a desire to serve others.

In the fall of 2007, his opportunity emerged. Chip was hired to work in DeKalb County’s Internal Affairs Unit until the county’s 83rd police academy began a few months later.

After graduating, he was a police officer, and he felt that he had finally found a career with the qualities that motivated him.

“It is my belief that police work is the professional avenue I have desired for quite some time,” Chip wrote while still in the academy.

Though Chip felt he had found his calling, he was still just getting started, and his income had been inconsistent for several years. Every dollar mattered, so



Chip and Kathy Olsen

Kathy was naturally hesitant about the additional cost of PBA membership.

“We have health and disability and life insurance through my job,” she said. “Why spend the money?”

“In case I need it,” Chip said.

“What could possibly happen?” asked Kathy.

But Chip insisted, and he joined shortly thereafter.

So began life as the wife of a police officer. She didn’t exactly know what to expect.

“None of my family has been in law enforcement,” she said, “so I had no idea what it was all about. We don’t live in DeKalb County, we live in Johns Creek, which really is a different environment from the areas where he patrolled.”

Though Kathy knew that Chip was a good police officer — he had even been selected to be on the prestigious DeKalb Police Honor Guard — she kept an “out of sight, out of mind” mentality when it came to his work.

“I think I mostly didn’t think about his

job because it was easier to deal with if I didn’t know what was going on,” she said. “He rarely talked to me about events that happened while he was working partly, because he didn’t want me to know what he was really up against.”

Kathy tragically found out March 9, 2015. It was her birthday, and because it was a Monday, she and Chip were planning to have a special dinner at home that evening with their son, Max, who was 5 at the time.

While she was still working, however, she got a call from one of Chip’s fellow officers, who told her that something serious had happened. Kathy first asked if Chip was OK, and the officer assured her that he was. Once she was able to talk to Chip, though, she began to gather the details of the event that would change the lives of the Olsen family forever.

That afternoon, Olsen had responded to a call from the management of a DeKalb County apartment complex about an individual who was behaving erratically. Dispatchers reported that the male suspect was completely nude and had been seen hanging from balcony railings, crawling across the ground and knocking on the doors of residents of the complex.

Witnesses observed the man talking to himself out loud, saying things like, “The devil is coming.” When he arrived on scene, Olsen found the suspect between two buildings, crouched low to the ground and, indeed, wearing no clothes.

As Olsen, still in his patrol car, tried to gather information to relay to backup, the suspect began sprinting directly at him. Olsen got out of his car and lost sight of the suspect until he was near the front fender of the unit, still quickly moving toward him.

Olsen told the suspect to stop and began to backpedal, but the suspect continued to move closer with his arms spread wide. Olsen drew his weapon and yelled for the suspect to stop again.

When the suspect did not stop and was within two or three feet of Olsen, the officer fired two rounds, both of which hit the man. Though Olsen immediately administered first aid, the suspect died on scene.

The man was identified as Anthony Hill, a 27-year-old with a history of mental health issues who was reportedly off his medication at the time of the shooting.

The PBA stepped in within minutes. SSPBA Georgia Counsel Don English met Olsen at the DeKalb Police Department headquarters and later took him home.

Though English said that there is always the possibility that the aftermath of an officer-involved shooting can take an unexpected turn, he immediately felt that Olsen's use of force was justified and remembers expecting a fairly open-and-shut investigation.

Kathy recalled her initial reaction.

"I was convinced that the department would see the situation for what it was and it would be fine," she said. "He might need some desk duty for a while, but I honestly believed it would all work out."

Olsen, however, felt differently.

"They are going to make an example out of me," he told his wife.

The uncertainty of their situation quickly became clear to Kathy. Chip was placed on leave with pay by the department while the GBI investigated the shooting. "(The department) said, 'You didn't do the right thing,'" remembered Kathy, "which put him into a deep depression with anxiety."

As he faced a deluge of criticism, not only from his department but from countless critics who mercilessly scrutinized his decision-making in an unimaginably difficult situation, Chip could do nothing but wait and wonder what the future held.

In January 2016, a grand jury indicted Chip on two counts of felony murder,



Chip and Kathy with baby Max in 2010

two counts of violation of oath of office, aggravated assault and making a false statement. Only then did the DeKalb Police Department start its own independent investigation, which apparently came to a quick resolution, as the department asked for his resignation just four days later.

Once again, Chip found himself unemployed. His time in the one career where he finally felt he belonged had come to an abrupt and ignominious end. As if the incident and the subsequent charges against him weren't difficult enough, the financial burden on the Olsen family began to mount.

Chip's trial didn't begin until September 2019. The nearly four-year gap between indictment and trial was unusually long and proved to be an agonizing period of waiting and wondering for the Olsens.

"We tried to take it day-by-day and continued to do the things we would normally do as a family," said Kathy. "Our son was too young to understand, so we just kept on going. There was, however, this cloud that was constantly there, threatening to burst."

All the while, however, the PBA was a constant source of reassurance for Kathy and Chip.

"Once we started talking to the attorneys, I never had a doubt that the PBA would come through for us. Don (English) was adamant about that. The financial and legal support really did help me feel as if we would survive this."

At Chip's request, renowned defense attorneys Don Samuel and Amanda Clark Palmer were appointed to represent him in court.

Kathy remembered the trial as some of the most difficult days of her life.

"It was horrible, to be honest," she said. "I don't really have any experience with lawyers and courtrooms, but I didn't expect to hear the things I heard."

The years of stagnation before the trial began had also worked against Chip in a different way. Between 2015 and 2019, anti-police sentiment had only grown in the U.S., and Chip's trial began only months before it reached a fever pitch with the death of George Floyd in May 2020.

Criminal trials of police officers had become media spectacles and political opportunities as much as they were prosecutions of the facts.

"It felt like a circus at times," remembered Kathy. "There were cameras, videos,

protesters outside the courthouse. The rhetoric, the insults, the pure abject lies about everything were hard to hear. I felt like there was nothing the team could say or do that was going to help us.”

Somewhat ironically, despite the increase in scrutiny on police officers that had occurred in the years since the shooting, Chip’s defense case may well have been stronger if the shooting had taken place in 2019 rather than 2015.

Bodycams were well on their way to becoming ubiquitous among police officers by the time Chip faced the jury, and English still believed that bodycam footage would have gone a long way in showing that jury exactly what he had been up against.

“It would have shown exactly what he was facing,” said English “and the timeline, and what (Olsen) was doing, yelling at (Hill) to stop. It was not just (Hill) walking up to him, like they were trying to allege.”

But no bodycam had been worn on that day in March 2015, and there had been no dashcam in his patrol car, either, so no such evidence existed.

“As if it could have been worse,” Kathy said, “the entire police department, along with all of his colleagues, was 100% absent. They ghosted him entirely. We know why, but still, at the time, it made everything much worse, because he was on his own.”

Kathy often felt like the PBA was all the Olsens had. “Don English was there for us emotionally. He always picked up the phone, even when it was late at night or on weekends,” she said. “He was a pillar for us in many, many ways.”

On Oct. 14, 2019, Officer Olsen was convicted of aggravated assault, making a false statement and violating his oath of office. Though it was no small deal that he beat the murder charges — under Georgia law, a murder conviction would have eliminated the possibility of parole for 30 years — Kathy was devastated.

“When the verdict was announced, I



Kathy with Max at Disney World

literally lost it,” she said. “I had to be escorted out of the courtroom because I honestly couldn’t believe what had happened. I think I was the only one who thought he would be found not guilty. But it’s what I had to do to get through it all.”

At Chip’s sentencing, Kathy read a statement before the court, desperate to make the judge understand who the Chip Olsen she knew was.

“I believe that most people in this world do try to do what they feel is the right thing,” she told the court. “Some are just better at it than others. My husband, I truly believe, is one of these people.”

The judge sentenced Olsen to 12 years in prison, and he was taken into custody. As Chip went to Georgia State Prison in Tattnall County, Kathy went home to Max, who was then only 9.

When asked how she and Max made it through Chip’s years behind bars, her answer was simple.

“We didn’t have a choice.”

The emotional toll of missing a husband and a father was immense, but the tangible consequences of Chip’s imprisonment — the things an onlooker likely wouldn’t even consider — accumulated into a heavy burden that she felt resting squarely on her shoulders

every day.

