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THE FRONT LINE

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Officer Branden Estorffe Bay St. Louis, Miss. EOW: Dec. 14, 2022

BY CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

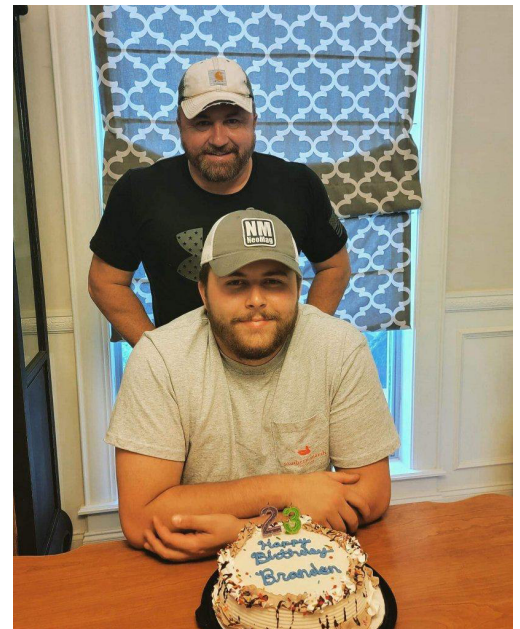
As soon as he heard gunfire, police Officer Branden Estorffe ran toward the sound, intent on putting a safe end to what had started out as a welfare call at a Motel 6 in Bay St. Louis, Miss.

What he found required critical, split-second and decisive action. His partner, Steven Robin, had been fatally shot in the head by the suspect.

As he ran toward the shooter, Estorffe was shot in the left arm. Even after being shot, he heroically moved forward and was able to fire a round, center mass, into the suspect's chest.

In an ill-fated, simultaneous motion, the suspect was able to get off a shot, too, striking Estorffe in the head. Tragically, he later succumbed to his injuries at the hospital.

On that December morning, the officers had received a call regarding



Branden and his dad celebrate his 23rd birthday, which would be his last

a woman staying at the motel who showed signs of mental instability. In the car alongside her was her 8-year-old daughter. The two officers had already been on-scene for about half an hour, trying to



Branden Estorffe with his chief and deputy chief after getting his firearms award

defuse the situation and get the daughter to safety.

Out of concern for the welfare of the young girl, Estorffe called Mississippi Child Protective Services and was communicating with that department at the moment he heard the gunshot that killed his partner. Estorffe's instinctive and courageous actions in his last moments of life likely resulted in lives being saved and the 8-year-old girl being reunited with her family members.

Ian Estorffe, Branden's father, received a call at 4 a.m. from a friend and coworker who shared the devastating news. He rushed to the hospital where he found Branden unconscious, but he was able to see and talk to him.

He described Branden as "the definition of the perfect son."

"He had a heart of gold," said Estorffe. "He loved his sisters and had an amazing fascination with making sure children were safe and taken care of."

Branden came from a loving law enforcement family. His father is a 28-year veteran law enforcement officer

and firearms instructor, and his stepmother, Heather, is a forensic scientist with 16 years of service working for the Mississippi Department of Public Safety.

Branden graduated from Slidell High School in Louisiana in 2017 and earned an associate degree in criminal justice from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. He became a police officer for the Mississippi Military Department and earned Top Shot while in the academy there. At 21, he enrolled in the police academy, and there he also earned the title of Top Shot, had the overall highest shooting scores and won the firearms award.

According to an article in Darkhorse Press, Branden's father remembers Branden saying he wanted to work in Bay St. Louis, even though other agencies had expressed interest in hiring him after his training was progressing so well. He had even tried out for the local SWAT team one day prior to the deadly confrontation.

Mississippi state Rep. Brent Anderson was Ian's partner on the force for many years. In fact, he was there the day Branden was born and always considered him to be

like a nephew. He calls it an “honor to watch him grow into the man he became.” Anderson shared that what he’ll remember the most about Branden is his smile, compassion and drive.

