



July 2024

THE FRONT LINE

A Southern States PBA Newsletter

VOL. 3 - Issue 2



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PBA assists Mississippi member in standing up to public pressure under extreme circumstances

BY MICHAEL CARR
CARR LAW FIRM, CLEVELAND, MISS.

On May 20, 2023, at around midnight, Sgt. Gregory Capers, an award-winning Mississippi officer with the City of Indianola Police Department, responded to a call of domestic violence and potential hostage situation involving a man with a gun.

Sgt. Capers, familiar with this residence as he had responded to similar calls to it multiple times per year, proceeded with backup to the location of the call. Encountering a distressed female at the scene, Sgt. Capers was able to remove her from the residence.

The female advised there was a man with a gun still inside the residence who had been holding her hostage.

After authorizing entry with the female and his department, Sgt. Capers proceeded inside to clear the residence with the knowledge that a man with a gun was inside.



Sgt. Capers and Michael Carr

As he cleared the residence, an individual quickly moved from behind a doorway in front of Sgt. Capers, and Sgt. Capers, in an instant, fired once. He shot an unarmed 11-year-old boy, who was



Attorney Michael Carr and Sgt. Capers discuss shooting lawsuit on national news program

the minor son of the distressed female. She never told Sgt. Capers, nor anyone else, that her child was in the home.

The entire incident was captured on body camera, which was placed into the custody of the Mississippi Bureau of Investigations.

Sgt. Capers, realizing what had just happened, immediately called emergency services and started life-saving medical care on the child until EMS arrived. The child ultimately made a full recovery. The man with the gun was arrested in the home by another officer and will be prosecuted.

The child's family hired an attorney who immediately proceeded to go on every media network he could find, including national and international media, in an effort to build a civil case for money damages. The attorney led a concerted effort to brand Sgt. Capers as a reckless officer who shot a child.

Unfortunately, the city, without having seen the body cam video, bought into the media circus and placed Sgt.

Capers on unpaid administrative leave from June 2023 until January 2024. The family of the child pursued criminal charges against Sgt. Capers and filed a multi-million-dollar civil suit in federal court.

Fortunately, Sgt. Capers was a member of PBA. Shortly after the incident, he contacted PBA and was assigned to veteran PBA attorney Michael S. Carr of Cleveland, Miss., as his counsel. They immediately began to gather and preserve evidence in the case, as well as to secure witness statements, 911 calls and, most importantly, body camera footage. They created a counter narrative and responded to multiple media inquiries.

The Mississippi Attorney General's Office investigated the criminal case through MBI and, in December 2023, approximately six months after the shooting, presented the case to a local grand jury. Jurors voted "no bill" on all charges.

Attorney Carr and Sgt. Capers then traveled to New York City at the invitation of "Good Morning, America" for a televised segment on the shooting, the decision of the grand jury and the importance of body cameras to

protect officers as well as the public.

Despite being cleared by a grand jury, the City of Indianola, still influenced by the media circus, refused to reinstate Sgt. Capers immediately. It took four different board meetings over the course of several months before Sgt. Capers was fully reinstated to active duty.

As of this date, the City of Indianola still refuses to issue any backpay from the unpaid administrative leave from June 2023 to January 2024. Further, the child's mother refiled simple assault charges, which were also ultimately dismissed by the circuit court.

The Section 1983 federal civil rights suit for money damages is still pending and is stayed based on qualified

immunity motions. Now, over one year after the shooting, Sgt. Capers and his PBA counsel Michael Carr are still working to repair Sgt. Capers' reputation as an officer within the community.

As all PBA members know, use-of-force incidents do happen, and the public response can significantly impact an officer's career, community connections, family life and marriage. Sgt. Capers has remained steadfast in his determination to serve the City of Indianola despite significant periods of lack of municipal support, false accusations and financial distress.

We are proud to represent Sgt. Capers and look forward to continuing to assist him to clear his name and get his back pay.

BEHIND THE BADGE SEMINAR

The Facts:

- More officers die each year by their own hand as opposed to being killed by an assailant.
- 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.

OUR NEXT SEMINAR LOCATIONS...

GEORGIA

The PBF and PBA of GA have partnered with the PBA of GA Augusta's River Region Chapter, LEAPS Training LLC and Columbus Convention Center to bring this seminar to Augusta, GA.

Savannah Rapids Pavilion
3300 Evans-to-Locks Road,
Martinez, GA 30907

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024
8:00am - 4:00pm

Register Today!



