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THE FRONT LINE

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Mississippi member gets \$55,000 settlement to end lawsuit against employer for failing to provide benefits to LEOs injured in the line of duty

BY JASON KIRSCHBERG
BY JEFF REYNOLDS
MISSISSIPPI ATTORNEYS

In April 2019, PBA member Peter Butler – an officer with the Mississippi Department of Transportation – was engaged in mandatory training exercises when he suffered a physical injury.

The injury left him unable to work, forcing Officer Butler to take medical leave during his period of recovery.

Mississippi statutory law provides that law enforcement officers injured “in the line of duty” need not use accrued personal or medical leave during their recovery period. (See Miss. Code Ann. 25-3-93(5), 25-3-95(6)) When Officer Butler sought such benefits, he was denied. MDOT based its denial on an internal policy that MDOT narrowly, and wrongly, construed to exclude injuries sustained in training exercises from the policy’s definition of “in the line of duty.”

In other words, according to MDOT, officers engaged in mandatory training sessions are not acting “in the line of duty.”

Consequently, Officer Butler applied for workers compensation benefits during his period of recovery. Although Officer Butler was awarded such benefits, they paid only about 66% of his monthly salary. To fill the 34% gap each month, Officer Butler cashed in a portion of his accrued personal and

medical leave hours each month.

Eager to return to his policing duties, and stop burning through his accrued leave hours, Officer Butler returned to work in October 2020. Unfortunately, however, Officer Butler's April 2019 injury never fully healed.

After months of working through the pain of his injury, Officer Butler concluded that his injury's lingering effects left him unable to work at full speed, thus compromising his ability to safely perform his duties as a law enforcement officer.

He therefore returned to medical leave in August 2021, when he also resumed receiving workers compensation benefits supplemented by cashing in some accrued leave hours -- the balance of which kept getting smaller and smaller.

By the middle of 2022, Officer Butler's accrued leave hours were approaching depletion. Once he used all his accrued leave hours, he would lose 34% of his monthly income, leaving him unable to pay his bills. Unsure what to do, Officer Butler contacted the PBA for help.

The PBA acted quickly. It assigned the matter to Mississippi attorneys Jeff Reynolds and Jason Kirschberg, whom the PBA tasked with investigating the facts, reviewing the law and determining Officer Butler's options.

As part of the investigation, the PBA paid to retain a forensic accountant who calculated that, since his April 2019 injury, Officer Butler used accrued leave hours valued at more than \$38,000.

Had MDOT correctly determined that Officer Butler's injury occurred "in the line of duty" in April 2019, Officer Butler would not have needed to use a single hour from his accrued leave time to supplement his income.

Upon completing their investigation in September 2022, Reynolds and Kirschberg sued the Mississippi Department of Public Safety in the Circuit Court of Hinds County, Miss. MDPS, not MDOT, was the named defendant because MDOT merged its law enforcement division into MDPS in July 2021.

The lawsuit sought a judicial declaration that Officer Butler was injured "in the line of duty," as that phrase is used in the relevant statutes, and thus entitled to all attendant benefits available by law. The lawsuit also sought damages for breach of contract and violations of Officer Butler's state constitutional rights.

Within weeks of filing the lawsuit, the MDPS, through its attorneys, contacted Officer Butler's attorneys to advise that MDPS wished to explore a potential settlement.

After weeks of negotiations, MDPS and MDOT agreed to pay Officer Butler a total of \$55,000 to resolve the lawsuit, about \$16,000 more than his actual damages identified in the complaint.

This excellent result would not have been possible without Officer Butler's PBA membership, which paid all costs for Officer Butler's attorneys' fees and expenses.

Although Officer Butler's injury ultimately led him to retire from his career in law enforcement, the PBA is proud to have fought alongside him to ensure justice was done and that he received the vital benefits law enforcement officers and their families depend upon in the face of work-related injuries.



Attorneys Jeffrey Reynolds and Jason Kirschberg
of Reynolds/Kirschberg in Jackson, Miss.

Remembering Officer Logan Medlock

BY RANDY BYRD
DIRECTOR OF FOUNDATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS

For Officer Logan Medlock, his legacy of removing impaired drivers from the streets of London, Ky., also became a horrific irony that ended his life. Part of this incredible officer's service led to him receiving the Governor's DUI Impaired Driving Award for three years in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

In the last year he won the award, his life was taken by a drunk driver who T-boned his cruiser at an intersection in the early morning hours of Oct. 30. The driver was found to be driving at four times the legal limit. Medlock's sacrifice likely saved other lives.

For his wife, Courtney, the nightmare began at 3 a.m. when her doorbell rang. The ring was followed by pounding on the door and then a phone call requesting that she come to the door. She was met by her father-in-law, a retired assistant police chief, her step mother-in-law, her mother and a retired major from the police department.