“He never met a challenge,” said Anderson. “When he believed in what he was doing, it was always 110% One of my biggest hurts will be that he had the drive for law enforcement, to be able to teach other police officers how to be the perfect police officer. Not being able to witness that in the future is devastating. But remembering what he was able to do in his short career will definitely leave a positive mark in his legacy.”

Bay St. Louis police Chief Toby Schwartz recalled the first time he met Branden.

“He walked into the police department to report for night shift,” said Schwartz. “He was of big stature, smiling and extending his hand to say, ‘Hi, Chief, pleased to meet you, sir.’ Before he could tell me his name, I immediately recognized him as the son of Ian Estorffe, who I worked with previously in my narcotics career. There was no mistaking him.

“He was personable and always smiling,” Schwartz continued. “It gives you comfort when a big fella smiles at you. This is something the public loves to see when they encounter a police officer. He was young, impressionable and loved being a cop. You knew he was a gentle big fella, but you also knew he had the pedigree as a great police officer and more. He was proactive and not scared of the unknown. He possessed the desire to figure it out with a co-worker’s guidance or on his own. It was emitted through his demeanor and eagerness to learn. Always asking questions and determined to grow with knowledge.”

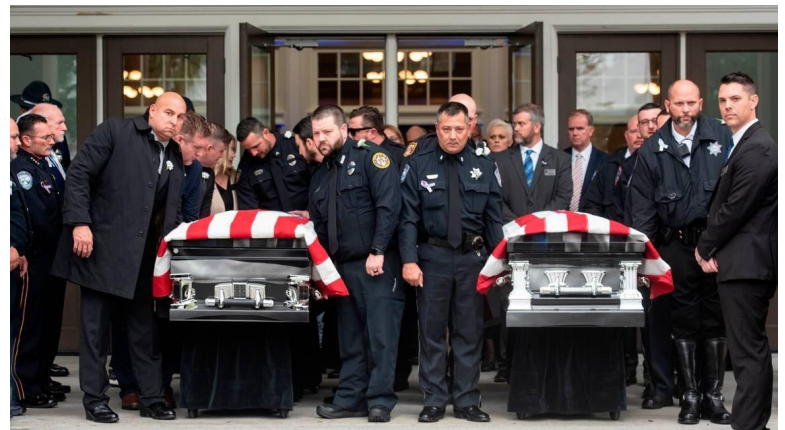
Heather Estorffe also mentioned his smile as the first thing that comes to the minds of most people when they think of Branden. Working on cars and guns and spending time with friends and family are all things that he loved to do.

She also pointed out that his sarcastic wit will never be matched.

“Every day brings a new set of challenges as we



Mississippi state Rep. Brent Anderson, who partnered with the elder Estorffe, was like an uncle to Branden.



Grieving officers with caskets of Estorffe and Robin





Father and son at shooting range

navigate our new normal as a family. We cling to the fact that he died a hero, doing what he loved. The unwavering love and support from our friends and family, as well as our blue family, the MS Gulf Coast, and the entire state of Mississippi has made this whole situation bearable. We are extremely appreciative of all of the letters and cards from all over the world."

Chief Schwartz's favorite memory of Branden illustrates just how skilled and well-trained he was.

"I remember how excited he was to be on the Advisory Council," said Schwartz. "He was elected by his peers to represent his shift. He couldn't wait until it was his turn to relay his peers' questions as well as his. He asked about the department's pursuit policy and then he did a Ralphie from 'A Christmas Story.'"

"You see, Branden was quite the marksman with firearms and his duty weapon," he continued. "He had not been approved to carry a tactical rifle as his secondary duty firearm on duty. Just like Ralphie being obsessed with

getting a Red Rider BB gun, Branden was chomping at the bit to be approved to carry his tactical rifle.