“Finances were tough,” she said. “Not only did we have the loss of Chip’s income since 2015, but we now had extra expenses — sending Chip money for commissary and clothing, money for phone calls and letters.

“Both of the prisons were over four hours away and always required a night in a hotel,” continued Kathy. “If someone who is incarcerated doesn’t have people on the outside to send money and/or purchase extra clothing, that person is going to be extra miserable. We would try to visit at least every couple of months. Visitation at Georgia State Prison was a nightmare.”

Kathy remembered waiting on benches outside the facility for hours at a time, in all types of weather, for a guard to arrive to process the visitors. To make matters even worse, the COVID pandemic took hold just a few months after Chip was incarcerated, shutting down all visitations for nearly a year and a half.

Kathy, Chip and Max were forced to depend on spotty video calls to see each other’s faces. “We would sign up and pay for a video call, only for the call to either never connect, or it would just cut off,” she said. “So, we mostly relied on phone calls, emails and the occasional card.”

Kathy and Max didn’t have a choice but to endure, but they did have a network of family and friends who were willing to be there for them. “We were never alone for birthdays and holidays,” she said. “We had extra visits from grandparents and (Max’s) aunt and uncle. When he was a little older, Max had friends to spend the night with.”

The people who worked to fill the gaps left by Chip’s absence helped Kathy maintain some sense of normalcy for Max and made the time they spent waiting for Chip’s freedom pass just a little bit faster.

The Olsens also still had the PBA. Don English also frequently endured the difficulties of communicating with an inmate. He used PBA resources to help Chip meet medical needs he encountered

behind bars, find work inside the prison and seek a transfer to a different facility

Chip would eventually be moved to a more favorable situation at Long State Prison in Ludowici, Ga., in early 2022.

English also kept his eye on the possibility of a successful appeal. "I was optimistic," he remembered, "but I knew the reality that very few cases like this do get reversed."

Nevertheless, after Chip's conviction, the PBA again retained the services of attorney Don Samuel, who first argued Chip's motion for a new trial and then presented oral argument before the Georgia Court of Appeals in 2023.

Samuel argued, in essence, that the jurors in Chip's trial were unfairly allowed to rely on the DeKalb County Police Department's use-of-force policy, which contradicted Georgia self-defense law.

For five months after the Court of Appeals hearing, the Olsens were once again trapped in the same state of uncertainty that had defined so much of the past decade. They hoped that, for the first time in what felt like forever, something would go their way.

And then, March 12, 2024, a light finally appeared at the end of the tunnel the Olsens had been thrust into almost nine years to the day earlier. The Georgia Court of Appeals overturned all of Chip's convictions except for the false statement count.

"I was elated," remembered Kathy, but the ordeal wasn't over yet.

It was nearly four months before Chip was released, and even then, he was still under indictment, as the DeKalb DA still had the option of re-trying him. The Olsens had to post bond, Chip had to wear an ankle monitor and he was subject to a curfew. However, at least for a while, he was home — Kathy had her husband back and Max had his dad. In May 2025, Samuel and Palmer reached an agreement with the DA. Chip Olsen pleaded guilty to one count of aggravated

assault and was sentenced to 15 years with 12 commuted to time served, with the balance to be served on probation. The nightmare had finally ended.

For the first time in a decade, Kathy had finally found some certainty. Chip was home for good.

"The PBA saved our family, plain and simple," said Kathy as she reminisced. "While I don't know the total amount of money that was spent on our legal fees, I do know this: we would have been ruined financially, and most likely, Chip would have never seen the light of day until after he had served his full sentence. There would have been no appeal and, more than likely, he would have received a tougher sentence."

Chip and Kathy can attest that there is indeed no limit on the cost of the legal coverage that the PBA offers its members.

"The PBA has not once ever had me questioning whether or not they would pay, that we really could pick the attorney, and that they would continue to pay until it was all settled," she said. "Don English is our PBA attorney and I am grateful for his hard work, his support of my husband and his unwavering belief that Chip didn't do wrong and didn't deserve what was happening to him."

The respect was mutual.

"Just salt of the earth folks," said English of the Olsens. "Super, super people."

Despite the tribulations he faced, and even though his time as an officer was abruptly cut short, Chip is still able to look back with appreciation at the drastic career change he made back in 2007.

"I loved being a police officer," he said. "I got to learn something new every day. I got to use my mind, body and personality to be a public servant. That's what drives me. I was proud to do the right thing. I felt that at age 45, I was finally doing something fulfilling in life."

It's been more than year since the case was resolved, and the Olsen family is



PBA General Counsel Don English

still adjusting to what Kathy calls their "new normal." Though she's had to accept that things will never go back to the way they once were, she also appreciates the fact that Chip is now able to do things that, for many years, seemed like total impossibilities.

"Chip will certainly never be the same," she said. "He is a convicted felon since pleading guilty. That will never go away. Our son just turned 16 and is learning to drive, and, of course, Chip is teaching him. Chip's able to go to the baseball games, where we help in the concession stand, and watch our son march in the marching band. So yes, to some degree, we are no different from the average family in our daily activities."

Though the reality is that, beneath the surface, the Olsens have had to face obstacles that are the furthest thing from average, Kathy has her family back. And with it, she has a renewed sense of how important that is.

"There are definitely days that feel more 'what they used to be like' and some not so much," she said. "But the overwhelming majority of the days are great days, because we know what the really not-so-great days were like."

(Disclaimer: Neither Chip nor Kathy Olsen were compensated by SSPBA for their contributions to this article.)

SEMINAR PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR TRAINING, NETWORKING

By Joni Fletcher Cawthon
Senior Legal Services Director

On April 25, 2025, 70 PBA attorneys met in Atlanta, Ga., for PBA's annual legal seminar.

The day-long event provided an opportunity for longtime PBA attorneys as well as those new to the PBA effort to learn the expectations of PBA staff regarding handling critical incidents for members.

In addition, the event enabled attorneys who represent law enforcement officers to share suggestions and experiences they've encountered along the way.

"This event is important to us each year because it provides us an opportunity to personally thank the attorneys who are directly representing our members," said Reneé Dixon, SSPBA chief executive officer. "It's also eye-opening for our staff members who attend because it provides a greater understanding of how our team works so hard to take care of our members."

In addition to training regarding the basics of responding to a critical incident involving PBA members, the day's agenda included discussion of the increasing occurrence of prosecution of law enforcement officers.

PBA panel attorney Jack Byrd of Nashville, Tenn., presented information regarding the value of experts in defending officers in court proceedings.

PBA panel attorney L. Scott Miller of Lexington, Ky., — a former law enforcement officer himself — addressed the attendees regarding the importance of understanding the perspective of a law enforcement officer when representing PBA members.

The day concluded with presentations regarding the areas in which PBA assists members beyond criminal investigations, including disciplinary matters, lawsuits



More than 70 attorneys attended the 2025 PBA legal seminar held in Atlanta



SSPBA Assistant Director of Legal Services Dale Preiser



SSPBA Senior Legal Services Director Joni Fletcher Cawthon

and certification issues.

Recent PBA successes were also discussed.

As PBA continues to grow its network of almost 800 panel attorneys throughout

its coverage area, this annual conference provides for a gathering of the minds who are focused on the valuable cause of providing excellent representation to law enforcement officers.

ALA OFFICER PREVAILS AFTER ENDURING LENGTHY LEGAL CASE

By Jordan Mitten
Senior Legal Assistant

On Sept. 16, 2025, the SSPBA was pleased to receive an update from panel attorney William Dawson that he and Kenneth Alan Plemons, a longstanding ALPBA member, had prevailed in an attritional case that first began back in December 2017.

This underlying case was initiated with Plemons' termination from the Helena (Ala.) Police Department because of a citizen complaint. Upon receiving news of Plemons' termination, SSPBA was able to assign Dawson to assist with his appeal. Plemons' appeal hearing occurred in January 2018, when the decision for him to be terminated was sustained by the Appeal Board.

However, Dawson immediately questioned the composition of the board, as its final member was to be chosen by a non-elected employee representative, and advised that he had a certiorari review — the review of a lower court's or government agency's decision — filed in circuit court.

Dawson filed this review for the court to look at the record of the hearing, as Alabama law holds that a single improper panel member can void the decision of the other two.