"Logan is dead," her father-in-law said.

He embraced her as she started screaming and carried her up a flight of stairs and laid her on a couch as the agony continued. The next few days were a blur for Courtney, she said. She lay on their living room floor in front of their fireplace crying and screaming for the next few days. She was angry. She was heartbroken.

"Logan and I kissed each other goodbye every single day as if it were our last time, but we never ever thought it would actually be the last," she said. Their talk about growing old together with white hair and rocking chairs was not to be.

Through faith and prayers, she found the strength to carry on for her and their son, Brantley, as the funeral was planned and Logan was laid to rest. Family and friends never left her side.



Officer Medlock with Courtney and Brantley

"Our community truly showed their support for us," she said. "Fundraisers, food, texts, phone calls, blue light bulbs. So many gathered and showed support."

Logan and Courtney were high school sweethearts who started dating as sophomores in high school. He played football for North Laurel, and she was a cheerleader for South Laurel.

They had a mutual friend who introduced them, and they ended up going to the movies together. After high school, they were married on April 23, 2016. A little over a year later, Brantley was born.

Logan began his career in law enforcement working at the Laurel County sheriff's detention center as a correctional officer, up until he was hired at London City Police Department in 2019. He graduated from the police academy January 23, 2020.

In addition to his DUI awards, he also received an Officer

of the Year Award and the Medal of Valor. His service also extended to the Keavy Fire Department where he volunteered.

Officer James Williams worked with Logan at the police department. James had moved from Arizona to Ky., and he met Logan during the hiring process.

They quickly became friends. Logan would invite him to the gym to work out to prepare for the academy. Their lives and families became intertwined through kids' birthday parties and visits to the zoo.

James also admired Logan's work on the street.

"Logan was a great officer. He loved, lived and breathed law enforcement," he said.

James remembers him being proud of his work and serving with compassion. James added, "He could tell when people were having a hard time and were just making poor decisions."

James took Logan's death hard. What is often referred to as survivor's guilt became all too real for James. He never had cried so much or so hard in his life.

For the first month after his passing, he didn't want to go home. He didn't want to see his wife and kids. He said, "I felt so guilty because I knew it was something that Courtney and Brantley would never have again. I felt like I didn't deserve the joy and happiness of being greeted by my wife and kids."

Courtney asked James to be a pallbearer for Logan's funeral. Although it was one of the hardest things he had ever done, he considered it an honor.

James said, "I still miss him. I still wear a mourning bracelet with his name on it. I loved him. He truly was like a brother to me."

A piece of Logan's academy water bottle that James found at his friend's crash site also helped with the healing. He carried it in his cruiser for months to symbolize that Logan was riding shotgun with him.



Logan holding newborn Brantley



Logan and Courtney celebrate Brantley's birthday



James Williams, far right, with Medlock next to him at their academy graduation

During this time, he found out that Logan's father, Randy, had the bottle and was missing the one piece that he had. It was the last piece he had of Logan but something he felt he needed to do, he said. Giving it to Randy made him break down crying once again.

Sgt. Drew Jackson also developed a friendship with Logan. Both were weightlifters who spent many hours working out in the police department gym.

Drew knew Logan to be an outstanding officer and

family man who would've done anything to help anyone, on and off the job. He was motivated, proactive and truly loved his job. He said, "I'm honored to have gotten to serve with him"

The night of his death, Drew was with him a short time prior to the wreck. They were joking around as usual and Logan was in a good mood. When Logan pulled away, just a few seconds prior to the wreck, he told him that he was going to look for a DUI driver.

Jackson said, "I have no doubt he died doing what he loved, and he gave his life to save another that night."

Officer Elbert Riley considers Logan one of the best

Next issue of **FRONTLINE**
will focus on these states



If you have story ideas from these
member states, please email

jblackburn@sspba.org · rbyrd@sspba.org

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of the **FRONT LINE**,
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officers he ever had the opportunity to work with. When Logan was hired at the police department, he was one of Logan's training officers.

"He was one of the most dedicated, genuine and passionate officers I have ever trained," Elbert said. "He always wanted to go above and beyond for his peers and the community," he added.

Elbert lived in the same subdivision as Courtney and Logan, and he and Logan spent hours walking the neighborhood together or working out in the local gym.

These rides to the gym were in Elbert's minivan which became a humor point for Logan and him. Logan would say, "We shouldn't be driving the mom van to the gym."

Elbert considered Logan one of the greatest people he had ever had the pleasure to know. Logan literally would give you the shirt off his back, as he did one day at the gym after Elbert's back had gotten soaked by a hard rain.

Since Elbert was headed to meet his wife and take his son to the doctor, Logan gave him the shirt he had brought to change into so he wouldn't be soaking wet for the appointment.