"So, with a reserved smile he asked the question," concluded Schwartz. "He could hardly contain himself getting to ask it. He asked and I responded that all he needed to do was qualify with his rifle. He smiled in gratification because he knew he could ace the qualification course and it opened the door for other officers to qualify and carry theirs also."

Anderson shared a similar train of thought regarding Branden when was asked about Estorffe's best qualities.

"Training. Branden showed the results of dedicated training," said Anderson. "True meaning of fight or flight. Branden was a young warrior in my eyes, Branden did his job."

Rep. Anderson further described Branden's most important character traits as his "love for family and fellow officers. His compassion for the people in his life was second to none."

Heather Estorffe added, "As a mother, every day is hard without Branden and his amazing smile. People know him for his heroic acts, but I want him known for his kind heart and loving nature that the world didn't get to see, because, of course, that's the part I miss the most."

Chief Schwartz said, "He's truly missed. His loss was extremely painful from all aspects, to include mine from a father's perspective. I have a son in law enforcement, so the empathy runs deep.

"Losing Branden Estorffe and Steven Robin was like losing a close family member," he concluded. "Branden and Steven were the right kind of officers that can't ever be replaced. I wish more young officers could be like Branden. He was truly special, and he will never be forgotten."

(Apel, T. (2022, December 12) Through a police father's eyes: Losing his son in the line of duty. Darkhorse Press. Mississippi's Hometown News Source. <https://darkhorsepressnow.com/through-a-police-fathers-eyes-losing-his-son-in-the-line-of-duty/>)

Hannah Woodward, LA Division scholarship recipient



The Woodward family celebrates Hannah's graduation

By CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

Honor society board member, athlete, FCA leader, salutatorian and vice president for her graduating class: Hannah Woodward did it all in her four years of high school.

Her accomplishments and hard work resulted in her being named the winner of a PBF scholarship for the Louisiana Division of the PBA. Hannah graduated from Ouachita Christian School in Monroe, La., in May 2023. The basketball team was named state runner-up, state champ, semifinalist and quarterfinalist during her time on the team.

Her track team performed well also, earning back-to-back state champ and state runner-up titles. Her senior classmates selected Hannah for the senior superlatives of best personality, friendliest and most Christ-like.

Hannah sings the praises of growing up in the small town of Monroe/West Monroe, where she's lived her entire life.

"Everyone knows everybody and there are so many

different ways to connect with people," she said. "I love the closeness and love of this community and will treasure it forever."

Hannah's greatest influences growing up were her parents. She said she could never thank them enough for raising her in a loving Christian home and showing her how to live a life dedicated to the Lord. Her father, William "Robby" Woodward, has been a master trooper assigned to patrol at Troop F in Monroe since 1999.

It is his membership in the PBA that gave Hannah the opportunity to apply for this scholarship.

"He has worked diligently as a Louisiana State Trooper for over 24 years," she said. "His work and dedication to being a police officer are incredibly inspiring to me. I watch him go with little to sometimes no sleep for weeks on end, all while balancing work, family life and events, and church.

"Every day, he works to serve the community and those in need," continued Hannah. "I see the behind the scenes of what all our law enforcement have to endure because of their jobs, and I have such a great appreciation for all of our law enforcement, first responders and their families' sacrifice to help keep our community safe and functioning. My dad's profession is an example to me of how to work hard for others and not yourself, and how to live a life of service to others."

Hannah's mom, Sandy Woodward, works in the front office at Ouachita Christian School as a receptionist. Hannah has an older brother, Benjamin, and two younger sisters, Katee and Gracie.

Hannah is planning to major in communication sciences and disorders with the intention to become a speech pathologist. She chose this major because of the numerous and varied job opportunities it provides.

Initially, she is hoping to work in the hospital or medical arena, then possibly in the school setting down the line when she may need to balance her work and family life.

She's chosen to attend Harding University for her degree. Having spent time there when she was younger at various basketball and church camps, as well as cheering on the Bison football team, she said it feels like a "second home."