WEST VIRGINIA

The PBF and West Virginia PBA have partnered with LEAPS Training LLC and Marshall University to bring this seminar to Huntington, WV.

Marshall University
1608 5th Ave.,
Huntington, WV 25755

Monday, Dec. 16, 2024
8:00am - 4:00pm

Register Today!



Georgia officer's foresight, quick action save choking victim



Officer Severtson

BY CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

Acworth, Ga., police Officer Tamara Severtson was recently on patrol when the Zone 2 units received a call about an elderly person choking at a senior living facility.

Although she was assigned to Zone 1, Severtson knew she'd have to act due to short staffing and the Zone 2 officer being tied up with an accident call.

"I activated my lights and sirens to get to the facility quickly," she said. "While enroute, dispatch advised the female was turning blue and no longer responding. A few moments later, staff at the facility advised they had utilized the Heimlich maneuver several times but were unsuccessful.

"Upon hearing this, I knew something else had to be done in order to save the elderly patient," continued Severtson. "Upon my arrival on scene, I immediately retrieved my personal LifeVac anti-choking device that I kept in my patrol vehicle. I rushed inside where I located the elderly patient in her wheelchair. She was blue and unresponsive.

"With assistance from the staff, we were able to place the patient on her back on the floor," she said. "I placed the adult

size valve mask on the LifeVac and placed the mask over the patient's mouth and nose. I utilized the device a total of three or four times, and each time food was dislodged from her airway and I was able to remove it from her mouth. After the final time, the patient began to breathe again, and her color began to return. The fire department arrived on scene and was able to give the patient some oxygen. Due to the patient's age (94 years old), she was transported to a local hospital for treatment."

Interestingly, the only reason Severtson had this device with her at all was because she had seen a commercial for the device a year prior and decided to purchase three kits with her own money. She kept two of them at her home and decided to put the other in her patrol car in case she needed it for a choking incident.

"I honestly never thought I would need it, but I'm so glad I had it," she said.



Officer Severtson shows off LifeVac device

The LifeVac device is designed to remove any obstruction from a patient's airway in the event of a choking incident, through simple suction. The mask is placed over the patient's face, then the attached plunger must be pushed down, and then quickly pulled up. The process can be repeated if needed, as Severtson had to do in this case.

"After her release from the hospital, I checked on the patient when she returned to the living facility," said Severtson. "She was in good spirits and recovering well. We are trained to remain calm in chaotic situations where someone's life is

on the line. After the call was completed, I sat in my patrol car and just breathed. I was thankful that God put me in the right place at the right time.”

Her success with using the device led Severtson to take further action. After seeing firsthand how efficiently it had saved a life, she hoped to see all patrol cars outfitted with the tool and was able to set that in motion.



Officer Severston accepts \$1,500 donation from Atlanta News First

“Directly after the incident, I contacted my chief and requested to speak with him,” she said. “He immediately met with me and allowed me to explain what the LifeVac was and how I thought it would be a great tool for all officers on the road. He immediately showed interest and asked detailed questions on its function and useability. He took some photographs and then made a few phone calls. Acworth is very lucky to have such an open-minded chief that is invested in his officers and his community.”

With her 11 years in law enforcement as a detention officer, patrol officer and detective, this is not the first life that Severtson has saved. In fact, she’s been recognized with a lifesaving award once already. In addition to that, she’s been honored as officer of the quarter and officer of the year for her outstanding performance, and has been presented with a public safety recognition award.

When it comes to choosing law enforcement as a career, Severtson offered this advice to those who may be considering it.

“Make sure your heart is in it,” she said. “It is so much more than chasing the bad guys and writing tickets. It’s about protecting those who can’t protect themselves. Being a light in the darkness to someone who is going through a crisis. If this is for you, be a good person, for yourself, your department and your community.”

Her own career began as an intern at the Acworth PD after earning her bachelor’s degree in criminal justice/forensic behavioral science from Kennesaw State University. Severtson credited Chief Dennard as the greatest influence in her professional life.

“In 2013, I was a young intern in college finishing up my internship with the Acworth Police Department,” she said. “Honestly, I had no intention of getting into law enforcement, but on the last day of my internship, Chief Dennard approached me and offered me a job. He said he was impressed with my dedication and work ethic over the course of the internship and wanted me to be a part of his team.