Into summer 2018, Dawson advised that the Court dismissed the claims beyond the review of the hearing transcript and record, with the judge refused to set aside the dismissal of all claims. At this time, Dawson avoided the risk of foreclosure on Plemons' case by filing another suit against the City of Helena. This suit sought to have the legal issue of the appeal process resolved, seeking declaratory and injunctive relief instead of any review of the hearing record.

The new suit proceeded through attempts at dismissal and continuances from the city's counsel and eventually was assigned to a new judge by March



2019. By this time, between the second suit and original complaint, Plemons' case was heard by its fourth judge.

Upon order of the judge at that time, Plemons' appeal was presented with evidentiary materials as to how the hearing panel was constituted. The case carried into 2020 as the appeal and relevant materials were reviewed, and the judge ultimately ordered that Plemons' termination was void because the hearing panel was improperly constituted.

The judge's order was followed by a motion hearing in May 2020, and both sides argued as to how the case might proceed from there. Dawson argued that the court decision rendered and canceled the termination, but some cases from other states potentially allowed the city to reconvene and have another hearing where the hearing panel was properly constituted.

The case lay dormant for several months after the motion hearing, until another argument was made before the judge in August 2021. Dawson informed SSPBA that it was made clear by the judge that the City of Helena should not "get another bite at the apple" by starting over with a proper hearing panel. The judge was inclined to set the matter for a hearing on the matter of damages

and suggested that the matter be set for mediation to see if there could be a settlement.

The City of Helena and its attorneys continued their claims that starting another hearing would be proper, while Dawson attempted to settle the case with payment to Plemons in return for brief reinstatement and retirement.

In March 2022, it was ordered that the City of Helena was not in conformance with the required standards for police departments across the state of Alabama, and that they would owe back pay and other damages to Plemons — even if they took the position that he could be terminated again.

In July 2022, following another argument before the judge, it was ordered that mediation would take place and it would be heard by retired circuit judge, Court of Civil Appeals Judge Joiner.

Dawson said that they attempted to mediate the issue of damages due Plemons, primarily arguing again for his reinstatement for one day to get Plemons' time and retirement, but the city continued to refuse. At this time, the SSPBA also brought on the assistance of panel attorney William "Bill" Gray at Dawson's request.

Plemons' case proceeded with mediation into late 2024, where the city and its insurance company rejected the settlement, and eventually a bench trial in Shelby County Circuit Court in April 2025. After being litigated through several years and various judges, justice was finally done for Plemons through the judge's final order — reinstating him with backpay less any monies he received from other employment while separated from the City of Helena.

The SSPBA is proud to not only have longstanding members like Plemons who trust its attorneys in times of need, but to also have veteran attorneys like Dawson and Gray who so passionately advocate for members.

PBA CONTINUES TO FIGHT AGAINST GIGLIO UNFAIRNESS IN NC

By Joni Fletcher Cawthon
SSPBA Senior Legal Services Director
and Jeffrey S. Warren
Ellis & Winters LLP, Raleigh, N.C.

The 1972 case of *Giglio v. United States* established that prosecutors are required to disclose evidence impeaching the credibility of government witnesses. “Giglio material” includes evidence of dishonesty, misconduct, or bias by law enforcement officers. But PBA has witnessed a troubling development: rather than limiting Giglio disclosures to particular cases, some district attorneys have weaponized the process by sending letters to officers’ supervisors declaring that those officers cannot testify in future proceedings. In practice, those letters can function as career-ending determinations untethered to any specific prosecution. No state in the PBA coverage area has seen the level of such activity as high as in North Carolina.

In the past several years, PBA has taken to the North Carolina courts to seek relief for our members. Below is a synopsis of activity in PBA-sponsored litigation on behalf of three NCPBA members as of early 2026.

Anthony Sorangelo: In August 2020, District Attorney Todd Williams sent a letter to the Asheville Police Department declaring that Anthony Sorangelo, an APD officer, could no longer testify in misdemeanor proceedings. Williams based that determination on a pending simple-assault charge filed against Sorangelo after a citizen kicked him during an arrest. The trial court later dismissed that charge at the close of the State’s evidence, but the letter still barred Sorangelo from testifying in future proceedings and led to his termination. Most notably, the letter did not rest on the usual allegations of dishonesty or bias. The district attorney issued it simply because Sorangelo had been charged with a crime.

Left without any meaningful avenue to repair the damage to his reputation



and career, the PBA authorized PBA attorney Jeffrey S. Warren of Ellis & Winters LLP in Raleigh to file suit in Buncombe County Superior Court in 2022 against the district attorney, the City of Asheville, and the chief of police. The complaint asserted, among other claims, violations of due process and Sorangelo’s right under the North Carolina Constitution to enjoy the fruits of his labor. The case marked the first lawsuit in North Carolina to challenge a district attorney over this kind of Giglio action. The defendants later moved for summary judgment. Although the court granted summary judgment for the City and the chief, it denied summary judgment as to Williams. That ruling positioned the case to become the first in North Carolina history to go to trial on a claim under the state constitution’s Fruits of Labor Clause.

Undeterred, Williams then filed a motion for judgment on the pleadings—his third attempt to have the complaint dismissed. After a hearing in late 2025, the court denied the motion as to the Fruits of Labor claim but granted it as to the due process claim. The PBA has authorized an appeal.

SeanPatrick Leech: In 2021, District Attorney Michael Waters issued a Giglio

letter to PBA member SeanPatrick Leech of the Roxboro Police Department after accusing him of improper disposal of evidence and dishonesty. By that time, North Carolina’s Giglio statute had taken effect, so the letter also placed Leech’s name in the statewide Giglio database. The Giglio letter forced Leech’s designation and prompted an investigation by the North Carolina Department of Justice. The PBA again asked Jeffrey Warren to represent Leech.

Before commencing litigation, Warren represented Leech at a hearing before the Probable Cause Committee of the North Carolina Department of Justice. At the conclusion of that hearing, the committee voted unanimously in Leech’s favor and found no probable cause to support allegations of either mishandling evidence or dishonesty. Following that result, Warren sent the district attorney a letter requesting that he rescind the Giglio letter but received no response.

Warren filed suit on Leech’s behalf in 2023 in Person County Superior Court against the State of North Carolina, the Attorney General, the President Pro Tempore of the North Carolina Senate, the Speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives, and District Attorney Michael Waters. The complaint

challenged the constitutionality of the Giglio statute and asserted claims against Waters for deprivation of rights, violation of the right to enjoy the fruits of one's labor, and injury to reputation.

The trial court later heard the defendants' motion to dismiss and dismissed all of Leech's claims, and the PBA authorized an appeal. In an unusual development, the North Carolina Court of Appeals granted oral argument, and the panel appeared highly skeptical of Waters' defenses. In 2025, in a unanimous decision, the Court of Appeals ruled in Leech's favor and reversed the trial court's dismissal. The case remains pending.

Archie Quintana: In the PBA's longest-running Giglio fight, which began in 2018, PBA member Archie Quintana of the Washington County Sheriff's Department was deemed Giglio-impaired after identifying suspects in a home-invasion burglary. PBA attorney J. Michael McGuinness of the McGuinness Law Firm in Elizabethtown appealed that determination, and the case ultimately went before the North Carolina Court of Appeals in 2019. Quintana prevailed, but, five days later, District Attorney Seth Edwards authorized a new Giglio letter against him.

While McGuinness continued to represent Quintana in matters related to his decertification, the PBA authorized



attorney Jeffrey Warren to file a constitutional claim on Quintana's behalf in Washington County. Warren filed that suit in 2023. As in *Leech*, the complaint challenged the constitutionality of the Giglio statute and asserted claims for violations of due process, the right to enjoy the fruits of one's labor, and injury to reputation arising from the district attorney's actions. The defendants included the State of North Carolina, the North Carolina Justice Officers' Standards Division, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and District Attorney Seth Edwards.

The trial court consolidated the Leech and Quintana cases for procedural purposes and, in 2024, dismissed all of Quintana's claims. The PBA authorized an appeal.

Then, while the appeal was pending, Edwards agreed to withdraw the Giglio letter, and the State agreed to remove Quintana's name from the Giglio database, in exchange for Quintana agreeing to dismiss his lawsuit. To the PBA's knowledge, this marked the first and only time a law enforcement officer's name has been removed from the database.