But her primary reason for choosing Harding University is because of the "Godly influence and community that it offers."

"Harding is a place that has always brought me closer to God and opened many doors for God-centered relationships with so many people," she said.

It's no wonder that Hannah said her favorite leader is Jesus Christ.

"He leads me each and every day," she said. "He is the reason I am here today and have the hope that I have. The hope that this world is not my home. Jesus saves me even though I do not deserve it, and I base how I live each and every day off of how He led His life while He was on earth. I look forward to meeting Him face to face in Heaven one day."

Hannah said she is "overwhelmed with immense gratitude" on getting the PBF scholarship.

"Paying for college is something I have prayed about and worked toward for years, and I am so thankful to God and the PBF for granting me this great blessing," she said. "I feel so blessed and honored to have been awarded this scholarship, and I just cannot say thank you enough to God or the PBF."



Hannah and her parents

Next issue of FRONT LINE
will focus on these divisions



If you have story ideas from these
divisions, please email

jblackburn@sspba.org · rbyrd@sspba.org

To read past issues
of the FRONT LINE,
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Hannah's championship rings

Brunswick County deputy saves driver from fiery N.C. crash



Deputy Locklair receiving the Deputy of the Year award from former Sheriff John Ingram

BY CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

Pulling a woman from a burning car is not usually part of a day's work for those who wear a badge and a gun.

However, Brunswick County, N.C., sheriff's Deputy Adam Locklair was recently recognized for doing just that.

On April 18, 2023, Locklair was called to a wreck that had occurred on North Carolina Highway 17. Upon arrival, he spotted a 25-year-old driver pinned inside a vehicle that had crashed and was on the verge of being aflame.

Finding he was unable to open the door from the outside, he smashed the window and reached in to open it from the inside. He then cut the seat belt away from the driver and pulled her to safety. Locklair's training had instinctively kicked in and he saved the woman's life.

Locklair's explanation of why he chose to become a law enforcement officer aligns perfectly with this rescue incident.

"I chose to get into law enforcement as a continuation of my previous skills gained in the military," he said. "I enjoy the complexity of law enforcement and how every day can be very different. I enjoy the action and being outside and not in an office cubicle or performing mundane tasks like in other jobs."

Saving the life of another person doesn't fall in the category of mundane. Serving in the Marine Corps from 2012-2019, Locklair had a primary MOS of 0311 (Infantry Rifleman). He also attained a secondary MOS as a Marine Corps martial arts instructor.

He served with 2nd battalion 6th Marine regiment, and with 2nd battalion 2nd Marine regiment. Both units were stationed at Camp Lejeune, N.C. He ultimately



Deputy Locklair (l) with fellow deputy

completed three deployments and left the USMC with an honorable discharge, attaining the rank of sergeant.

All the training and experience from his time in the military made the transition into law enforcement an easy and logical decision. Locklair completed his rookie school at Coastal Carolina Community College in Jacksonville, N.C., and started his career at the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office, where he is in his fifth year.

As a uniformed deputy, he racked up several awards for his work in the short time he's served BCSO. They include a Commendation Medal, Deputy Sheriff Isaac Skipper Award, 2022 Sheriff John Carr Davis Deputy Sheriff of the Year Award and the Military Service Award.

Locklair points to his shift supervisor, First Sergeant Bryan Stephenson, when asked about the greatest influence in his law enforcement career.

"Bryan sets a good example for other law enforcement officers to emulate and encourages his people to

remain mentally and physically fit," said Locklair. "He encourages proactivity and backs his people up when they are in the right. He also is a good person to talk to about work issues and cares about how his people are doing.

"Another thing to mention is how valuable it is to have good co-workers who are also proactive in their job," he continued. "This facilitates a healthy competition that I enjoy feeding off of and it is also good for camaraderie."

His membership in the PBA is what Locklair calls a "no-brainer when you consider the yearly cost versus the legal protection you receive if you need it. Especially in these modern times of policing."

