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THE FRONT LINE

A Southern States PBA Newsletter

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Former PBAGA chapter president still active after retirement

BY KATHARINE JEFCOATS
EDITOR

Retired Atlanta police Sgt. Rich Houston has seemingly lived a dozen lives in his 59 years on earth.

Born smack dab in the middle of nine siblings in Oxford, Miss., in 1964, Houston is small-town, southern and Christian at heart.

"While growing up there I played mostly all sports in school," he said. "In the summertime, I played baseball and softball. I attended Oxford High School. Both my parents' families grew up there, and most are still there."

Oxford is in the north central part of the Magnolia State, home to University of Mississippi and literary great William Faulkner.

Houston credits his parents for his strong foundation.

"I grew up in a Christian home," he said. "I was taught to push yourself. Believe in yourself. Do things for you and everything else will work out. Respect yourself and you will respect others. You can do anything you want. All you need to do



Houston hits the links often

is just do it."

He took that guidance to heart and wildly succeeded at life.

"I joined the Marines while still in high school," said Houston. "I went in on the delay entry program. I left for boot camp June 25, 1983, stationed in Camp Le-



Retired police officer Houston also served as a Marine

june, N.C., for my infantry training.”

He said he joined to see the world. He was not disappointed.

“I wanted to meet people from all over,” said Houston. “Growing up in Mississippi, you only understand your world as you see it. The Marines gave me a chance to see the world in a different light.”

Houston served in Charleston, S.C.; Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and Marine Security Guard. He was stationed at three different embassies -- Nairobi, Kenya; Dominican Republic and San Salvador, El Salvador. He served with three different infantry units.

He was assigned with the 13th MEU that landed in Somalia, a poverty-stricken, underdeveloped African country. Houston said he was able to connect with his parents – and the media – via military cell phones.

“I was interviewed by Ted Koppel, ABC news, while in Somalia,” he said. “I talked on a cell phone before there were cell phones as we know today.

While in Somalia, I used a General SAT COM phone to call home. My mother could not believe I was talking to her from Somali in Africa. It was shocking because my parents’ house didn’t even have cable at the time.”

Houston also did two UDP to Japan. He served in all three Marine Infantry Divisions and the 4th Marine Reserve Division.

All of that service resulted in a multitude of accolades and achievements, including Navy Marine Corps Achievement Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal, Navy Achievement Medal; Joint Meritorious Unit Commendation, Combat Action Ribbon (3) Meritorious Unit Citation, Sea Service deployment, Overseas Ribbon and Marine Security Guard Ribbon.

He was also a master instructor with thousands of hours of classroom instructions.

He qualified as small arms weapons expert, green belt instructor, infantry platoon sergeant course. He also completed all the leadership courses, including advance staff non-commission officer course; attended warfighting skills program, light armor vehicle course, and airborne school.

Houston’s last duty station was in Harrisburg, Penn. It was there he finished his bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and administration. He officially retired from the Marines June 30, 2003.

He was just 38. What did he do next to leave his mark on the world? Joined the Atlanta Police Department where he also excelled.

“I took the test and applied with New York, Atlanta and Charlotte police departments,” said Houston. “I received a letter of acceptance from all three. I chose Atlanta. I joined the Atlanta Police Department in February 2003. I was able to leave (the Marine Corps) early with vacation, sick and leave time earned.”

While with the Atlanta Police Department he held the position of patrolman, investigator and sergeant. He also was motorcycle and bike-certified.

“I achieved the highest level for advanced leadership and management level courses at POST,” Houston said. “I retired from the Atlanta Police Department in October 2019.”

Houston sought his second career to find solutions to problems.

"I want to solve things, to help and figure out things," he said. "I thought it was a noble profession. You gave and received respect. I always told officers one thing -- policing is personality and personality is policing. Who you are is how you will police. The best part of law enforcement for me was when you served the public day in and out. It was doing the little things like helping a motorist who was out of gas, giving directions to someone who was lost and just helping out."

He also joined PBA and was elected president of his chapter. Houston remains involved in the organization that provides members with legal protection, legislative representation and benefits in eligible instances of injury or death in the line of duty.

"I am still active in the PBA," he said. "I was at one time the president of the Atlanta Chapter. I joined PBA and became a member of the board because police officers don't understand their rights. So, I want to help."

Next up? Traveling, golfing and welcoming a roommate, his grandson, AJ, who is a Cub Scout.