Even so, Quintana's fight is not over. Edwards's successor, District Attorney Thomas Anglim, continues to treat him as Giglio-impaired, and Quintana continues to seek reinstatement of his law enforcement certification.

The PBA and these members continue to break new ground on the critical issue of Giglio impairment, as well as North Carolina's distinctive constitutional protections for the right to earn a living and to preserve one's reputation.

The PBA hopes these efforts will curb some of the extreme measures district attorneys have used to damage or destroy the careers of law enforcement officers.



CALL TO SERVICE: CAREER, NOMINATION OF SC DEPUTY PIERCEY

By Brandi Dixon
Project Coordinator

The South Carolina Governor's Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award, established in 2023 to recognize service beginning in 2022, honors exceptional officers for their professionalism, dedication, community service, valor and innovation.

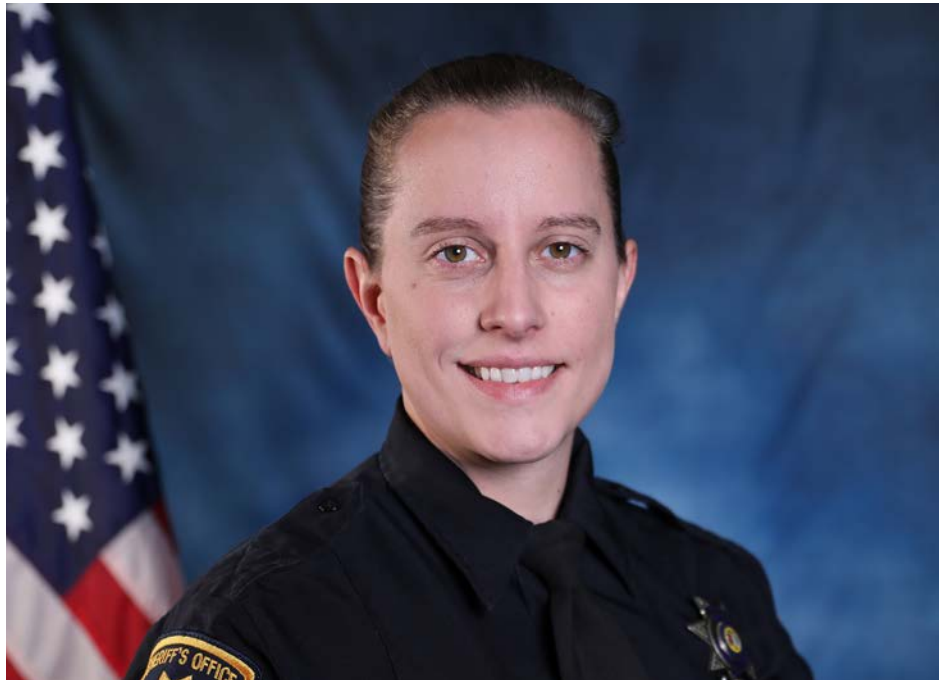
Among the 2026 nominees is Deputy Lisandra Jade Piercey of the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, who was nominated by Sgt. Michael Mangum for State Officer of the Year. The award ceremony is set for summer 2026.

Administered by the South Carolina Department of Public Safety, the program selects three annual recipients across state, county and municipal categories. Each awardee receives a monetary prize of \$10,000 and is recognized during a formal ceremony in Columbia, S.C.

The program has quickly become one of the state's highest recognitions for law enforcement excellence, highlighting individuals who demonstrate not only technical skill but also a deep commitment to public service.

Piercey's law enforcement career reflects both professional growth and a deeply rooted sense of purpose. A graduate of Western Carolina University with a bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship, she initially followed a more conventional path before ultimately pursuing her calling in law enforcement.

After completing training at the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy a part of Class #692, she graduated Feb. 8, 2019, marking the beginning of her career in public safety. Her early years in the uniform patrol division at Greenville County Sheriff's Office provided the foundational experience necessary for any successful law enforcement officer. Over the course of four years, she responded to a wide range of calls for service, gaining firsthand experience in



Deputy Lisandra Jade Piercey of the Greenville County Sheriff's Office

crisis response, community engagement and decision-making under pressure. These experiences both strengthened her practical abilities and shaped her understanding of the communities she serves.

Following her time in patrol, Piercey transitioned to the GCSO's Community Services Division where she spent another four years focusing on proactive policing and investigative work.

In this role, she addressed ongoing crime issues, particularly those related to narcotics. This phase of her career demonstrated her ability to move beyond reactive policing into more strategic and investigative roles.

Serving as an investigator in the Internet Crimes Against Children Unit since October 2025, Piercey described how she holds this role dear.

"It's a very heavy assignment within law enforcement, but if you pair the work I'm doing with my faith, it's given me an even deeper sense of purpose," she said.

"It's the most meaningful work I've ever done. Pointing back to my faith, this is the embodiment of defending the defenseless because of the nature of the work."

In this capacity, she works on complex cases involving the exploitation of children, requiring not only technical, investigative skills but also emotional strength. Her work involves identifying offenders, gathering digital evidence and ensuring that cases are built thoroughly for prosecution.

The transition into ICAC represents a significant step in her career, as it places her at the forefront of protecting some of the most vulnerable members of society. The nature of these investigations often exposes officers to distressing material, making mental resilience critical. Piercey's ability to navigate these challenges speaks to her dedication, fortitude and strength of character.

Piercey's decision to pursue law enforcement was shaped early in life.

"My eyes were turned to the first

responder world after 9/11,” she said. “I was in elementary school, but I saw the aftermath. Upon all of the news media that was covered and the stories that came out, I was inspired by the acts of service.

“I was also exposed to law enforcement as a child,” continued Piercey. “I hesitated at first to get into law enforcement because I’m a female — and my size being a petite female — so I didn’t get into law enforcement immediately. I did what everyone said to do — go to college, get a job —so, that’s what I did. I knew it wasn’t my calling. I had a gut feeling that it wasn’t what I wanted to do until I retired. My faith plays a big role in my life, and I believe that it doesn’t matter what I try to do, the Lord’s will is what’s going to happen. And that’s how I ended up transitioning into my career in law enforcement.”

Beyond her investigative work, Piercey has demonstrated significant leadership within the Greenville County Sheriff’s Office Search and Rescue Team, where she has served for five years. This specialized unit requires a high level of physical endurance, practical training and teamwork.

Piercey has earned advanced certifications, including those for technical rescue, swift water rescue level I and low angle rescue, enabling her to operate effectively in challenging environments.

Search and rescue operations often involve unpredictable conditions, extended hours and physically-demanding terrain. Piercey’s involvement in this team highlights her willingness to go beyond standard duties to ensure the safety and well-being of others. Her leadership role within the team exhibits her ability to coordinate efforts and make critical decisions in high-pressure

situations.

One of the most notable operations in her career involved the search for an elderly man with dementia who had been missing in a wooded preserve area for five days without food or water.

“We got a call out from a neighboring agency,” she said. “An elderly gentleman with dementia had separated from his family and driven his car until he got into a preserve area on an old logging road. By the time our routine got activated to help the sister agency, he had been missing for 24 hours.

“On the fifth day of searching, on very rugged terrain, at times you had to get on all fours for searching — we found out he was located and alive. I was on the extraction team. We utilized an Anderson wheel and an UTV to get him out of the woods and into an ambulance, where he survived.”

This operation not only demonstrated her specialized skills but also her compassion. The successful recovery of the individual represented more than just the completion of a mission — it reflected the life-saving impact of coordinated law enforcement efforts and the dedication of those involved. Piercey’s commitment to service extends beyond operational duties to include advocacy for her fellow officers. As vice president of the Greenville County Chapter of the SCPBA, she works to ensure that officers have access to essential resources, including legal protection and wellness support.

“It’s another level of camaraderie, support and resources,” she said. “So often, having healthy resources is overlooked in law enforcement. So having direct access to that without red tape or jumping through

hoops is a massive benefit to those in law enforcement.”

Piercey added that membership has brought her assurance.

“It creates a background sense of peace,” she continued. “It’s great having an organization that’s there when you need them and also finding other members locally that help to develop relationships which are personal and unique.”