When he's not busy pulling people from burning cars or patrolling the roadways of Brunswick County, Locklair enjoys spending time with his 6-year-old daughter. Riding and working on motorcycles are also favorite ways to spend his free time.

According to a Facebook post by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office, "Deputy Locklair would say he was only doing what he is sworn to do, and any other officer would have the done the same thing. Law enforcement goes beyond enforcing the law. It's about service above self."

(WECT staff writers, (2023, April 20). Brunswick Co. Sheriff's Office deputy commemorated for saving woman from burning car. WECT News <https://www.wect.com>)



Deputy Locklair with his daughter

Wilson County, Tenn., deputy's K9 a trailblazer in training



Deputy Burton with K9 partner, Blaze

By CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

Blaze, K9 partner of Wilson County sheriff's Deputy Dusty Burton in Tennessee, is still somewhat new to his role but has already proven to be a worthy partner.

Thanks to his training, Blaze is only the second K9 in the state to be trained to check for the presence of firearms, ammunition and explosives. This recently proved helpful when he was needed to locate items associated with firecrackers that were set off in a school where he assists his partner as a school resource officer.

Blaze is a German shorthaired pointer and is a kinetic detection K9 with enhanced firearm detection capabilities. He was trained by Global K9 Protection group in Opelika, Ala. Burton and Blaze spent four weeks there for the instruction he needed.

His expertise is used daily in the Lebanon Special School District. He has already been instrumental with investigations. He's also been trained with a softer skillset, such as interacting appropriately with the students and making special appearances around the LSSD.

Burton grew up in Watertown, Tenn., and was active in

FFA, football, National Honor Society and Beta Club at Watertown High School, where he graduated in 2003. He attended Middle Tennessee State University as an animal science major until his junior year when he was hired by the sheriff's office.

Considering his life-long interest in law enforcement, he realized that this career was a great fit, and he's been with the Wilson County Sheriff's Office ever since.

The fact that no two days are the same in law enforcement is a big factor in why he enjoys it so much. Having the opportunity to help people each day is also a facet he really appreciates.

Burton has been in the field for 15 and a half years. He has served as a school resource officer, a sniper with the special response team and with the marine division. He said that his PBA membership is important to him because it provides "that extra layer of protection for me and my family."



Deputy Burton with K9 partner, Blaze, and a coworker



Deputy Burton is engaged to Sarah, a high school psychology teacher

Burton is engaged to Sarah, a high school psychology teacher, who also lives and works in Wilson County. When not pairing up with Blaze to investigate and patrol the schools, he enjoys long range shooting, reloading, hunting, fishing and taking care of his farms.

His dad gets the credit for being the greatest influence on Burton's career. He said at first his dad "wasn't crazy about the idea of me being in law enforcement.... but soon became very interested in it. He taught me to have a strong work ethic and to always do the right thing, no matter what."