As with others, the loss of Logan hasn't been easy for Elbert. He said, "He truly made an impact on my life and all the lives he touched."

Logan was an avid hunter and fisherman, according to Courtney. He loved to spend his free time in the woods or on the lake, often with his father. Logan had just started to pass along these skills to Brantley when he was tragically killed.

"He loved his family with everything in him, and we loved him just as much," Courtney said.

She cherishes his commitment to her and Brantley as a family and his desire to spend time together. She said, "I am sure glad we did."

She also wants Logan to be remembered for the

beautiful person he was inside and out.

She said, "He was sweet, caring, genuine, tough, and stern when he had to be. He truly cared about everyone and wanted to make a difference in our community."

Courtney is also appreciative of the PBA of which Logan was a member.

"The PBA has shown so much respect, love and appreciation for Logan, me and Brantley. They have helped us financially, and by honoring Logan. We are so thankful to them for sharing Logan's story."



Logan with a gobbler

PBA attorney spotlight: Michael Laubshire of South Carolina



South Carolina attorney Michael Laubshire

BY JONI FLETCHER CAWTHON
DIRECTOR OF LEGAL SERVICES

PBA attorney Michael Laubshire has known the peace of mind that comes with PBA membership.

As a former Spartanburg County Sheriff's deputy for almost 10 years, he saw law enforcement officers call on PBA when in need.

"Although I didn't have to call PBA myself, it felt comforting to have the service at my fingertips, if I needed it," he said.

Laubshire left the sheriff's office to attend law school at the University of South Carolina. His first job as an attorney was at the South Carolina Department of Corrections, as in-house counsel.

He then worked for the 10th Circuit Solicitor's Office,

as a prosecutor, in Anderson County, S.C., before establishing The Laubshire Law Firm LLC in Columbia, S.C.

The firm focuses on criminal defense and family court matters. Laubshire works alongside one other attorney in the office, Richard Dolce, and together they've put together a healthy law practice.

"We work well together by bouncing things off each other," Laubshire said. "We have very different points of view on most things, and when we work together, it's very beneficial for our clients."

A friend in law enforcement asked Laubshire to become a PBA attorney years ago and, as he said, "To go back to working for the good guys."

Laubshire has been handling PBA cases for over 11 years, primarily representing members involved in shootings and other critical incidents.

PBA staff is very familiar with Laubshire's availability and willingness to assist when called upon.

Staff representative Patrick Cullinan said, "I love being able to reach out to Michael Laubshire on a member's behalf. I know that Michael will drop everything and go wherever I ask."

In addition to being licensed in South Carolina, Laubshire is admitted to the bar in Washington, D.C., New York and New Jersey.

He said that he felt the need to be licensed in New York and New Jersey in the event law enforcement officers there need his help because many attorneys there are not friendly to the interests of officers.

When asked why he handles PBA cases, Laubshire said that PBA provides a great program and that because he's been on both sides, he knows that officers want a competent lawyer when they're in a critical situation.

"Having been a deputy, I know that officers typically aren't prepared to pay for major legal representation – the attorney bills can really add up," he said.

"Working with PBA gives me the opportunity to help officers."

"You've got to believe in what you're doing," he added.

Laubshire attended the PBA attorney seminar in East

Point, Ga., a few months ago.

"That was one of the best seminars I've been to in a long time," he said. "I was able to put to use what I learned there right away."

PBA appreciates Michael Laubshire's commitment to law enforcement and his willingness to assist members day and night.



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Alabama fallen officer leaves a father's legacy

BY DON FLETCHER
GEORGIA TROOPER

Ivan Mauricio Lopez grew up in Cali, Colombia, where his mother, Maria Manzano, reared him, his two brothers and his sister.

That single-parent family situation helped Ivan develop a profound respect for all the women in his life.

"My dad's life was centered around the women in his life -- his two daughters and mom," said his daughter, Isabella Lopez. "He was such an attentive man to all friends, family and strangers he knew. He has always been so full of energy and life, able to work 12-plus-hour shifts and still make it to soccer practice, cook dinner and spend quality time with his family."

Ivan also had an aunt and uncle in Colombia, Margo and Asbel, with whom he was close. They had two children, Angela and Juan Carlos, whom he called his siblings.

After Ivan earned a degree in social work while in Colombia, he made his way to the American south. He worked a short time with Baldwin County Mental Health before entering the law enforcement field in 2003 as a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer in Gulfport, Miss.

He worked in that capacity for four or five years before moving to Alabama so he could be closer to daughters Isabella and Natalia. He got a job as a patrol officer with the Prichard Police Department.

He worked with other police departments before joining the Mount Vernon Police Department. Ivan also became a PBA member.