Piercey serves on the sheriff’s Physical Fitness Committee, where she advocates for maintaining physical readiness and overall wellness. Law enforcement is a profession that demands both physical and mental stamina, and her efforts contribute to fostering a culture that prioritizes health and sustainability within the agency. Throughout her career, Piercey has consistently demonstrated a commitment to making both the public and the unprotected feel safe and secure. She continues to look to her faith as a beacon through the challenges of work.

“Law enforcement is about a lot more than enforcing laws,” she said. “It’s about protecting people — especially, for me, protecting the most vulnerable. The work is hard, but it’s also rewarding. My faith is what keeps me grounded and reminds me that even in challenging times, there’s purpose in what we do. And I think that’s applicable even outside of law enforcement and applies to life in general.”

Her combination of leadership, compassion, technical skill and unwavering dedication substantiates why she has been nominated for one of the highest honors South Carolina offers in this field. Whether through investigative work, life-saving rescue operations or advocacy for her fellow officers, Piercey exemplifies the values of service, integrity and purpose which define excellence in law enforcement.



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LEAVING A LEGACY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT SUPPORT IN WVA

By Randy Byrd
Director of Foundation and
Media Relations

On Jan. 31, 2024, in Charleston, W.Va., the Police Benevolent Foundation began a quest to educate West Virginia officers about the realities of PTSD and suicide in their jobs.

This training took place through the Behind the Badge Seminar. This and future work in West Virginia would be made possible by a special lady named Judy Guinard.

Judy grew up in Paw Paw, W.Va, a small town in Morgan County on the Maryland border. For Judy, life wasn't easy in this community, as she spent most of her youth in foster care. This path, however, didn't define her, but instead created a desire to help others that persisted throughout her life.

She was working as a nurse's aide when she met her husband, Bill. They later made their home in Virginia, where Bill served as vice president of Olympus Imported Auto Parts.

Judy had a son, born before she met Bill, who served in the military and eventually took his own life because of PTSD.

As she grappled with her early childhood experiences and her son's death, Judy turned to her artistic abilities and began creating Fabergé-style decorated eggs. She was a collector of these eggs, and one of her most prized possessions was a beautiful St. Michael the Archangel egg.

She became an expert in her field and served as president of the International Egg Art Guild for two years.

She supported other "Eggers" through a regional art show, and her combination of artistic expression and care for others helped her blossom despite the difficult life experiences she had endured. Bill supported Judy in her love of egging, and she always had a studio in a spare



The late Bill and Judy Guinard

bedroom wherever they lived.

Another passion Bill and Judy shared was their support for law enforcement. Throughout their marriage, they donated to numerous police fundraisers.

Bill passed away in 2019, and before her death, Judy wanted to ensure that these efforts would continue. She earmarked a portion of their estate to go to support law enforcement officers in West Virginia.

When she passed in 2022, her sister-in-law, Frances Pickard, set out to fulfill this wish as the executor of the Guinard estate. Frances' search for a worthy cause to donate to led her to PBF, and the Guinards' donation has now funded Behind the Badge seminars in Charleston (twice), Huntington, Morgantown and St. Albans.

Over 300 officers, spouses and chaplains have attended. In addition to these seminars, several peer support classes have been held to broaden the mental health support network available to officers in West Virginia. These classes led to the first formalized peer support team in the history of the state.

Although Judy wanted to support law



St. Michael the Archangel egg that has been donated to PBF

enforcement through her bequest, she never knew that it would directly support PTSD awareness and suicide prevention.



Judy at Eggsposure show

Frances believes that knowing her gift went to help others who struggled with the same pain her son did would be meaningful to her.

Another coincidence is the fact that the St. Michael the Archangel egg meant so much to Judy, as St. Michael is the patron saint of police officers. Frances decided to donate the egg to PBF, and it will be put on permanent display at our SSPBA headquarters in Georgia for others to enjoy.

Steve Haines was president of the Department of Natural Resources Chapter of the West Virginia Police Benevolent Association when the PBF made their first steps into the Mountain State.

He was instrumental in getting the leadership of his agency involved with Behind the Badge and getting fellow officers to attend the seminar. The first class in Charleston had over 144 attendees.

"I am incredibly indebted to the generosity and thoughtfulness of Judy Guinard," said Haines. "She has given us the ability to recognize and fight back against the stresses of our profession. Law enforcement officers take a front seat to trauma, depression and anxiety from our experiences in the line of work. Judy's contribution gave us the resources to recognize it, deal with it and know that it is OK to get help."

Haines concluded with a message of gratitude to Judy: "I hope you are looking down from heaven and seeing the goodness your gift has given to the officers in West Virginia."



Behind the Badge class in Huntington, W.Va., at Marshall University



Behind the Badge class in Morgantown, W.Va., at West Virginia University



Peer Support class at the Charleston Police Department Training Academy

A LEGACY OF DEVOTION: REMEMBERING DANNY GARDNER

By Brandi Dixon
Project Coordinator

Danial “Danny” Lynn Gardner, born Oct. 2, 1963, in Atlanta, Ga., and raised in Forest Park, lived a life defined by integrity, quiet strength and an unwavering commitment to others.

Danny passed away March 15, 2026, at 62. He was a valued SSPBA employee since 2019.

The son of James Gardner Jr. and Ellene Gardner, Danny grew up alongside his brothers, Jerry Gardner (Pat), the late Bobby Gardner (Rebecca) and Tommy Gardner (Deborah). Danny was preceded in death by his daughter, Victoria Clanton, and is survived by his son, Stephen Gardner.

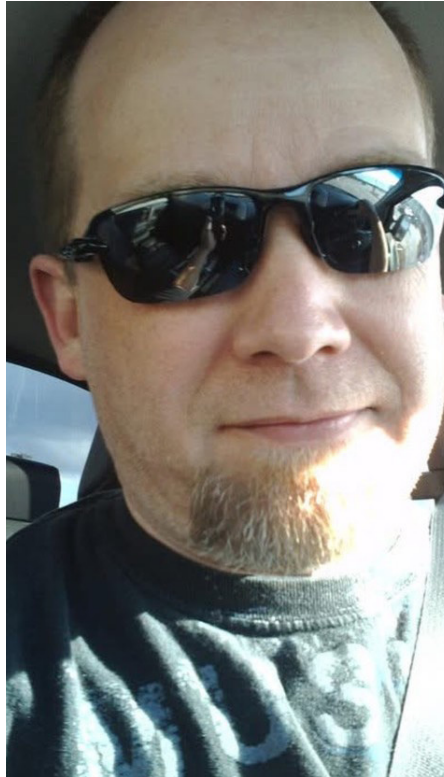
A graduate of Forest Park High School in 1981, Danny entered the workforce with a natural curiosity and determination that would define his professional life.

He spent nearly three decades at Dover Cylinder Heads in Atlanta, where his technical knowledge and work ethic quickly set him apart. Beginning as a technician and rising to general manager within a short time, Danny became someone others relied on — not just to lead, but to help and to solve problems.

Even after the company closed its doors in 2019, his desire to contribute and serve led him to the Southern States Police Benevolent Association, where he began working in communications and left a lasting impact on colleagues across the organization.

While his professional accomplishments were significant, it was Danny’s character that defined him most. To his family, he was a constant source of support, humor and understanding. His niece, Natalie Woodall, shared memories.

“He was ‘My Danny,’” she said. “I could always count on him and confide in him as my uncle and friend. We could always



Danny Gardner

read each other very well. He always tried to make a ‘funny.’ He was the one who could insert humor when things got heavy. He would give his shirt off his back for anyone — the kind of man that said, ‘I’m here to help you.’”

Her words reflect not only affection, but the reliability and emotional presence that Danny consistently offered to those closest to him. Family gatherings became a central part of those shared memories.

“Some of our best memories were at our family gatherings, sitting on the covered patio at the barn,” said Natalie. “All I had to say was ‘Danny, we’re having food’ (or) ‘Danny, we’re getting together’ and it was always, ‘I’m there, I’m there.’”

These seemingly simple moments illustrate something deeper — his eagerness to be present, to connect and to prioritize time with loved ones above all else.

“Danny was eight years older than me,”



In his younger days, Danny enjoyed heavy metal/rock and playing in a band.

she said. “Our relationship evolved over the years, and we got closer as the years passed. I just thought the world of him and looked up to him all the time.”