"I was told a long time ago that anything you stop doing has to be replaced by something else," said Houston. "So, when I retired from the Marines, I joined the police department. When I retired from the department, I purchased an RV and traveled. I play golf about four times a week. I have my grandson living with me. So, I help raise him."

Houston is an avid golfer with his eyes on attending the Masters Tournament in Augusta, Ga.,

"My golf game has come a long way," he said. "When I started out, I had a high, 17, handicap. I got it down to a 10. One of my goals was to go to all the majors in the U.S."

"Then Covid hit, so had to put that on hold," continued Houston. "But I did get it started with the PGA in New York. I am in a golf league. We play at least 10 tournaments a year. I've never been to the Masters but enter the lottery every year."

He thinks people would be surprised at how much



Houston and his grandson, A.J.

support PBA garners from legislators.

"I think the successes we have had in getting political support come from understanding the political climate," said Houston. "You have to have politicians support you because you are supportable. If you come from a place of fairness, you can get anyone's support. I tell a politician that law enforcement don't want anything special -- just fairness across the board."

Houston is well-educated, well-traveled and well-versed in his passions but remains simply a God-fearing child of small-town Mississippi who created and fulfilled his dreams..

"I believe in God, country and the Corps," he said. "God encompasses all -- family, friends, neighbors and self. I learned and gained respect for this country while in the Marines. When you travel to many different countries you understand and appreciate this country more. What we have cannot and will not be repeated anywhere in this world. Last, but not least, is the Corps. Once a Marine, always a Marine. The brotherhood is unbreakable."

SC student says he's grateful for tuition boost

By KATHARINE JEFCOATS
EDITOR

Not many will argue that college is expensive. With school loans becoming a political football with drama on both sides, South Carolina student Jordan Lester said he is grateful for scholarship assistance.

The marketing major is studying at Anderson University in South Carolina.

"There are many people going to college these days and are paying for it years down the line," he said. "I am grateful for the Police Benevolent Foundation investing in the new generation of students."

Lester is eligible for the scholarship through his dad, Spartanburg sheriff's Deputy First Class Clarence Martin Lester Jr. Jordan Lester said his dad joined the force when he was in seventh grade. The deputy is a member of PBA's Piedmont Chapter.

"From that time, I have gotten the privilege to witness the humble service he has continued to do til now," he said. "Watching my father go out and serve the community has instilled a humble mindset of service and how important it is to care for people."

Clarence Lester has also served as a pastor for almost 30 years. He sees his career in law enforcement as a similar calling.

"I see law enforcement as a calling," he said. "When people are in trouble, they usually call the police or the pastor. I have been a licensed and ordained minister for 28 years. I enjoyed being involved in church ministry, but I see law enforcement as an opportunity to serve my community on a much greater scale."

His specific duty gives him an even broader presence in the community – he's an SRO, a role he seems to have been divinely guided into. "I enjoy being a school resource officer," said



Jordan Lester is a student at Anderson University in S.C.





Lester on the soccer field at Anderson University

Lester. "My background is youth development, outreach and special victims unit investigator. That experience has equipped me with tools and resources to be able to serve my students, teachers and their families. I'm assigned to an elementary school so it's all fist bumps, high fives and autograph Fridays."

Even as a child, Jordan Lester was able to recognize the impact his father had on the community.

"It takes a man that really cares about people to suit up and give everything to the people," he said. "Although my dad has given me much wisdom and advice, he did not have to -- his actions have given me everything I need to know to navigate life. I am extremely honored to be a son of a police officer. It is because of my father that I am the man I am today."

For Deputy Lester, he said he is proud to represent a voice for the most vulnerable in society.

"When I was an investigator assigned to the special

victims unit, I investigated crimes against children and vulnerable adults," said Lester.

"My most memorable were two cases where I charged two suspects with assault on a child," he continued. "One ended up in prison and the other did jail time. Law enforcement is the voice of the voiceless. Oftentimes, children don't have much of a voice when it comes to crimes perpetrated on them by adults."

Deputy Lester and his wife, Monica, are proud of their son's academic successes and soccer but even more so of the character he is developing.

"He is successful on and off the field – team

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

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captain as high school sophomore, Honors Society with 4.4 GPA, All-Region, All-Region Player of the Year, All-State, All-Area Player to Watch and Clash of the Carolinas,” said Lester.

His son also scored 17 goals in his junior year. “Random people would approach me and

tell me how respectful and how much of a great leader Jordan is,” Lester said. “I would tell them that I tell Jordan that his character is more important than any goals he kicks. Your character will be with you for a lifetime.”