“I was hesitant and initially thought about declining the offer, but his faith in me, having only known me for a month or two, gave me the courage to accept,” Severtson continued. “Throughout my career, Chief Dennard supported me and pushed me outside of my comfort zone on more than one occasion. He asked me to join the Criminal Investigation Division as a detective. Again, I was apprehensive, but I knew if he saw something in me then it was worth a shot. He would always say to me, ‘Thank you for serving with your heart.’ I would always respond, ‘Thank you for creating a work environment where I can.’”

At about the same time she was offered the position, Severtson decided to join PBA. A representative of the PBA had informed her of the many benefits of membership.

Now, as a field training officer for several years, Severtson is the one passing along information and training her colleagues. She “loves teaching” and points out that many of the officers on the road for her department have trained with her at some point.

The foresight and preparedness that Severtson showed as she saved the life of the resident just spotlights what she calls her favorite part of being a LEO: The opportunities to help someone in need and to make an impact on their life.

Tennessee member gets settlement from city after filing suit on protected speech



Attorneys Logan Davis and Janie Varnell of Davis & Hoss P.C. with PBA member Clifton Couch

By JONI FLETCHER CAWTHON
SSPBA DIRECTOR OF LEGAL SERVICES

PBA Member Clifton Couch was hired as police chief of Athens, Tenn., in 2017 by the then-city manager, Seth Sumner. Over time, the relationship between the two became strained as the city manager repeatedly intervened in law enforcement matters, pressured Chief Couch to harass Sumner's political enemies and behaved in other ways that made the chief uncomfortable.

Matters escalated in 2021 after the chief contacted the district attorney over his concerns about the city manager unlawfully taking possession of city property. The chief notified the DA so that someone with authority to investigate besides himself was aware of the situation. After the DA inquired into the situation, the city attorney notified the DA that the city would be conducting its own investigation. No action was taken against the city manager, and retaliation against the chief by the city manager began. That retaliation included widening the scope of a staffing study of the police and fire departments that was being conducted by an outside party; the study was expanded to include a performance review of the police chief. No other employ-

ee's performance was reviewed.

Couch contacted PBA regarding his concerns in the summer of 2021. PBA asked attorney Janie Varnell of Davis & Hoss P.C. in Chattanooga to evaluate the situation.

Attorney Varnell was present when the chief aired his concerns of retaliation at a city council meeting. In response to the information presented by the chief, the city manager was allowed to speak for over two hours regarding the chief and to attack the chief's character. The meeting lasted until 11:30 p.m., when it was continued due to the late hour. The meeting was not rescheduled for nearly two months; in the meantime, the city manager called the chief in and terminated him without notice. Attorney Varnell assisted Couch in requesting an administrative appeal of his termination; the city did not respond.

Attorney Varnell advised PBA that she believed Couch was terminated in direct retaliation for 1) asking the DA to investigate the city manager, and 2) speaking openly about the fear of retaliation to members of the city council.

Public employees in Tennessee are provided a right to speak with elected officials under the Tennessee Public Employee Protection Act. Given attorney Varnell's assessment of the actions taken against Couch, PBA authorized the filing of litigation. Couch and attorney Varnell filed a federal lawsuit in March 2022 against City Manager Seth Sumner and the City of Athens claiming violations of the First Amendment, violation of PEPFA, and violation of the Tennessee Public Protection Act, which states that public employees may not be discharged solely for refusing to remain silent and/or refusing to participate in the activities of their employer.

While the case was progressing, city manager Seth Sumner was given a six months' severance package in exchange for his resignation. Multiple council members publicly expressed their concerns regarding sever-

ance given to Sumner.

After depositions were held in the summer of 2023, Clifton Couch's case proceeded to mediation. In September 2023, former Chief Couch settled with the city's insurer for \$350,000, including back pay, front pay and reputational damages.

The city was also required to provide Couch with a letter of recommendation, and it was required to recommend an employee whistleblower protection policy for the city council to pass. Attorney's fees were also awarded and were reimbursed to PBA.

Cliff Couch has continued his law enforcement career with McMinn County Sheriff's Office. He said the following about his ordeal:

"One of the most lopsided things about this situation was that one individual could use the power of an entire city because of his position, whereas I was just on my own. It gave me a new appreciation for how important it is for individual officers to have some form of outside support they can rely on if their systematic legal protections are co-opted by the politics of an incident.

Janie and her team were incredible, and the hard questions they asked during the lawsuit forced our city to deal with a lot of serious issues.

It's clear to me that God ultimately used this situation to make Athens a better place, but I never would have been able to stay in the fight if I had to take out a second mortgage on the chance a lawsuit would be successful.