Danny’s son, Stephen, described him as a man who was not only present, but fully engaged in every stage of his children’s lives.

“Any baseball game, award ceremony or performance growing up — he was there,” said Stephen. “He never missed anything. He was a father who never shied away from the opportunity to spend time with his family.”

Stephen said his father was kind.

“He was a very fair man — so fair that the wrong person could take advantage of him, but that just goes to show his character and how kind he was,” he said.

Danny’s intellect and curiosity were equally defining traits.

“He was the most knowledgeable man I knew,” said Stephen. “He knew at least a little bit about everything —like a jack of all trades. He knew a whole lot about computers and gained skills at his old job over the years that he was able to apply to the SSPBA.”

This breadth of knowledge made him a trusted resource, both professionally and personally.

“I called him about everything because he knew everything,” he said. “He could tell what was wrong with my car just by listening to it on my phone.”

Beyond knowledge, this reflects Danny’s willingness to help at any moment — no matter how small the need. Some of their most meaningful moments were rooted in shared experiences.

“I have a better appreciation for music because of my father. We used to ride around Lake Spivey in his truck and listen to music together,” Stephen said.

These quiet, everyday memories highlight the lasting influence of a father who understood that connection is often built



Danny with his son, Stephen

in the simplest of moments.

“He was always so easy-going and never problematic. Just an even-keel guy,” said Stephen.

Stephen also reflected on Danny’s early commitment to parenthood.

“When my mom got pregnant with me, he really dedicated his life in every way to taking care of us so he would be a good father,” he said.

This decision defined the trajectory of his life and shaped the legacy he leaves behind.

Music was another thread woven throughout Danny’s life. A talented musician, he played rhythm guitar, bass guitar and drums, and was deeply connected to heavy metal and rock. From practicing in his parents’ basement as a young man to performing in bands in the 1980s, music was both an outlet

and a passion — one that allowed him to express himself and connect with others.

For his best friend, Jesse Ashley, Danny was not only a colleague but someone he could truly trust.

“We met in 1989,” Jesse said. “We would go out when the band rolled out on Old National Highway all week long and had a great time playing music.”

Their shared love of music defined their friendship as well as their time spent with each other professionally.

“In 1991, we worked together at Dover Cylinder Head,” said Jesse. “Before that, he was a technician at Nissan. Within a year, Danny was running the place as a general manager at Dover. We worked together for around 30 years.”

Jesse also emphasized Danny’s intellect.

“One of the smartest people I’ve ever

known in my life,” he said.

Yet, it was not just his intelligence, but how he used it to help others that stood out most.

“When you’re dealing with Danny, you had to get your ego out of the way because he was going to correct you,” said Jesse, “not to make you look bad but because he wanted you to know more about something. And then he would give you the whole breakdown on how something worked.”

This approach reflects a teacher’s mindset — one driven not by ego, but by a genuine desire to uplift others.

“He was always trying to help somebody,” he said. “I don’t recall any bad times with him. Over all those decades, all I have are good memories. I never experienced him doing wrong to me. He was a super guy. He was the funniest man I knew.”

Humor, as many noted, was one of Danny’s defining traits — often used to bring light into heavy moments.

“He always came at things with a different viewpoint,” said Jesse. “He was very unique.”

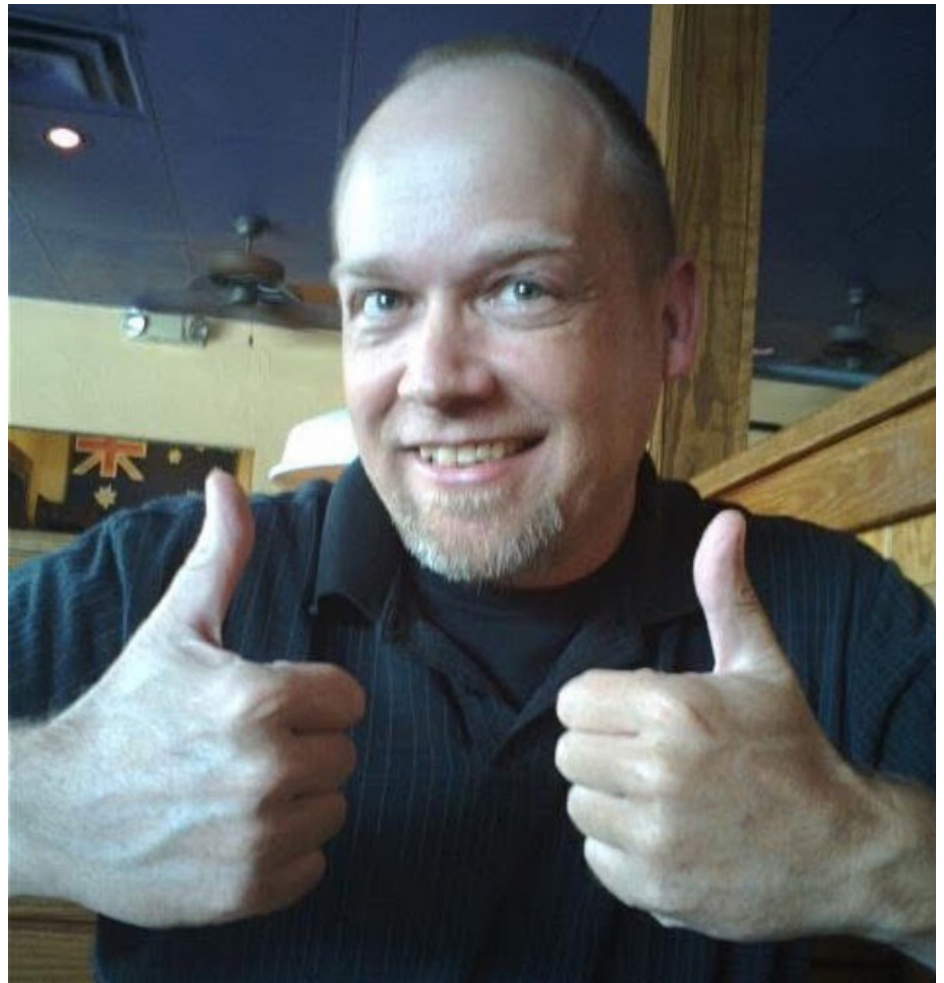
Even his perceived flaws spoke to his character.

“His biggest flaw was that he would always try to take care of everybody — and always giving people a second chance even to his detriment,” he said. “And he was always honest. Through all those years, I never saw him be dishonest or do something that may have been wrong, even if it would’ve benefitted his work — he kept his integrity.”

Reflecting on the outpouring of support after Danny’s passing, Jesse added, “We were blown away with the representation of the SSPBA at the funeral.”

Within the SSPBA, Danny’s presence was equally impactful. SSPBA Chief Executive Officer Renéé Dixon shared her own memories of Danny.

“Danny was a tremendous asset to the



Danny always kept a positive attitude.

organization of the SSPBA,” she said. “He never ceased to keep a positive attitude and a smile on his face regardless of his circumstances. His work ethic was excellent, always putting forth his best in the communications department and willing to help anybody across departments as well.

“Danny’s integrity made a lasting impact on everyone he met,” Dixon continued. “Not only was he a great employee, but he was also a wonderful friend to all and an outstanding father to his son, Stephen, and his daughter, Victoria. He will be greatly missed by everyone.”

Her words highlighted not only his professional contributions but the relationships he built along the way. In memorial for Danny, the SSPBA planted a tree on the grounds of the property to remember his life and the impact he made on everyone there.

Justin Blackburn, who worked closely with Danny as the director of the communications department, offered a deep, personal perspective on both his professional abilities and his resilience.

“Upon meeting him, I knew Danny was a really intelligent, inquisitive person,” said Justin. “He wanted to know how everything worked so he could know how to help. He asked a lot of questions.”

Their shared interests fostered a strong connection.

“We shared a lot of like interests with computers, technology, sci-fi, etc.,” he said. “I immediately respected and knew I liked him. Danny started working for the SSPBA in December of 2019, so we worked together for a little over six years.”

Their collaboration was marked by both productivity and camaraderie.

“We bounced a lot of ideas off each other in the office. We laughed and joked with each other. He had a dry, sarcastic and witty sense of humor,” Justin said.