SSPBA's Randy Byrd (r) presents scholarship to Jordan Lester and his parents



Jordan Lester with his family



Jordan Lester with his proud dad, Clarence

Hope for LEOs in Hopewell, Va., and beyond



Goszka and Redavid address Hopewell, Va., City Council

BY RICH GOSZKA
STAFF REPRESENTATIVE

Hopewell, Va., is a blue-collar industrial town south of the state's capital along the James River. In recent years, after poor leadership, the police department is struggling to recruit and retain officers.

In April 2023, the Hopewell Chapter of the Virginia PBA began the process of seeking collective bargaining for its officers and members, led by chapter President Michael Redavid and his active board.

The chapter worked hard to lay the foundation for collective bargaining to include the screening and endorsing of city council candidates prior to the submission of the draft ordinance.

The law firm of Simms-Showers, on behalf of the

chapter, presented the ordinance to the city council as required at several meetings.

The council pushed back the vote to November in order to receive input from legal counsel. Information was received that the city council may vote down the ordinance.

The chapter launched a media campaign and lobbied city council members. Local church leaders were also contacted for support.

At the Nov. 14 council meeting, rather than kill the ordinance, the council passed a resolution in support of collective bargaining and to move forward with it after a financial review by a consultant was completed.

Although not the outcome the chapter wanted, their efforts with the support of the community are paving the road for the future of collective bargaining in Hopewell.

In 2020, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation establishing that localities could allow for collective bargaining. The framework and bargaining units were left up to each locality in the form of an ordinance or resolution.

This was the first time public employees could collectively bargain in Virginia since 1977. The Alexandria PBA chapter was the first to use PBA as the bargaining agent and successfully negotiate a contract with the city.

The Fairfax Chapter's contract will go into effect in July 2024. Numerous other PBA members and chapters are in the process of establishing collective bargaining in their jurisdictions.

The movement is in response to today's modern police officer's desire to have a voice in their work environment and culture.

In 2023, the Virginia Division board voted to add collective bargaining for state level law enforcement to their legislative agenda for the 2024 session of the General Assembly.

KYPBA member earns Impaired Driving Enforcement Award

By CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

Cara Woods, an officer with the Maysville Police Department in Kentucky, was recently honored with the Governor's Impaired Driving Enforcement Award in Lexington.

According to the Office of Public Affairs for the Commonwealth of Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, this award recognizes the officers' "extraordinary efforts to protect motorists from impaired drivers, in keeping with Gov. Andy Beshear's high priority on highway safety."

Woods said she feels honored to receive this award even though she comes from a smaller department.

"DUIs in Maysville are not hard to come by and, for me, have an inclination to just fall into my lap," she said. "I am always more than happy to work them whenever they come my way or are found. I find impaired driving enforcement to be important for everyone's safety."

"I've stopped many cars and worked many collisions with injuries in my law enforcement career," she continued. "To be able to prevent catastrophe, like injuries, and even deaths, from DUI-related accidents could be considered reward enough."

Woods received her award for having the most impaired-driving arrests in her agency. While at the recognition event in Lexington, she was presented with a plaque to mark her achievement.

Working in Maysville is special to Woods as it is her hometown. She was born and raised there and graduated from Mason County High School in 2015.

After moving around a bit following graduation, she realized that there was "no place like home" and returned to Maysville to join the police force. Maysville is a place where everyone seems to know each other but is larger than some of the surrounding towns.



Cara Woods, Maysville Police Department

After two years at the University of Louisville, Woods transferred to Armstrong State University in Savannah, Ga., for a year, then decided to apply for the police academy (Peace Officer Academy) through Savannah Technical College. She is working on completing her degree through Northern Kentucky University.

Upon her return to Kentucky, she said she was "lucky enough" that Kentucky accepted her certification, and she did not have to go through the academy again.

However, she was required to take several steps for the transfer to be valid, including several basic officer courses.

While in the police academy in Georgia, she heard about the benefits of becoming a PBA member and was sold on the idea. In the time she's been back home, she has recommended PBA membership to many of her coworkers in law enforcement.

Woods worked for two different agencies in Georgia -- Port Wentworth Police Department and Emanuel County Sheriff's Office -- before moving back to her hometown. She's been in law enforce-

ment for almost five years.

The community aspect is her favorite part of working as a police officer.

"It begins with the family-like community you build with coworkers," she said. "I have worked for a few departments and still talk to coworkers that I have not been able to see in years, just to keep in check. It then builds into the community you are working with.