His female-centered life, which also included a passion for the people – and the animals – with whom he came into contact, ended Aug. 22, 2022, when a drunk driver, traveling at more than 100 mph with a blood-alcohol content three times the legal limit, plowed into his car as he was on his way home from his job as an officer with the Mount Vernon Police Department.

A friend with the Mobile County Sheriff's Office notified Isabella's mother, who passed on the bad news to Isabella. They drove to Auburn, Ala., the next morning



Mount Vernon police Officer Ivan Lopez



Lopez and his 'Daddy's girls'

to notify Isabella's younger sister, Natalia, who was away at school.

Isabella said the days immediately following her father's tragic death were a grief-filled blur that remains to this day, despite her effort to accept the loss.

"Truthfully, I cannot recall the next few days and weeks, as all my days ran together," she said. "I was unable to eat, focus or do much else but cry. I don't know if I'm able to say I've 'coped,' because that would mean that I've accepted it, and I don't feel like I have.

"Every single day I think about the fact that I will never be able to call him and hear his voice, tell him how my day was, or hear him tell me he loves me," continued Isabella. "I had to watch my little sister go through the same situation at a much younger age, and I'm grateful I had her to share my sentiments. I couldn't imagine going through it alone without her."

The man to whom she was engaged, along with her mother and grandmother, all helped her make it through the life-changing event.

"I am grateful for my fiancé, Danilo Baladad, who was very loved by my father," she said. "He stepped up in a way that I know would have made my dad so proud. We had my mother, who also lost her father at a young age due to an unfortunate accident and could not understand the pain we felt. Family is always great to lean on. You just never wish to go through something like this together."

"Anyone that knew my dad could confirm that my sister and I were the light of his life," she said of the man who taught his daughters to drive a car, motorcycle and boat and how to shoot a gun.

"There would not be a conversation that would pass without him mentioning us or bragging about something we did. He worked tirelessly at making



Ivan Lopez enjoys time well spent with his mother, whom he called his best friend, Maria Manzano, and his oldest daughter, Isabella Lopez.

sure we felt loved and important, reminding us how beautiful, intelligent and strong we are.

"Most importantly, he taught us the value of hard work and perseverance," Isabella continued. "There was nothing his girls couldn't do, and there was nothing that would get in the way of him being there for them, either."

Isabella pointed out that her father's passion for people and animals were trademarks of his law enforcement career.

"He had such a passion for police work and proudly wore his uniform," she said. "He thrived in getting to know members of the community he swore to protect. My dad was very personable and loved making conversation. He was genuine, and the residents of Mount Vernon echoed that sentiment."

The family's first canine pet was a dog he rescued after she was abandoned by her family when Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast.

"My dad was very passionate about people and animals, always lending a helping hand when he could," she said. "He was known throughout his career in policing for always having dog and cat food in his patrol car so he could feed the strays."

She said his legacy was the faith-based manner in which he lived his life.

"I'd like to believe the legacy my dad left was how strong he was in his faith and the role it played in his life," she said. "His faith guided him through some of the toughest, darkest moments in his life"



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Ivan Lopez with his daughters on a trip to visit family in Cali, Colombia, during December 2021.

and similarly he'd give all glory to God during the highest peaks of his life. Despite whatever he had going on in his life, he showed so much compassion and understanding.

"He truly loved the people in his life and would go above and beyond, expressing his love through acts of service," continued Isabella.

"The relationships my dad built were so unique. He was incapable of being superficial. All of his relationships were deep and meaningful. There was no favor or request too large, as my dad would find a way because as kind as he was, he was also just as resourceful.

"My dad exuded happiness, he loved life, and he lived intentionally every day," she said. "He didn't need a reason to celebrate because he saw every day as a gift."

Her father's strong presence in the lives of her and her sister continued after her parents divorced when Isabella was 3, a fact that makes his absence even harder to deal with.

"We were definitely spoiled," she said. "Regardless how, what he really enjoyed doing most was spending time with family. Even if it was watching Shrek all day, eating popcorn and M&Ms, as long as he was with his family, he was happy.

"I always knew I was lucky to have such a present dad," continued Isabella. "It just hurts that much more now that he's gone. The void he left is unbearable. There's a quote that really resonates with me now and it reads, 'With great love comes great loss,' and that could not be truer.

"Every birthday he'd say, 'If it's God's will, all I ask is for more time to see those smiles of yours,'" she said. "What I would give to see him smile one more time."



Proud dad celebrates his youngest daughter, Natalia Lopez, as she graduates from Auburn University in May 2022.

WVPBA member receives lifesaving award

BY CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

In the United States, 107,622 people died from drug induced overdoses in the year 2021, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Law enforcement officers are all too familiar with the many destructive ramifications that drugs have in our society. Police officers never know what their day will entail when they begin work each morning.