Danny’s work ethic and reliability earned deep trust.

“I entrusted him with a lot of the web side of things because I knew that he would run with it and question the things that didn’t make sense,” he said. “He re-worked and revamped a lot of the forms that we have today and made them better than they were. He was a great problem-solver. I knew he had great attention to detail, and I knew I could trust him with the work.”

Even in conversation, Danny’s love for his family was evident.

“We talked about our children, and he would share stories about Stephen and Tori,” said Justin. “You could always hear the tenderness and pride in his voice when he talked about them.”

Their friendship extended beyond work.

“We would talk for hours about our hobbies in different nerdy, techy things including Star Wars, Star Trek, and sci-fi shows like *Expanse*,” Justin said. “He was one of those guys you could relate to and talk to easily, a very kind-hearted person. He was a great friend.”

Perhaps most telling of Danny’s character was how he faced his battle with cancer.

“He started feeling weak, out of breath, not great,” said Justin. “He went to the doctor and they started running tests. It was a few months before he was diagnosed with cancer. When he told me his diagnosis, I could hear a little bit of worry in his voice, but he was always positive. He never let on to anything less than a positive report.

“We talked about putting faith and trust in God,” Justin continued. “We would pray. We prayed that God would heal him and help him. Treatment after treatment, he never showed that things were bad. Every setback, he had a plan and a way to tackle it. There were only ever two times



Danny with his children, Stephen and Tori

I ever heard him disheartened. The first time was after his first surgery. It was just because of the not knowing since he always had a form of a plan. The only time he didn’t seem like himself or ‘like Danny’ was in the waiting or not knowing what to expect. He was very strong-willed. He had strong character.

“The second time was when he ended up getting a new doctor, and the blood count showed he had issues with his liver caused by damage from the medicine — so they stopped treatment to see if his count would improve,” he continued. “Then they started treatment again. Similarly, he would only be discouraged when he was caught in a waiting period. He was just worried he wasn’t going to be strong enough to come out of it. He was worried about his job — but we reassured him that his job would be okay. He was such a hard worker. No matter how many times I told him to rest — he would work and take care of an assignment anyway. Even when he was in the hospital, his mind was on helping others and getting his work done. He never complained. He

was such a fighter through cancer.

“I can’t say enough good things about Danny,” Justin concluded. “He was a very special man. I think the biggest worry on Danny’s mind through it all was letting people down. He was just a provider at heart. He wanted to be there for people. So, when he couldn’t totally do that through the cancer, he felt like he was disappointing people. I think that truly speaks to his character — his servant’s heart. If he could help you, he would. It wasn’t just about a job for him — it was about helping people.”

Danial “Danny” Lynn Gardner’s life reflected steady devotion — devotion to family, to friends, to his work and to doing what was right even when it was difficult. His legacy is not only found in what he accomplished, but in the countless lives he touched through his kindness, humor and unwavering willingness to help. He will be remembered as a man who showed up, gave selflessly and left every place — and every person — better than he found them.

NC CHAPTER BRINGS BACK RACE FOR THE FALLEN GLOW RUN

By Randy Byrd
Director of Foundation and
Media Relations

The Race for the Fallen Glow Run was a staple of the Police Benevolent Foundation for many years after the inaugural run in McDonough, Ga., Sept. 19, 2015.

The pandemic, however, changed that, as everyone adapted to the new norm, and our signature race to honor fallen officers and financially support their families was put on hold.

After the pandemic ended, one of the Foundation's goals was to dust off the playbook and find a chapter that was willing to do the heavy lifting to bring back this incredible event.

The leadership of the Winston-Salem Triad Chapter of the North Carolina Police Benevolent Association answered the call. On Oct. 24, 2025, over 200 runners ran through Washington Park in Winston-Salem to show their appreciation for those who serve and protect our communities every day and to remember those lives that have been lost.

Sgt. Daniel Clark with the Winston-Salem Police Department ran in full uniform in memory of his friend and fellow coworker, Sgt. Mickey Hutchens.

On Oct. 7, 2009, Hutchens was shot outside a restaurant after he responded to a call reporting a disturbance. The restaurant's manager reported that her ex-husband, who had outstanding warrants for his arrest, was at the restaurant and would not leave. The suspect fled from the officer and then opened fire at close range when confronted. The shot struck Hutchens in the head.

The suspect also shot Clark in the head and chest before Clark returned fire, fatally wounding the suspect. Clark survived his injuries, but Hutchens passed a few days later.



And they're off!



Signing up



Gerod and Kathy King with NCPBA President David Rose at right



WSPD Chief William Penn Jr. came to support.

“I hate running,” Clark said, “but it was an honor to run in memory of Sgt. Mickey Hutchens. The Race for the Fallen is not about the finish line; it is about honoring heroes like Sgt. Hutchens, whose courage and dedication continue to inspire me and so many others.”

Cpl. Holly Gordon works with the Greensboro Police Department. Since November 2018, she has experienced the loss of three fellow officers within her agency.

Officer Jared Franks was killed in a traffic accident while responding to a robbery-in-progress call. Sgt. Dale Nix was shot and killed while confronting shoplifters at a convenience store. Officer Michael Horan was shot and killed responding to an armed person call inside a grocery store.

Gordon brought her daughter, Peyson, so they could pay homage to these officers.

“I’m blessed to have served alongside officers like them,” said Gordon. “My daughter was there for all three. I left her to go direct traffic at the scene before we knew we lost Officer Franks. I was riding beside her when we passed the ambulance carrying Sgt. Nix. We were at her dentist when we heard of Officer Horan. I want my daughter to understand the love and sacrifice they gave for others.”

In addition to the runners showing their support, many in the community stepped up with monetary donations to support the cause.

Dalton McGuire with N.C. Farm Bureau was one example. A former officer, he has tremendous respect and appreciation for those who serve.



Peyson and Cpl. Gordon

"It is an honor," said McGuire, "to support the Police Benevolent Foundation as they provide support for officers and their families at a time when they are most in need."

Carolina University in Winston-Salem is another example. The university chose to donate after chapter President Mark VanBuren met Gerod King, a Carolina University faculty member, at an event.

Carolina University already supports officers, spouses and their children by offering online degree programs that are affordable and designed for career growth.

Justine Weber, the university's executive coordinator, thought that supporting the run would just be a natural extension of

their work, and her colleagues agreed.

"Carolina University was honored to support the Police Benevolent Foundation and the 2025 Race for the Fallen through both our donation and our presence at the event," said Weber. "We recently launched our Heroes Program, which offers significantly discounted tuition rates to first responders, active-duty military, veterans and their families, so we were proud to support an organization doing important work for the law enforcement community."

"Carolina University is grateful for the opportunity to stand alongside the Foundation and looks forward to supporting its work in the future," she continued.



Wake Forest University band member Jack Sweeney plays 'Taps.'



Winston-Salem Triad Chapter Senior Vice President Shanté Gallagher speaks with the media.



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Winston-Salem Police Department Honor Guard and supporting cast



Sgt. Daniel Clark crosses the finish line.



NCPBA President David Rose with Winston-Salem Triad Chapter members who were presented plaques for their efforts.



Winston-Salem Police Department Motor Unit

LYNCHBURG VA LEO DISPLAYS SOFT SIDE TO CRIME VICTIMS

By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

Imagine being the victim of a crime interviewing with police detectives in a bleak, intimidating room complete with metal frame chairs and harsh overhead lighting.

Lynchburg police Detective Sara W. Bond believed victims deserved better and partnered with Project Beloved: The Molly Jane Mission to develop a trauma-informed “soft interview room” within her department.

“Working with people who have been victims made me realize that we don’t always take their comfort level into account when we are interviewing them,” she said. “Our interview rooms at the department were pretty stark and not very welcoming. Victims of traumatic events should feel comfortable and safe when coming to speak with us and provide statements.”

Bond, a Police Officer III, attended academy training at the Central Virginia Criminal Justice Academy in downtown Lynchburg. She has been assigned to the Criminal Investigations Division for over six years. Prior to that, she spent nine years in the patrol division.

“I serve as one of two domestic violence reviewers for the department,” she said, “and in that role, I am tasked with reviewing all DV reports that come in from patrol.”