Without the PBA, I would have been forced to either quietly capitulate to the corruption around me, or just slink away. I'd recommend that any officer (no matter their rank) be a member of the PBA. It's a small financial investment that could have huge consequences if it's ever needed."

Attorney Janie Varnell said the following:

"I am honored to do this work every day for law en-

forcement officers like Chief Couch. As the daughter of a retired chief, growing up in this law enforcement world has taught me to always do what is right for the right reasons. Chief Couch is the walking persona of that motto.

"However, without the PBA, none of this would have been possible. We would not have been able to fight for Chief Couch like we did. PBA was there every step of the way, willing to provide counsel, experts, and court reporter expenses. Without the PBA, officers like Chief Couch would continue to be treated poorly by city officials who think they can get away with it. With the PBA and our team, they have a fighting chance."

Next issue of **THE 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**,
please scan.



When LEO suicidal ideations become reality: 'It's tangible'



Deputy Patrice Hall

BY KATHARINE JEFFCOATS
EDITOR

Pender County, N.C., sheriff's Deputy Patrice Hall is a polished professional with 22 years of experience in law enforcement.

She spoke in a precise, measured manner as she recalled the suicides of two coworkers, men who had held the ranks of sergeant and captain. Hall said she believed she was taking the right actions and saying the right words during her interactions with them.

After attending the PTSD and Suicide Prevention seminar in Cherokee, N.C., recently, Hall learned she could have done more.

The realization haunts her.

"It's tangible," she said. "Having two coworkers commit suicide, this stuff is really real. You never think it will happen. If it happens again, I know what to say, what to look for. We're not picking up on clues."

Hall, an SRO deputy, is one of more than 100 LEOs

who attended the Cherokee seminar, presented by the Police Benevolent Foundation of the SSPBA. The seminars are free and open to all LEOs and their families. The class is eligible for continuing education credits. The seminars are funded by donations from individuals and businesses.

Specifically, Hall said she learned to not simply ask "What's wrong?" but to ask, "What is bothering you?" and "What is hurting you?"

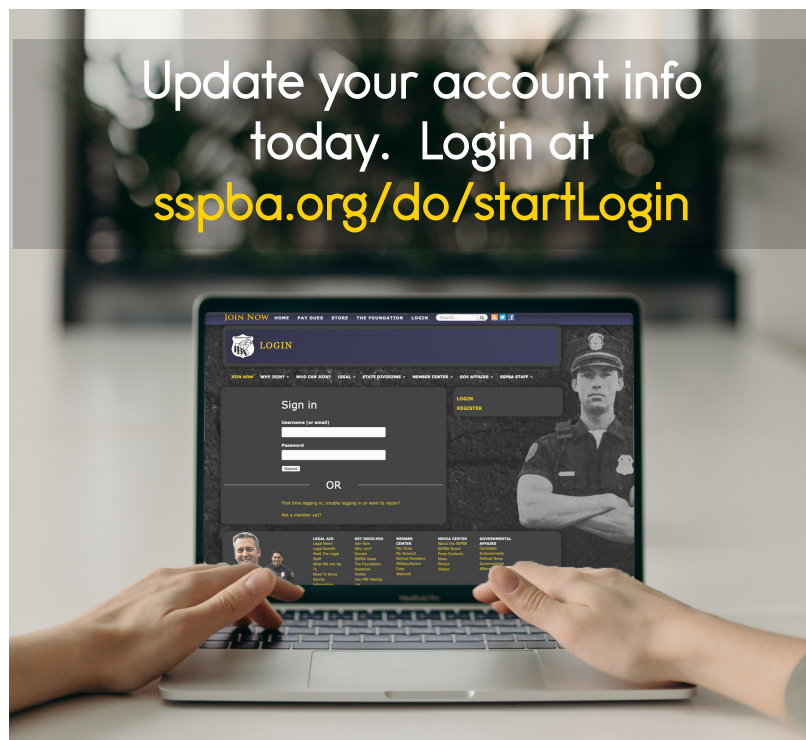
"We've got to press more," she said.

Hall said she owes her career to the captain who died.

"He picked me out to attend Basic Law Enforcement Training," she said. "I loved him. If not for him, I wouldn't be a deputy."

She said she will take what she learned from the seminar back to her agency to share.

"They will hear about it," said Hall. "We can all benefit in some way. This is a great opportunity to help us help ourselves."