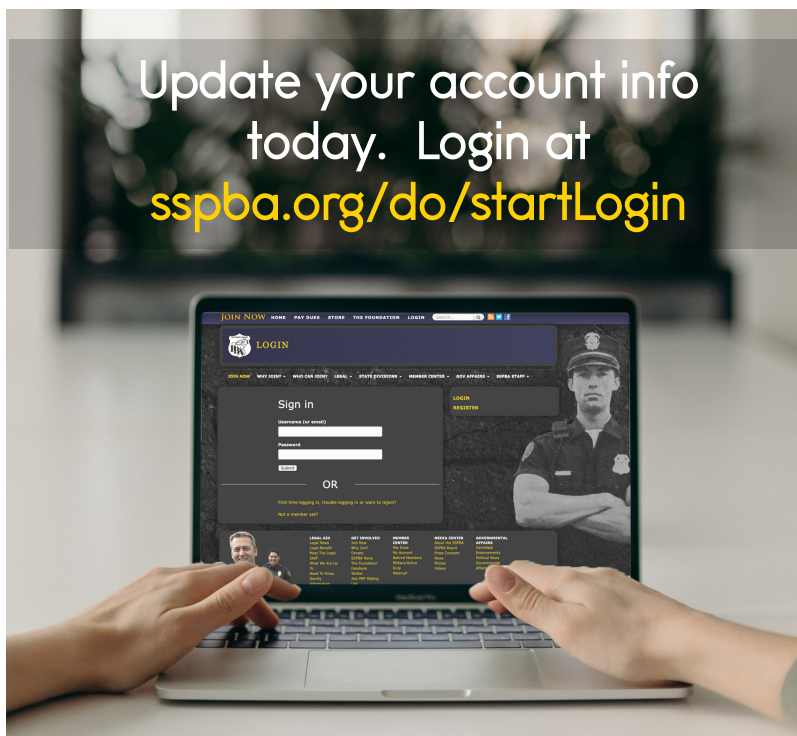
Burton's favorite quote goes right along with his role in law enforcement. It is from Edmund Burke: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to

do nothing."

The partnership between Burton and Blaze is sure to be a beneficial one for the students of LSSD. According to the school system's website:

"Dusty and Blaze are the very first of the School Resource Officer K-9 Program in Middle Tennessee and only the second in the state. The program, also known as 'Paws on Patrol,' will be utilized for prevention, mitigation, and education while empowering students and stakeholders to feel safer on campus. K-9 Blaze brings many benefits to the district, for both adults and children, such as enhanced firearm detection capabilities, overall stress reduction, increased morale, child-friendly interactions, and relationship opportunities. The program is a multi-year commitment from both the Wilson County Sheriff's Department and Lebanon Special School District to provide an enhanced law enforcement service to all the students and staff within the district."

(Lebanon Special School District. (2023, August 15). Lebanon Special School District introduces "Paws on Patrol." Retrieved from <https://www.lssd.org/apps/news/article/1795952>)



Attorney spotlight: Russell Wood of Arkansas

By JONI FLETCHER CAWTHON
DIRECTOR OF LEGAL SERVICES

When a PBA member in Arkansas is involved in a critical incident, attorney Russell “Rusty” Wood expects a call.

“I’ve traveled to the four corners of the state multiple times to handle PBA emergencies,” Wood said. “I see this as a team effort to make sure PBA members are taken care of.”

From his centrally-located office in Russellville, Wood truly is able to assist members throughout the state. In addition, he is licensed in Tennessee and seeks to assist PBA members in western Tennessee as much as possible.

“Years ago, I decided that I wanted to make sure that PBA knew that I want to be called upon.”

PBA has certainly taken Wood up on his offer. Since he began taking PBA cases in 2006, Wood has taken on more than 675 cases.

“I believe I’ve taken every type of law enforcement case: members using force, members getting shot, pursuit deaths, criminal defense, deaths in custody. There have been lots of employment issues and over 200 federal and state lawsuits where PBA members were named defendants. I’ve also handled unemployment cases, decertification issues and retirement system issues for members.”

Wood says that he doesn’t handle very much general practice work at this point in his career and he is therefore able to really focus on the legal issues that affect PBA members the most.

“I believe this benefits the members and it benefits PBA with efficiency and with the confidence they have in me. I see this as a mutually beneficial partnership.”

“My experience with Rusty has been excellent,” said Tommy Simpson, SSPBA director of organizational services—west region. “We never have a problem getting him to answer the phone, and he’s always willing to go anywhere in the state to help a member,” Simpson



Arkansas attorney Rusty Wood stays busy with PBA cases added. “He truly goes above and beyond the call.”

Wood developed an affinity for law enforcement early in life as his father was an Arkansas state trooper. Wood says that law enforcement is in his wheelhouse as he learned to relate to and communicate with officers as a youth.