Dean Redinger and his fellow officers had no idea that it was an emergency call that would result in him being recognized with the Lifesaving Award for his department recently and help prevent one person from becoming another drug-related loss.

Redinger serves as a detective with Wheeling, W.Va., and is assigned to the US Marshal's Mountain State Task Force. He and fellow officers were completing their day in the office when a call came in about an unresponsive individual lying face down nearby.

They quickly responded and were able to locate both the caller and the victim. First impressions led them to believe that the victim was deceased, but they soon determined it was a drug overdose.

Revival efforts led to a pulse and keeping the victim stabilized until first responders arrived from the fire department. Transport to the hospital soon followed and the victim ultimately survived.

Redinger started his law enforcement career with the Wheeling Police Department in August 2016. He became a police officer after recognizing in his senior year of college at Wheeling Jesuit University that his original plan to become an attorney was not what he wanted to do with his life.

Having majored in criminal justice, and with student loans to pay, he applied and was hired at Wheeling PD where he's worked ever since.

In addition to his current assignment, he serves on the Crisis Negotiators Team. During his career, he has been honored with several awards.



Dean and Dani Redinger with daughter Harper

Redinger is also a proud member of the PBA, joining as a new officer after hearing of the many benefits that were described to him by a veteran sergeant in his department.

As an adult thinking back on his hometown of Martins Ferry, W.Va, Redinger said, "It was a nice place to grow up and a great place to be a kid."

He attended Martins Ferry High School and graduated in 2012. He was a member of the National Honor Society and several clubs and played football.

Redinger is married to his wife, Dani, and they have a daughter, Harper, who is 1-and-a-half-years-old. The family enjoys hiking and takes every opportunity to hit the trail.

His future aspirations include hiking the Appalachian Trail as well as the Pacific Crest Trail.

(2022, May 11). U.S. Overdose Deaths In 2021 Increased Half as Much as in 2020 - But Are Still Up 15%. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

Meet VAPBA leader Michael Lynch



Norfolk police Detective Michael Lynch

BY CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

Fifteen years in law enforcement, nine years of active duty with the U.S. Navy and 11 years of reserve duty with the U.S. Army have provided Michael Lynch with exactly the leadership skills he needs to serve as the president of the VAPBA Norfolk Chapter.

Under Lynch's leadership, the Norfolk Chapter came out of receivership with a new election and board in 2022. Officers had become disenfranchised with a previous union and were looking to find an organization that would help to address the critical issues with the agency. Lynch met with VAPBA Executive Director Sean McGowan and decided to take the lead to bring the chapter to fruition.

Lynch said, "It was important because the city was lacking respect for officers, and they didn't have a voice."

Since his election as president, Lynch has worked tirelessly to create strong relationships with city leaders and police administrators. His efforts have led to collective bargaining discussions as well as an increase in the membership of the chapter.

Lynch grew up on a cattle farm in Clearfield County, Pa. Hard work was no stranger as he would assist with the baling and moving of over 10,000 bales of hay each summer, as well as helping with the processing and packaging of the farm's own produce.

In his spare time, he also played hard, enjoying shooting rifles and handguns, and riding dirt bikes around the farm acreage.

Upon graduation from Philipsburg Osceola High School in 1997, Lynch joined the U.S. Navy where he served as a SEABEE builder until 2006, then became an Army reservist from 2006 to 2017 as a combat engineer.

His stint with the Army Reserves saw him deployed from 2009 to 2010 for Operation Enduring Freedom.

Along the way, he graduated with a bachelor of science degree in psychology from Lock Haven University in 2009 and is now in the process of completing a bachelor of science degree in forensic cyber security/ethical hacking from Grand Canyon University. Lynch's rookie school was completed at the Norfolk Police Academy.

Having friends who were police officers helped make the career appealing to Lynch. He also considers the job security of the profession as a positive. And, of course, as so many officers do, he enjoys the opportunity to serve citizens and make his community a safer place.

Lynch started his career with the Norfolk Police Department patrol and has also worked for the Department of Corrections as a corrections officer and in an elected position as a Pennsylvania state constable.

He is currently employed with the Norfolk Police Department, where he's been since 2012, as a detective with the field forensics section.

As a member of the PBA, Lynch points to the attorney coverage that the association provides as the biggest reason he initially joined.

Lynch describes himself as an empty-nester. He has two daughters and two grandchildren. He and his wife, Shannon, enjoy cruising to other parts of the world and spending time with pets in their down-time.


Lynch is also an ice hockey fan and likes to play as well as watch. Woodworking, by hand or CNC machine, is one of his hobbies, too.

Being a skilled handyman, focused on the precision aspects of the job, is another one of his strengths. He said this enables him to build or fix almost anything.


His dad is the person he calls the greatest influence in his career and also the source of his favorite quote: "Can't never did anything, and failure was never an option."