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Detective Brad Butterfield

The stigma of weakness that clings to the uniform of LEOs who seek help for PTSD symptoms or suicidal ideations is slowly losing its grip. Detective Brad Butterfield of the Henderson County (N.C.) Sheriff's Office has experienced the change firsthand.

"The mentality has changed and evolved over the years," he said. "We have feelings, too. And cops are more supportive of coworkers getting help."



Detective Brad Butterfield

Deputies in Henderson County are debriefed after a critical incident, said Butterfield, who has a past acute stress diagnosis. He also credits his wife for keeping him level-headed.

"She's understanding," he said. "I couldn't do this job without her support and understanding."

Butterfield is a member of PBA and is vice president of the Mountain Chapter. He's grateful for the seminar presentations.

"It's a wake-up call," he said. "If it's not you affected by PTSD or suicidal ideations, someone else is dealing with it. I'm very happy PBA puts this on and glad I came."



Alamance County sheriff's Deputy Mike Paschal and his daughter, 9.

Deputy Mike Paschal

Alamance County sheriff's Deputy Mike Paschal echoed Butterfield's embracing of the seminars.

"This is absolutely wonderful," said Paschal. "Very powerful. This should be a training priority. All of us are not OK. There is no doubt we're saving lives today."

Tim Rutledge presents the seminar information through personal experience, videos, statistics and other data that allow attendees to see themselves or coworkers in the material. Survivors of loved ones' suicides often join the seminar to share their own journeys.

Paschal is president of the North Carolina DARE Officers Association. He worked out a partnership with PBF to present the Cherokee PTSD class as part of the DARE meeting itinerary. He acknowledged the challenges LEOs face in seeking help.

"It's still perceived as a weakness," he said. "It's a tough hump to get over. It is still hard for officers to admit they need help. I have my own struggles. I lost my mom and I've separated from my wife. You find people who are safe and who you can trust. When you have down moments, you have to have someone you can trust."

His 9-year-old daughter is his "prized part of my life,"

said Paschal. “I put everything into her.”

Like many of the class participants, Paschal found the stats Rutledge discusses “alarming.”

“I mean, the average life expectancy of a police officer is 59,” he said.

Lt. Bruce Moore

Clay County (N.C.) sheriff’s Lt. Bruce Moore, a 22-year veteran, was also shocked by the stats.

“The seminar is great,” he said. “The value of the content is great. I wasn’t aware of all those stats.”

Moore’s relationship with his wife is unique.

“She is a social worker,” said Moore. “She has kept me sane. I can talk to her. I’m very blessed to have her. You have to be able to talk to someone.”

Moore is a PBA member.



Lt. Bruce Moore with his wife and daughter

He said having his daughter, 9, changed his perspective on life, forcing him to realize he can’t live in his own head. He advocates for LEOs attending the seminar.

“If you are truly contemplating suicide, it will give you pause,” said Moore.



Lynn Aly and Kora

Lynn Aly

Lynn Aly is a civilian forensic services technician for Asheville (N.C.) Police Department with 28 years of experience. She is also a member of the department’s peer support team.

“Any time I can attend seminars like this and get information, I try to attend,” said Aly. “The stats are alarming. If more of the public saw these stats, they wouldn’t be as harsh on police officers.”

Aly said she suffered mentally in 2011 after attending the autopsies of two children killed by their hatchet-wielding mother.

“The pure evil of it,” she said. “These are images I couldn’t get out of my head. I don’t want people to think you have to shove those things down. I didn’t know how to ask for help.”

She said she was placed on administrative leave for

a month and then demoted. She doesn't want to see that happen to someone else because of the negative impact of their duties.

"No one should have to die because of their job, especially when it's about helping people," said Aly. "This seminar is a good refresher on what can happen. You can get complacent when things are going well."

Deputy Jade DiPietro

PBA member Jade DiPietro is an SRO with Craven County (N.C.) Sheriff's Office with a total of six years' experience as a LEO. She refuses to accept that emotions and feelings make a person weaker.

"You are human and have emotions," she said. "You don't have to feel 'less than' or weak, which is how I felt prior to the seminar."



Deputy Jade DiPietro

DiPietro believes in opening up and sharing concerns, recalling helping a former roommate who survived an overdose.

"I wasn't weak for the feelings that happened after the fact," she said. "It should be talked about. What you present to someone is what you'll get back in response. Even though we don't talk now, she's alive and I did what I needed to do and just dealt with it. You're not weak."

DiPietro said she believes people should get in tune with empathy.