She also acts as a DV training resource for field officers and supervisors.

“I represent the department on the Domestic Abuse Response Team, and we are working toward forming a Domestic Violence High Risk Team to evaluate cases assessed as especially high-risk situations,” said Bond. “We hope this will allow the partner agencies to intervene with resources before a DV case escalates into serious injury or death.”



Detective Sara W. Bond

She also serves on the Sexual Abuse Response Team in which member agencies discuss issues surrounding sexual assault cases and how they can better serve the survivors.

However, Bond started down a very different career path. She was born and raised in Baltimore and worked in banking and social services prior to joining law enforcement. She completed college courses at several institutions, ultimately earning a B.A. in economics from Sweet Briar College.

But her first love appears to have been music, and she accumulated a prestigious resume.

“I began my academic career as a music major in vocal performance, and sang in high school and college, eventually joining the Baltimore Choral Arts Society,” said Bond. “We performed at numerous venues, including the Kennedy Center in Washington. I also performed in professional musical theater productions with the Young Victorian Theater Company in Baltimore while still in high school.”

As diverse as her interests were growing

up, Bond said she was also intrigued by police officers – especially K9 officers.

“As a child growing up in Baltimore, I loved seeing police officers in the community, and was especially excited to see K9 officers,” she said. “I remember the Baltimore K9 officers having German Shepherds and I thought that was so cool. I did grow up with a dog, but never a German Shepherd.”

After dipping her toe into several career options — and realizing that there was no time like the present — she went into academy training somewhat older than most in her class as a result.

“As a kid I was pretty quiet and shy, and I doubt anyone expected me to go into law enforcement,” she said.

Since becoming a police officer, Bond has worked closely with victims in various roles in the Lynchburg community. She said she is conscious of her status in uniform and works hard to leave residents with a positive impression of LEOs. She is also a member of VAPBA.

While in patrol, she spent two three-year terms on the Board of Directors of the Central Virginia YWCA, which runs the only local DV shelter program. For two of the years while on the board, she served as board president. The YWCA also runs SARP, the Sexual Assault Response Program.

“In my years working with the YWCA, I found that I loved making a difference in people’s views of law enforcement officers,” said Bond. “It was important to me that the citizens I came into contact with went away feeling respected by the police. One case in particular that sticks with me involved a sexual assault of a woman who had developmental delays. She was so brave. We recently had our trial for that case and came away with a guilty verdict, which was extremely satisfying.”

For many years, trauma-informed interviewing for victims was not

something considered in designing spaces at police departments, Bond said, but “thankfully,” that is starting to change.

“While in a meeting one day, I heard someone talking about an organization called Project Beloved, which provides all necessary furnishings for soft interview rooms where victims and survivors can provide their statements in a secure and welcoming setting,” she said.

Lynchburg PD was in the beginning stages of building a new headquarters. After getting approval, Bond said she reached out to Project Beloved and received a quick response from founder Tracy Matheson.

“She put us on the list,” said Bond. “Tracy and her organization were absolutely wonderful to work with. Tracy’s work came from a place of tragedy as her daughter, Molly Jane, was sexually assaulted and killed. Tracy knew she wanted to honor Molly’s memory by doing something meaningful and that was the start of Project Beloved.”

According to projectbeloved.org, Matheson’s only daughter, Molly Jane, was sexually assaulted and murdered April 10, 2017. She was 22. Part of the project’s initiatives includes working with agencies to create soft interview rooms for crime victims and even those suspected of committing crimes.

“Based on my work with Project Beloved to complete the soft interview room for adult victims, word got around to our own Lynchburg Police Foundation,” said Bond. “This non-profit voted to fund furnishing for a separate juvenile interview room in our building. I was asked to take on that task, and I’m pleased to say that is complete as well.”

The juvenile interview room features comfortable stuffed sofas and chairs, prints and colors, all designed to foster calm and ease.

Now that the room is available, Bond said it can be used to interview juvenile victims and also provide a safe play space for children who occasionally come to

police headquarters with a parent who needs to speak with an officer or detective.

Bond said she loves her job and hopes she is making a difference in people’s lives.

“I think it is important to leave something lasting once I retire or move on,” she said. “I hope that by working to complete the specialty interview rooms at the department, other officers and detectives that come after me will have those resources to assist in working their cases. I hope that these rooms will bring a small bit of comfort to victims and survivors.”

In her private life, Bond is married. She and her husband are parents to two dogs that are “probably more spoiled than some people’s children.”

“One dog is a rescue mixed breed from a local rescue group, Central Virginia Regional Rescue,” she said. “Our second dog is a greyhound who never made it through race training and retired to take over our sofa instead.”

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ARPBA DETECTIVE NABS TOP AWARDS, CREDITS DEVOTION TO JOB

By Katharine Jefcoats
Editor

As a child, Crossett police Detective Cpl. Kali Grier moved around the country with her family, led by her Air Force stepdad.

However, she spent summers with her nana in Crossett, a town of fewer than 5,000 residents about 10 miles north from the Louisiana state line.

Grier's aspirations ran the gamut from medical examiner to attorney and "everything in between," she said.

In high school, Grier discovered another interest – technology.

"I graduated from high school where I was actively involved in a few extracurriculars which included, at one point, an all-girls robotics team," she said. "Our team won at the state level and went on to compete nationally, which sparked my interest in tech and coding."

But she was more inspired by family influences close to home.

"Public service has always been a strong influence in my life," said Grier. "My Nana worked as a paramedic for many years and later taught at the University of Arkansas at Monticello to aspiring paramedics. My mother also served as a firefighter and paramedic with the Crossett Fire Department for a few years."

Grier joined her family's dedication to public service when she took a position as a dispatcher with Crossett PD in early 2023. After a year, she was working patrol, moving into investigations in June 2025.

Again, she credits Nana for providing support and encouragement.

My greatest influence in joining law enforcement was my Nana," said Grier. "When I was working as a dispatcher and told her I planned to move to patrol as an



Cpl. Kali Grier and her 'amazing man'

officer, I expected hesitation or concern. Instead, she simply said, 'OK?' — not out of doubt, but curiosity as to why I was nervous to tell her. She made it clear that she had complete confidence in my abilities and encouraged me to pursue the role if I believed I could meet the demands of the job."

At the same time she hit the road, Grier joined PBA because she believes in its mission of supporting and advocacy for LEOs.

In 2025, Grier said the Crossett police chief decided to bestow awards on top officers, based on peer votes. The results reinforced her decision to join law enforcement and to continue to pursue the career long-term.

Her peers voted her 2025 Officer of the Year and 2025 Rock Award.

"Knowing that my fellow officers took the time to recognize my work — and being honored with two awards — was an overwhelmingly positive and humbling experience for me," she said.

"The recognition meant even more to me because it came from my peers, as it reflected the respect and trust of the people who work beside me every day and understand the demands of the job.

"Seeing how my brothers and sisters in blue view my effort, professionalism and dedication was incredibly gratifying and reinforced the pride I take in my work every day," continued Grier.

Throughout her life, she said, Nana consistently pushed her to be better and to never allow others to define my capabilities.

"She taught me that confidence is built by showing others what you are capable of through hard work and integrity," Grier said. "That mindset played a significant role in my decision to pursue a career in law enforcement."

Overall, Grier said she is "truly blessed."

"I have found an amazing man that supports me and stands with me, who always pushes me to be better," she said. "I have found a great group of friends inside and outside of the workplace. They are always there to help pick me back up or give me a pep talk when I need it to push on. My partner and my friends are the biggest assets to me, and I always know I can lean on them."

In her free time, Grier said she enjoys staying physically active. She regularly trains at the gym, she boxes, and she continues to develop her skills in Brazilian

Jiu-Jitsu, which, she said, aligns well with both her personal discipline and professional mindset.

“My career goals are focused on continued growth as an investigator and expanding my professional impact within law enforcement and my community,” she said. “I aim to strengthen my investigative skills through advanced training, hands-on casework and continued learning, while also continuing to build strong working relationships with local, state, and federal agencies.

“I take pride in continually improving myself, learning new skills from experienced investigators and continually contributing at a higher level; goals that drive me both professionally and personally. I live by never becoming complacent in life,” continued Grier.



Cpl. Kali Grier with fellow police officers



Cpl. Kali Grier with friends



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