Michael Lynch and this mindset should be a good leadership combination for the Norfolk Chapter of the SSPBA.

THE POLICE BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION OF GEORGIA -
AUGUSTA'S RIVER REGION CHAPTER PRESENTS



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ALL PROCEEDS BENEFIT THE POLICE BENEVOLENT FOUNDATION

Georgia Trooper Chapter members elect new leadership

BY KATHARINE JEFFCOATS
EDITOR

With a proposed trooper retirement bill pending in the Georgia House, newly-elected leaders of one PBA chapter hit the ground running with plans to urge support from state legislators.

Through attrition, Georgia Trooper Chapter leadership has overturned with a new slate of officers -- Dustin Stone is president, Michael Strickland is senior vice president, Chase Cullinan is vice president and Cameron Reese is secretary.

DUSTIN STONE

Stone said the most pressing issue for the chapter is Georgia House Bill 824, which would start a defined retirement system for troopers who only have a 401(k) with match retirement option. The proposed system provides a 25-year, 80% with DROP retirement, he said.

"Currently, our department's salaries are ranked 31st out of the 50 state police or highway patrol agencies in the country," said Stone. "This new retirement would help us with our recruiting and retention and give our troopers a much-needed defined retirement. We plan to continue to encourage our legislators to support this bill and show them why it is important not only to troopers but to the entire state."

With more troopers on the roadway, fatalities will decrease and this bill will help overcome short staffing to provide a better service to the citizens and visitors of the state of Georgia, he continued.



Trooper Dustin Stone

Stone has spent his entire law enforcement career as a trooper with Georgia State Patrol, beginning 15 years ago as a radio operator at Post 25 Thomson just months after his 2008 high school graduation in Pierce County.

"I was fortunate enough in 2011 to be selected to attend the Georgia State Patrol's 89th Basic Trooper School," he said. "Upon graduation, I was assigned to Post 35 Jekyll Island."

Growing up the child of a body shop manager and pharmacy tech, Stone sought a career out of a routine 9-5 job.

"I chose to go into law enforcement to be able to do something that mattered on a larger scale than just myself," he said. "I enjoyed the idea of every day being different and not becoming mundane day in and day out. I knew several law enforcement officers growing up and they were always looked up to by others and I felt I could be the same type of officer they were."

During his career, Stone spent a significant time assigned to the Georgia State Patrol's Nighthawks DUI Task Force, he said.

"Currently, during college football season, I am assigned to the protection and escort detail for Georgia Southern University football and Head Coach Clay Helton," said Stone. "I travel with the team, providing escort and security along with one other trooper who is assigned to the detail."

More than once, Stone was recognized for excellence in service, including a lifesaving award in 2018. However, he has most often received accolades for his efforts to combat intoxicated drivers.

"I have received the Mothers Against Drunk Driving award for DUI arrests for the last 10 years consecutively," he said.

In 2012, he received a commendation letter from Gov. Deal. In 2013, Stone was named Glynn County Exchange Club Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. In 2014, he got another commendation letter from Deal for efforts during a winter storm disaster. In 2017,

Stone was awarded the Georgia State Patrol's Troop Achievement Award for Troop I, which made him a finalist for the Georgia State Patrol Trooper of the Year Award.

In 2018, Savannah Police Department presented Stone and three SPD officers with a lifesaving medal for their actions in pulling a suicidal juvenile back over a bridge railing after she jumped in a suicide attempt.

In 2020, he received a Certificate of Recognition from the City of Tybee Island mayor and city council for assistance provided to the city during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also, in 2020, Stone received the Georgia State Patrol Public Service Award. In 2022, was named Evans County Sheriff's Office Support Officer of the Year by Sheriff Mac Edwards. That same year, he was named Georgia State Patrol Post 42 Trooper of the Year.

Joining PBA was an easy decision for Stone.

"I became a PBA member to be more prepared to protect myself should I ever be involved in a critical incident and need representation," he said. "I was fortunate enough during my time as a radio operator to see a preview of what was in store for me as a trooper and had a lot of guidance from the troopers at the post during my time on the radio. After seeing them go through some of these things, I knew joining PBA as soon as I was on the road was going to be a priority."

Being a member of PBA also means increased protection for Stone's family. He and his wife of seven years, Kindol, have three daughters, Karoline, Kennedy and Kady. In addition to spending time with his girls, Stone enjoys golf, magnet fishing, and promoting and supporting PBA.

"After being involved in several incidents that led to me utilizing my PBA membership and receiving an excep-

tional service from the PBA staff and attorneys, I felt that I could use my experiences to help other troopers be more prepared for when their time came to be involved in a similar situation," said Stone.