"You could save your life or the life of someone you know," she said.



Waynesville police Chief David Adams

Chief David Adams

Waynesville, N.C., police Chief David Adams has been a LEO nearly three decades. He's been a PBA member for 20 years. He said he learned about the seminar from an ad.

"I thought this would be beneficial training," he said. "The stats are alarming."

Adams said he knew three officers who died by suicide.

"I think their judgement gets clouded and they don't see that help is right there," he said. In crisis situations, "We have an immediate debriefing. We provide chaplains,

responder services and peer support. Officers are encouraged to seek help.”

Adams brought four officers with him to the seminar.

“I think we’re making major improvements in making sure people get help and that it is not seen as taboo,” he said. “I’d like to see more chiefs and sheriffs attend and send officers.”

Becky Costello

Becky Costello is in a unique position. She is the assistant to the Cherokee County (N.C.) sheriff and the wife of a deputy.

“This is a great seminar,” she said. “More people out of law enforcement need to see and understand what these heroes go through. And the stats? If you watch the news, you have to know they’re going up.”



Becky Costello with her husband

Costello said she does not want to know details about calls her husband works.

“I have trust and faith in him and his coworkers,” said Costello. “That’s always been my philosophy.”

She firmly believes that family should be prioritized by law enforcement agencies.

“I think the family gets overlooked a lot,” she said. “Law enforcement officers put their families on the line every day. I think families need more tools to deal with the LEO in their lives. I think it would be better all around, a great benefit.”



Seminar presenter Tim Rutledge

For more information on the seminars, visit <https://www.pbfi.org/ptsd-suicide-outreach-seminar/> or contact Randy Byrd at 919-649-7710 or rbyrd@sspba.org.

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Retired Ark. police sergeant shares journey to healing PTSD

BY CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

As a third-generation law enforcement officer, retired Sgt. Ken Slocum has policing in his blood. His father worked for 40 years for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office and retired as a captain. His mother was a veteran police officer as well, but she took a medical retirement after being injured during a pursuit.

Like so many others in this field, Slocum originally started in law enforcement because he wanted to help people and do something to help remedy the negative things he saw happening in his hometown. Once he had some time under his belt, though, he remained in law enforcement because of the comradery he found with his colleagues.

These days, he's focused on his volunteer work called Heroes Behind the Line, an Arkansas group that helps those who may be struggling with PTSD by providing counseling services to officers in crisis. Slocum is also involved with Arkansas Service Paws, a non-profit that works with first responders and veterans on assisting them with service dogs.

Slocum was born and raised in Pine Bluff, Ark.

"(It was) a pretty good town growing up, until the crack epidemic hit," he said. "Then it quickly became one of the most dangerous places in the country."

He graduated from Pine Bluff High School in 1994, then finished his associate degree in 1996 before starting work at the Arkansas Department of Corrections. He returned to school in 2007 at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, juggling married life, a toddler and working full time as a police officer.

In 2010 he completed his BA in criminal justice and in early 2024, wrapped up work on his master's degree. Slocum initially joined PBA for the benefit to his wife if he were to have died on duty.

"We were a very young family and it seemed like the best option available," said Slocum.

Now, many years later, he realizes just how significant his



Former Sheriff Doc Holliday presents Slocum with a lifesaving award for his efforts responding to a crash.

PBA membership has been.

"PBA representing me in an officer involved shooting on the criminal side as well as the civil side is a really big deal," he said. "It saved me tens of thousands of dollars, and the PBA used the best attorney available at no cost to me."

During his 23 years in law enforcement, Slocum worked for departments in Arkansas and Louisiana. While with these agencies, he had several specialty assignments including patrol, investigations, training, administration and adjunct instructor at several police academies. He also received four life-saving awards, a medal of valor and recognition for meritorious conduct.

Unfortunately, like so many of his peers, Slocum was involved in several critical incidents while on duty. Those incidents led him to his interest in PTSD and pondering how he could help.

In 2002, he had an encounter when he followed a speeding carload of people who he realized were racing to the hospital. Upon both cars' arrival, an infant was thrown into Slocum's arms at the ER entrance. The baby, it would later be determined, had died several days before, but none of the car's occupants had realized this, and the child's lifeless body was in abhorrent condition.

He and his partner later went to investigate at the home where the mother and infant lived and



The Clinton School graduation for his masters degree with Bear, Slocum's service dog. Bear has his own Instagram page @theservicedognamedbear.

found the home in a repulsive, uninhabitable condition. Knowing the baby had suffered and died in such despicable circumstances was extremely disturbing to Slocum and the other officer on the scene.