The younger Wood considered a career in law enforcement himself and actually received a job offer from Russellville P.D. on the same day that he received his acceptance letter to law school. Rusty felt conflicted about the decision and discussed it with his dad, who advised him that he needed to proceed to law school.

After Wood completed law school at the University

of Arkansas at Little Rock, his first job was with a law firm that provided civil defense for roughly half of the counties in Arkansas, meaning that his first job in the legal field involved defending police officers.

After a few years at that firm, Wood moved on to the Sixth Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney's office in Little Rock. He spent a few years there as a deputy prosecuting attorney and was then recruited by an insurance defense firm in Memphis, Tenn.

After working in Memphis for several years, Wood decided that he wanted to return to his hometown of Russellville. In 2006 he returned home and opened Wood Law Firm.

Wood took on his first PBA case around the time he

opened his firm when his college roommate – a PBA member – got sued.

"I knew immediately that it was the type of case I wanted to be involved in," Wood said.

Law enforcement is not simply a practice specialty for Rusty Wood – it's something he's been directly involved in himself. While working as a prosecuting attorney in Little Rock, Wood worked part-time as a deputy sheriff. He later worked as a part-time deputy with Faulkner County and then with Polk County while continuing to practice law.

Among the noteworthy cases that Wood has handled for PBA are a class action settlement against the City of Conway that resulted in back pay for police officers



SCHOLARSHIPS

Help us congratulate the 24 recipients of 2023 PBF scholarships. We're proud to showcase their efforts.

The window to submit applications for 2024 funds opens Dec. 1.

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as well as a wrongful termination lawsuit against Hot Springs P.D. that settled out of court.

"Employment cases for law enforcement officers are hard," Wood said. "The law is not in our favor."

On the criminal side, Wood has represented members against federal charges and is representing a deputy on federal charges in a case that is headed to trial later this year.

Wood said he values being part of the PBA team.

"I routinely tell members that PBA is the best organization for officers to belong to," he said. "I say that because I see how PBA handles cases for its members. They send me a case and tell me to do what I need to do to represent the member. I don't feel restricted when I'm representing a PBA member like I have felt when working for other organizations. I also don't believe that any organization has a benefits package that is as good as what PBA offers."

Earlier this year, Wood attended the PBA attorney

seminar held in East Point, Ga.

"I thought it was great," he said. "It was informative, and I enjoyed hearing other attorneys' perspectives on how they handle law enforcement cases."

When he's not working on PBA cases, Wood stays busy working on his farm as well as his gun and sporting goods store. He is the owner of Wood Cattle Co., LLC, which raises Dexter cattle for farm to table, all-natural beef.

He is also the co-owner of American Outdoor Sports, Inc., which outfits and equips agencies around the state with firearms, body armor and other equipment. The store is a Glock law enforcement blue label dealer, is the only FN law enforcement dealer in the state and is also a Smith & Wesson law enforcement dealer.

Among Wood's many accomplishments are his service as an air traffic controller with the U.S. Navy. PBA is proud to partner with such a dedicated and professional advocate for law enforcement officers as Russell Wood.

Join us on **Tuesday, December 12th**, as the PBF, SSPBA, and NCPBA conduct an informational seminar about PTSD and law enforcement suicide. Hosted at **Forsyth Technical Community College** in **Winston-Salem, NC** from **8 a.m. to 4 p.m.**



Facts for LEOs:

More officers die each year by their own hands than are killed in the line of duty.

Law enforcement suicide is seldom addressed or acknowledged by law enforcement agencies.

Each day an officer makes the choice to take his/her own life.

The effects of law enforcement suicides are long lasting to both the officer's family and the department.

Of the nation's approximately 18,000 law enforcement agencies, approximately 2% have policies or programs that address law enforcement PTSD or suicide prevention.

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This seminar is absolutely **FREE**, and it is extremely valuable in its potential for saving families, careers, and most importantly - saving lives. We encourage everyone with an interest in securing and/or improving the profession of law enforcement to attend.