"I grew up in Maysville, so I have been reconnecting with people I have known and making new acquaintances just by being at work," continued Woods.

In her patrol car, Woods keeps an important little

note to remind herself of her favorite quote, "No rain, no flowers."

"It reminds me that I have to work through the bad days to get to the good ones," said Woods. "It reminds me during a bad call or shift that I'll work through it."

And on those occasions when she does have a bad shift, her dad always lends an ear if she needs him. She said he is the greatest influence in her career.

"My dad has always been my biggest supporter," said Woods. "Although he is a farmer and does not have any law enforcement experience, he is a volunteer firefighter and has seen some of the things that law enforcement does. He is always



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just a phone call away if I need someone to talk to about work or need advice on anything.”

In her younger days, Woods was a runner.

“I participated in track and cross-country for nine years and was pretty decent at it,” she said. “The team made it to State almost every year in cross-country. The track team made it to State quite often and I made it in individual races a few times for various events including the 400 meter.”

Nowadays, when she needs to wind down in her spare time, Woods enjoys weightlifting.

Being of “smaller stature,” she said, “I have recently found enjoyment in attempting to make myself a little bit bigger. I also enjoy spending time with

my family, like helping my dad on the farm and spending time with my niece.”

Woods’ dedication to her career in law enforcement and her hometown is clear, but she acknowledges that this field is demanding.

She has this advice to share for those contemplating working as a police officer, “Know somewhere deep in you that this is what you want to do and commit to it.

“Law enforcement is a tough career in more than just a physical way. Remember to keep your mental health in check and take your days off to spend them with your family or just yourself.”



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Birmingham SRO making a difference in young lives

BY DON FLETCHER
ALABAMA TROOPER JOURNAL EDITOR

Birmingham police Officer Francesca Clark, also known as Fran, Franny or Francine, earned a prestigious local award earlier this year. She was honored not for saving one life or stopping one crime, but for potentially saving numerous lives by steering young people away from crime.

Clark, a school resource officer at Jackson-Olin High – the school from which she graduated – was selected in March as winner of the Shero Award, which is granted to the community's police Officer of the Year. The award is presented annually to a woman who does "outstanding work with the community, beyond and behind the badge."

In July, she was honored by the Optimist Club of Birmingham with its Respect for Law Award. She was nominated for both awards by BPD Capt. Janice Blackwell.

Clark, the only girl among four siblings, is the daughter of a retired nurse and a military veteran stepfather/father who was later a truck driver. Clark said her family was constantly on the move, living mostly in California and Texas.

She explained that when she was a student at Jackson-Olin High, she felt out of place until an SRO there helped her become comfortable in her new surroundings.

That encounter helped solidify her decision as to what career path she would follow.

Clark played basketball and softball, and hurled the shotput for the school. She also played tennis during her other sports' various off-seasons and earned a full scholarship – first to Snead State Community College, then to Blue Mountain College, from which she graduated with an associate degree in criminal justice.

"Even though I come from a military family, I didn't join the military," she said. "I had intended on being a criminal justice lawyer or a police officer. As I got deeper into law, I decided that being inside was not for me. I wanted to be more hands-on and help people."



SRO Clark

That led her to police work. BPD had its own academy, and Clark went directly into the field after graduation. She worked for six months under a field training officer on Birmingham's rough west side, where her family lived when they moved from Texas, then patrolled a beat in that area for four years.

"I loved being on the streets, but I felt like the outcome was the same, arresting the same people and doing the same thing with no positive outcome," she said.

Fran eventually became SRO for her alma mater, as well as an assistant flag football coach, and is trying to help establish the school's first tennis team, for which she will serve as an assistant coach. She has been there for eight years.

She said the assignment is a perfect fit, one that allows her to pay forward the life lessons she learned and the attention she got from the school's SRO.

"While I was in high school, I had a problem adjusting to the atmosphere," she said. "I came from a mixed-race school, so when I came to a school where the kids were more like me, I didn't fit in. The SRO always checked in on me and made sure I was good.

"Eventually I found my way and I always wanted to be able to do the same (for students)," Clark continued. "So, when my time came to apply for SRO, I applied and, a year later, became one, for the same high school I graduated from."

Another law enforcement officer had made a positive impact on her life even earlier than high school.