Also, in the span of just a few months, Slocum experienced an officer-involved-shooting, where he ended up saving the life of the suspect he'd just shot, a crash of his patrol car that resulted in his car bursting into flames and him having to be rescued, and another officer-involved-shooting that happened on his son's birthday.

Another traumatic event for Slocum was when he responded to a vehicle crash with entrapment and fire, only to find out after running the car's license plate that the deceased driver was his daughter's babysitter, a family friend.

Serving through all those harrowing events led to a multitude of negative consequences for Slocum. He describes a feeling of discomfort in crowded places, an inability to sit still for very long, going days without

sleep, troubling bouts of depression lasting days or even weeks, being very quick-tempered, experiencing random flashbacks at the most inopportune times, and having suicidal thoughts.

He said that not dealing with all of these issues led to some very unfortunate outcomes.

"Unfortunately, it cost my marriage and strained the relationships with both of my kids," said Slocum. "Just now, years later, am I starting to mend those strained relationships."

Slocum went down a couple of dangerous paths before finding the coping methods he needed to manage his PTSD symptoms.

"Initially it was the use of alcohol, a lot of alcohol, sprinkled with bits of anger and sarcasm," he said. "Eventually I accepted that I needed help."

He credits the several years of counseling he's under-



Pulaski County Sheriff's Office

August 6, 2018 · 🌐

Deputy Slocum and Deputy Flowers.



Slocum and others working a fatal crash

gone, beginning in 2019, as well as the companionship of a service dog, as the healthier ways he's found to handle his symptoms.

"I am dealing with things more appropriately," said Slocum.

Slocum has realized that the way things were handled in the past regarding PTSD hasn't been the most effective. A focus he's had in the pursuit of his master's degree has been researching the issue of PTSD, in hopes of better understanding the condition and helping others.

While it would seem obvious, the first step is to recognize the struggles of PTSD within oneself and others, and this can be quite difficult.

"PTSD manifests itself in so many different forms at different times," he said. "It is very easy to focus on one aspect just to have another aspect sneak up on you and not recognize it."

"For me, minor things could trigger flashbacks like smells, or sounds," continued Slocum. "Crowds or just being in unfamiliar situations would also cause tension, which if I wasn't paying attention could sneak up on me. Traffic is also an issue at times, especially when I know that other drivers are not paying attention. The urge/need to get out and away from traffic is very real

since that crash.

"I've learned to pay attention to myself, especially when I can feel the muscle tension or see the hand tremors. Sometimes I might have issues staying asleep for several nights in a row. I found most of the time when this happens, I need to sit and figure out what has changed and address the issue."

"A very important part that I have learned is having a small group of people that you can trust to tell you when they see you are starting to manifest whatever symptoms you have. As well as others that have had similar experiences, they can really help you identify issues before they get out of hand."

Learning how to cope with PTSD has taken some time for Slocum. He initially tried to handle things on his own, without help, because he was scared of what others would think. He recalls that sometimes "I literally thought I was losing my mind".

Once he spoke with a fellow officer, who he considers his mentor, and he realized that he was not alone in his battles. "Nobody talked about it, so everyone thought it was just them going through the issues," he shares. "Just knowing that I wasn't the only one made a huge difference in how I addressed it to begin with."

Keeping busy is also a strategy that Slocum employs. As he said, "sitting idle is not a good thing, ever." Learning to key in on his feelings, avoid certain situations, have someone trustworthy with him and to mentally prepare for scenarios that might be challenging have all been helpful to him. He's also learned that alcohol "does no good and only makes things worse."

Becoming more active has also proven beneficial to Slocum. As he said, "PTSD and depression are very close. Doing some type of physical activity every single day, a walk or run, trip to the gym, playing ball, just about anything. The activity helps to release stored up tension and releases endorphins that combat those types of symptoms."

His service dog, Bear, has also been a tremendous source of help and comfort for Slocum. Diamond State

K9, in White Hall, Ark., connected Slocum and Bear in June 2023. The owner of that facility is an active-duty police officer and had fully trained Bear by the time Slocum took ownership.

Slocum credits Bear with being “amazing in how he is able to pick up on things and how he can even pick up on them before I realize they are there. He is able to provide distractions when needed and, in certain instances, he is able to provide me a way to leave a situation without too much fuss.”