"The saying goes 'it's better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it' but in today's law enforcement arena, it's not a matter of if it will happen but when your number will be called to be involved in a critical incident," he continued. "As a PBA leader, I get the opportunity to affect how the PBA helps our members and how the PBA is represented among troopers."

MICHAEL STRICKLAND

As senior vice president of the chapter, Strickland provides a voice for troopers. However, he actually has a certified voice.

"I've auditioned for the television show, 'The Voice,' twice," he said. "The second time, I made it to the round right before airing."



Trooper Michael Strickland

Not too shabby for a small-town kid raised in Thomaston by manufacturing plant workers.

"It's one of those towns where everybody knows everybody somehow," said Strickland. "It's one of those 'Friday Night Lights,' football game kind of towns. A very good place to grow up."

He graduated from Upson-Lee High School in 2010, where he was in band from sixth grade through 12th grade. Strickland became the first African American drum major to lead the school's

marching band in his junior year.

"I won numerous first place and Best in Contest awards while leading the band," he said. "I also won a drum major award from the University of Georgia for being a top drum major during their annual marching band camp. I was also involved with Student Council where I served as vice president and president my junior and senior years. I was also the vice president of the Future Educators Club and a member of the Tri-M Organization."

Strickland continued his education at the University of Alabama, which he attended for a year as a member of Million Dollar Band. He returned to Georgia and briefly attended Middle Georgia State University. He enrolled in Georgia Southwestern University in 2022, where he is working toward his bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

Although the child of factory workers, Strickland said he was influenced toward law enforcement by his stepfather, a lieutenant with Thomaston Police Department. He also had a lean toward education.

"Growing up, I always wanted to be either a history teacher or a state trooper," he said. "When I was a child, I was always around that environment and whenever I would see a trooper in uniform or their cars, I knew I wanted to wear that uniform one day."

He did marry into education, however. His wife, Kasey, is a third-grade elementary school teacher in Byron. They married in April 2022 and had a son, Bowdy Kash Strickland, Jan. 28, 2023. He said he enjoys spending time with them, playing volleyball and working out in CrossFit training.

Several years after high school, Strickland enrolled in the 96th Trooper School, graduating in February 2015. He was assigned to Post 15 Perry as a road trooper until he was promoted to Troop H recruiter in January 2020. In January 2021, he was promoted to corporal at Post 10 Americus. Then, in February 2023, he was promoted to sergeant at Post 33 Milledgeville.

Strickland has been recognized several times so far in his nine-year career, including multiple years as Troop

H Trooper of the Quarter, MADD Award recipient, DPS Top Performer and Everyday Hero in Houston County.

He has served as an FTO, an adjunct instructor, defensive tactics instructor and a use of force instructor. Strickland is also a certified marijuana examiner and a DPS background investigator.

Like thousands of law enforcement officers, Strickland joined PBA for protection against worst case scenarios. However, he also wanted to be involved and active for his fellow troopers.

"I wanted to be a part of a group of leaders that's transparent and communicates regularly with its members and make sure that everyone is on the same page for the goals of our group," he said.

Strickland said he has been influenced for high standards and leadership by two men, Trooper School instructor Kevin Ford and Steve Harrison, a member of the department's command staff.

"Kevin Ford was no-nonsense and held you to a standard, and if you did not meet that standard, he would let you know quickly," he said. "He was one of those instructors that you did not want to disappoint or be on their bad side. One of his favorite lines was 'The standard is the standard, and we will not compromise the standard.' The mentality that he instilled in Trooper School has been how I have operated from day one and has help me achieved the goals I have accomplished thus far."

Strickland said Harrison's leadership style and attitude that he showed toward people who worked for him made a big impact on him and how he wanted to be as a leader when Strickland had the opportunity to lead.

He also credits Jesus Christ for impacting his life.

"I've always said when given the opportunity I would praise His name and tell people how amazing He is and how good He has been in my life," said Strickland. "There is no better leader than my heavenly father, Jesus Christ."

CHASE CULLINAN

The Cullinan name is familiar to PBA and many of its members, especially those in Georgia.

“My father and grandfather were both PBA members,” he said. “I cannot imagine working in this profession without legal defense, and the death benefit is a comforting peace of mind in case of the worst happening.”



Trooper Chase Cullinan

Cullinan grew up in and around Augusta, the son of a career lawman and a Realtor mom, graduating from Evans High School in 2009. At Evans, he wrestled and played football. Accolades included perfect attendance for four years and a dual seal diploma in college and tech prep with a concentration in construction and Spanish.

He continued his scholastic career at Augusta University, earning a bachelor of arts with a double major in criminal justice and sociology in 2013, and a master of arts in intelligence and security studies with a concentration and certificate in social influence in 2023.

Cullinan had his eye on the military.