"When I was younger and living in California, my mother, my brothers and I were forced to move out of our home because of my dad's problem with drugs," she said. "There was a police officer who went above and beyond to help us get to the airport, made sure we ate and made sure we were safe, even when he was off duty. That encouraged me even more to want to pursue being an officer when I got older."

And, while Fran has been the recipient of the previously mentioned awards, she has given out more awards than she has received, one of the reasons for which she has been honored.

She helped create an annual award, funded out of her own pocket, which provides financial assistance to a deserving college-bound JOH student and reflects the help she received from the SRO when she was in school.

"The SRO Award is an award where I give out of my own money to a high school student who is going to college, staying on school grounds and has financial difficulties," she said. "It's a tote with \$500 worth of (toiletry) necessities, a \$200 gift card, a dorm-size refrigerator, dorm-size microwave, a tablet if needed, and bedding items, in order to help them to better adjust to being away from home.

"Many of these kids I've watched grow up, and (they) don't have people to check on them, tell them they love them, cheer them on at sports events or even graduation," continued Clark. "I'm their person. They call me if

they need to sometimes just to talk or (for) encouragement. I check on them after graduation and let them know I'm proud of them because in the community they are in – the same one I grew up in – seeing death is a norm."

Francesca – who is known to students as "Mama Clark," "Tee-Tee," or "O.C." – has no children of her own but considers the kids at Jackson-Olin as "my kids."

She and her wife – retired military Sgt. A'lonna Clark – have also created a non-profit dedicated to raising awareness of several issues.

"Together we have started a non-profit known as noxqcz," she said. "It was created to raise awareness of suicide, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and other mental health issues. We both are PTSD survivors and have both suffered from suicide in our families. We created this non-profit to not only raise awareness but to help (those with problems) not give in and to let them know they are not alone."

The couple sells clothes and custom orders and earmarks a portion of the proceeds to aid in their mission. The website is www.noxqcz.org.

Clark's hobbies are riding and working on her motorcycles. She is part of a motor sport club, the #1 Stunnas, where she is known as Shyne.

She also deadlifts, plays tennis and Xbox, writes poetry, dabbles in acrylic painting and spends time with her family. She loves art, any kind of music and tattoos, of which she has several.

She has worked 13 years in law enforcement and plans to continue "as many (years) as God allows me to." She said she is "a proud PBA member" and has been since she first joined BPD.

"I became a PBA member when I joined the force," she said. "The opportunity of being protected beyond the badge is what grasped me, and whenever I had questions about legal or anything, I could call, and someone was always there to answer my questions. If they couldn't, they would always guide me in the right direction."

The greatest influences on Fran's life are her grandfather, the late Robert Clark, and her mother, Janice Clark.

"My greatest influence was my grandfather, who was in the U.S. Air Force and passed away from cancer," she said. "He always encouraged me to be myself no matter what, to never give up without a fight, that you can't do what you're meant to do if you stop trying, and to smile."

"My favorite leader is no one famous, but my mother," Clark continued. "She never ever gave up on herself, even after her back was against the wall. Mentally, emotionally and physically, she always managed to keep her faith and her love for us no matter what we did. She pushed us, supported us and made sure we knew she loved us, no matter what she may have been struggling with."

The veteran police officer's favorite quote is "Great minds think alike but even greater minds think for themselves."



SRO Clark with Paw Patrol's Chase

Join us on **Wednesday, January 31st**, as the PBF, SSPBA, and WVPBA conduct an informational seminar about PTSD and law enforcement suicide. Hosted at **Marriott Town Center in Charleston, WV** 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.

Meet WV Natural Resources Chapter President Haines

By RANDY BYRD
DIRECTOR OF FOUNDATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS

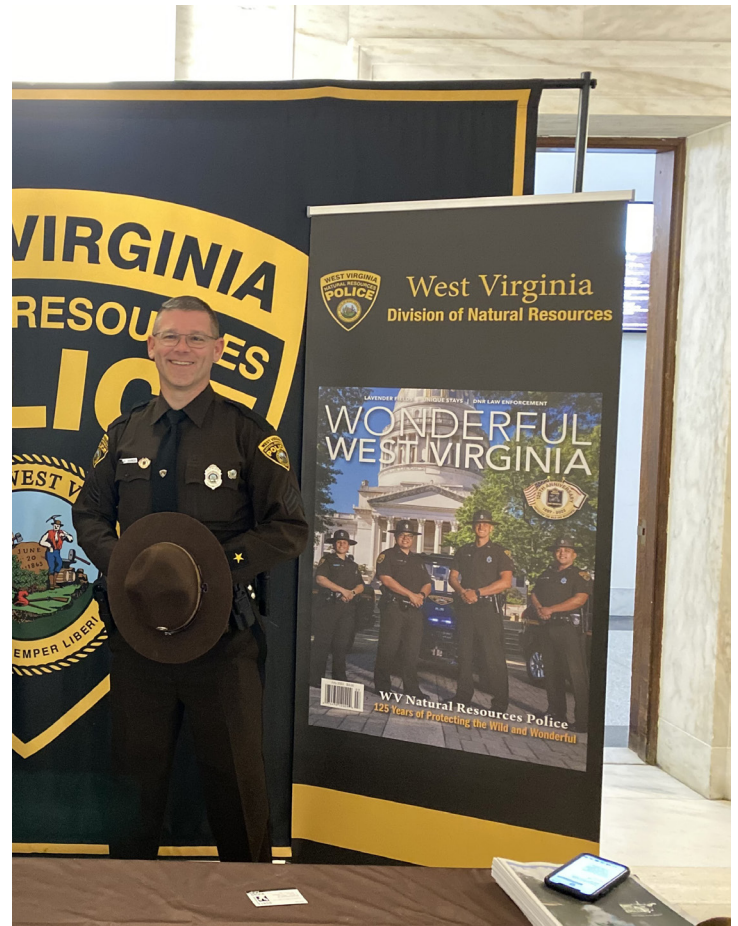
A career in law enforcement might not seem probable for someone who lost his vision in his left eye due to a neighborhood accident when he was in the first grade.

For Steve Haines, the president of the WVA Natural Resources Chapter, it wasn't a deterrent from realizing his eventual dream of becoming a protector of the outdoors – a dream that was cemented when, at 12, he witnessed a conservation officer apprehend several men as they grossly exceeded the creel limit on trout.

He was fascinated that an officer could catch people committing crimes in the outdoors and knew that was what he wanted to do.

The foundation for Haines to overcome adversity and reach his life goals started in Weirton, a small steel mill town in northern West Virginia.

"My father and nearly every man with our family worked in the steel mill," Haines said. "My hometown was very blue-collar oriented, and generations showed pride and dedication to their jobs."



Haines recruiting for WV Natural Resources



Haines and Mary taking some turkeys home



Haines at West Virginia Legislature

His father retired after 38 years in the mill. His mother worked at a local gas company and later for the City of Weirton. While growing up in Weirton, Haines became an avid hunter and fisherman.

"I followed my father closely and embraced his sincere appreciation and respect for all wildlife and the outdoors," he said.

Haines graduated from Weirton Madonna High School in 1994 with a class of 31 students. To this day he remains in contact with many of his classmates.

After high school, Haines became the first man in his family to earn a college education and not enter the steel mill. He graduated from West Liberty University with a criminal justice degree in 1998.

In that same year, he attended conservation officers recruit school in Indiana. The class started with 52 recruits and Haines was one of the 24 who eventually graduated.

Haines gives a lot of credit to his mother for seeing him through.

"My mother was incredibly supportive, and I knew I couldn't disappoint her," he said. "My mother's encouragement and inspiration kept me going through the most difficult times."

Several months later, he completed the Indiana law enforcement basic academy.

Haines worked in Indiana from 1998 to 2007, serving Huntington County in northern Indiana and then Greene County in southern Indiana.



Haines and daughter Mary sharing some time on the mat



Haines, Rosemarie and Mary and the one that didn't get away

He returned home in 2007 to work for his hometown police department before becoming a West Virginia Natural Resources police officer. He was promoted to sergeant in 2022.

In 2013, he was named the WVA Natural Resources Officer of the Year. Haines is also a four-stripe purple belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu with over 10 years of training. Haines is a valued member of the PBA.

"After listening to the legal benefits, the death benefits and the representation the PBA offered, it was clear that the PBA could protect those who serve," he said.

His original membership led to further involvement when he was nominated to serve as chapter president.

In his nine years at the helm, his board has secured much needed pay raises and a retirement system to recruit and retain officers.

"It is absolutely critical that we hire and maintain the absolute best law enforcement officers to protect our citizens," he said.

Haines is married to Rosemarie, who is a paralegal in a real estate law firm. They have an 11-year-old daughter, Mary.

"She is the absolute joy of my life and has my passion for hunting and fishing," he said. "She also enjoys dance, cheer, Jiu Jitsu, singing, swimming and being active in our church," he said.