The companionship of his service dog, Bear, and regular sessions with a therapist are the two biggest factors that Slocum points to as the most helpful for him personally. “Therapy helps a lot,” he said, and added, “one of the biggest things is to understand that this is more common than most of us would like to admit. It is okay to get help and don’t let things go when you know there is an issue. A friend of mine took his life because he did not reach out when he needed to. I wish he would have, every single day.”

As he has come to terms with the reality of PTSD, Slocum has learned much more about it through research and his own studies towards his recently completed master’s degree.

When I initially thought of PTSD, it was limited to an exposure to one traumatic event like a car crash, battery, sexual assault, something along those lines,” he said. “Through research I have found that there is also the possibility of PTSD through long term exposure to traumatic events.

“So basically, it can be the culmination of (in our case as law enforcement officers) years of dealing with traumatic events. There is also the repeated exposure to victims of traumatic events or crimes. Those that work sex crimes for example,” continued Slocum. “They have to go through detailed statements from the victims, watch videos, interview suspects and really deep dive into the events they are investigating. This type of repeated exposure has a detrimental effect, even though they are not the victim of the crime.

“PTSD is traditionally thought of as a mental disorder. Growing evidence is showing that PTSD actually reprograms the circuitry of the brain. MRI images show different areas of the brain activated when compared to those without PTSD. Of course, more research needs to be done to be definitive, but the DSM-5 requires some type of exposure to a traumatic event (this now includes to qualify for PTSD to be



The Clinton School. Slocum is at right with Bear.

considered).

“This requirement sets PTSD apart from most other diagnosable mental disorders. It has also been re-classified from the anxiety disorder classification to a category called ‘Trauma and Stressor related Disorders.’ This is to more accurately get a handle of what PTSD actually is and include some of the symptoms which may include guilt, shame, depression and anger, among others.

“Although there is no concrete national number of LEOs with PTSD, estimates range from 15% to 30%. This is a remarkably high number when compared to the overall population which is estimated at around 8%. The research I have conducted has also shed light on the more rural aspect of law enforcement. The larger (urban) areas are exposed to more events, but the rural areas have a higher likelihood of responding to an event that involves someone they know on a personal level.

“This seems to have a longer lingering effect. I know one of the hardest things I had to do was to give a death notification after a crash where the decedent was my daughter’s babysitter. I knew this kid and had known her for several years, her entire family, and then I had to tell my daughter. It hit harder than any other notification I have ever done before or after.

“Twenty years ago, this subject was avoided at all costs, both by rank-and-file personnel and administration, for multiple reasons. There is a shift in police culture in recognizing that there is an issue, and it does need to be addressed.”

Acknowledging the stigma that can accompany sharing one’s PTSD struggles in the law enforcement realm is another component that must be considered. Slocum has valuable insight into this.

“I have found that familiarization with providers helps to break down the barrier. Some departments require counselors to attend roll call and ride a shift at specific intervals. This allows the personnel to become more acquainted with the providers and helps to allow more of a natural conversation with someone they know

rather than the perception of some abstract head-shrinker that is out to take their badge and gun. Plymouth Police Department in Minnesota instituted a program that required sworn personnel to see mental health providers at specific intervals, they call it ‘Check Up From The Neck Up.’

The chief said the program was initially met with resistance, but after some time it became accepted. One important item was that department morale increased, especially after the senior officers began to accept the program. This is one example of many programs that have been implemented, but the premise is almost universal: to get personnel familiar with those that can help.

Something that cannot be overstated is the importance of senior officers and front-line supervisors. They can shape the entire outlook of a shift or division. They are also more apt to recognize someone who is potentially developing issues. Their early intervention could have a huge impact.”

With Slocum’s focus on helping others who are coping with PTSD, he’s found a new purpose outside of the daily work of law enforcement. His personal “I’ve been in your shoes” type of perspective is undoubtedly valuable and much appreciated as he helps connect officers with counseling services.

He is also putting what he’s learned about avoiding idle time into practice as he stays busy with his two children, now teens. His daughter has gotten her driver’s license, and his son is into gaming and sports, specifically football. He enjoys hanging out with them both and working on his 2002 Pontiac Trans Am, a project car that he and his son work on together.

Though he is retired from the day-to-day work of being a police officer, Ken Slocum is still very much in a position of service. By informing others about PTSD, getting officers the resources they need, and sharing his personal experiences, he’s found an important way to help and support those who put their lives, physically and emotionally, on the line every day as police officers.