“Initially, after completing undergrad, I was on my way to USMC Officer Candidate School,” he said. “I took a job in the Richmond County jail while waiting for a ship date because I was miserable waiting tables. I suspected that at some point I would wind up being interested in working in law enforcement later in my career and wanted to get my foot in the door.

“While working in the jail, I was offered a position to go try out for basic mandate,” Cullinan continued. “It seemed interesting, I did well on the PT, driving and shooting, and I enjoyed it. I was sent to mandate and

enjoyed it and never looked back.”

Cullinan said he married his college sweetheart, and they recently welcomed their first child. He trains in Jiu Jitsu, Muay Thai and kickboxing several times each week. He said he also enjoys woodworking, DIY and home improvement projects.

In his 10-year career in law enforcement, Cullinan has held positions as a general instructor, firearms instructor and a member of Specialized Collision Reconstruction Team.

He’s received several commendation letters, MADD awards and a lifesaving award. Cullinan spent five years with Post 25 Grovetown, which received the Colonel’s Commendation, Post of the Year, MADD Post of the Year and Agency Hero of the Year nearly each year for the number of DUI arrests and convictions troopers achieved.

“In 2018, our team arrested over 1,000 impaired drivers, which was a first for any post in the history of the patrol,” said Cullinan.

With more than five decades of law enforcement service between his father and grandfather, Cullinan looks to the two men for inspiration, example and guidance, including in making the decision to join PBA.

“I’m a third-generation lawman in my community and member of PBA chapter leadership,” he said. “I also had the opportunity to attend a lunch meeting in Atlanta one day as a guest and found that my personal and professional goals and beliefs aligned with the mission of the PBA/PBF.”

Rounding out his knowledge and experience in law enforcement, Cullinan studied “Meditations,” the writings of Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, a Stoic philosopher who lived from 121 to 180.

Aurelius’ beliefs seem to appear to reflect those best suited to law enforcement officers and Cullinan himself.

"His works emphasize the importance of Stoicism, which promotes self-control, discipline and fortitude to combat destructive thoughts, emotions and behaviors," said Cullinan. "It teaches someone to become a clear and unbiased thinker, allowing them to understand reason and objective reality of the universe."

"It also teaches that virtue is the only thing good for you and vice is the only evil, everything else is indifferent as it pertains to your own happiness," he continued. "Its principles include wisdom, courage, temperance and justice which align with the core values of the state of Georgia and the patrol."

CAMERON REESE

Reese has accomplished much in his 28 years and shows no signs of slowing down.

The Gray native has called Statesboro home for the 10 years since he graduated from Jones County High School. In those 10 years, Reese racked up eight years as a firefighter, seven as an EMT and more than five in law enforcement.



Trooper Cameron Reese

He has also graduated from Georgia Southern University with a bachelor of science degree in justice studies and completed his Firefighter 1 certification in 2015 and EMT-Basic and EMT-Advanced in 2016 from Ogeechee Technical College.

Reese joined the Bulloch County Fire Department as a volunteer in 2015 and the Statesboro Fire Department as a part-time firefighter. He worked for SFD until 2017 when he graduated and accepted a job with the Statesboro Police Department.

He still volunteers for Bulloch County as a firefighter and EMT. Reese started his career in law enforcement in December 2017 with the Statesboro Police Department,

and graduated from basic mandate in March 2018. He stayed until January 2021.

"While with the Statesboro Police Department, I became a motorcycle officer, field training officer, and received numerous chief's commendations for outstanding policework," he said. "I also received the lifesaving award in 2020."

His career path took a different turn when Reese joined the Georgia State Patrol in January 2021.

"I was the academic leader of my trooper school with an average of 95.9%," he said. "I am currently assigned to the Nighthawks South DUI Task Force as a trooper first class and field training officer. I am also a POST general instructor and a POST medical instructor."

Reese was honored as a 2022 Police Officer Association of Georgia Medal of Valor Recipient and 2022 Troop F Trooper of the Year. Within a year of becoming a law enforcement officer, Reese made the decision to join PBA and finds it rewarding to serve as an elected chapter officer.

"I became a PBA member to make sure that my family and I were protected for when we need it," he said. "I became a PBA leader because I feel that everyone should have PBA for their peace of mind, and I want to encourage others to get memberships."

His family consists of wife Katie, who is a detective with Statesboro PD, and their dogs, Maya, Ollie and Brewski. Reese said he entered public safety because he loves to help people and to give back to his community. He is also an advanced SCUBA diver and is working on his pilot's license. Reese enjoys hunting and fishing, too.

"I am currently a co-founder and owner of firstrespondercandle.com and am rapidly expanding this business," said Reese. "We make candles, wax melts, lotions, body scrubs, room sprays and so much more. Our mission is to give back to first responders, and we make a quarterly donation to local first responder agencies."