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THE FRONT LINE

A Southern States PBA Newsletter

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Roswell member honored for fight against human trafficking in the state of Georgia



Roswell police Detective Natalie Fields and Chief James W. Conroy

By KATHARINE JEFCOATS
EDITOR

Natalie Fields has lived a multinational, multicultural and multi-career life, but luckily for residents in Georgia, she's sticking with fighting crime – specifically, human trafficking.

Fields was honored for her efforts by Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police as 2024 Outstanding Officer of the Year.

She is a detective at Roswell Police Department and a Task Force Officer



Fields, flanked by Gov. Kemp (l) and Chief Conroy, is honored by Roswell Rotary Club

in Homeland Security Investigations, the Human Trafficking Group. She's been there for four years, the entirety of her LEO career.

"This award is designed to recognize the outstanding service by a full-time, sworn, non-supervisory, officer who brings great credit to their department, community or the State," according to the GACP. "The nomination was for combating Human Trafficking in the Atlanta area."

The nomination stated, "Through several undercover operations at spas in Roswell, Detective Fields discovered multiple Fulton County massage establishments that were involved in human trafficking.

"In September of 2023, Detective Fields and the Roswell Police Department performed a large-scale operation which resulted in the arrest of three individuals. Since that operation, the investigation has spread to multiple counties across the state and has resulted in the freedom of over 50 victims.

"Due to her outstanding achievements in the law

enforcement field, GACP would like to recognize Detective Natalie Fields as our 2024 Officer of the Year."

Fields was stunned at the news of getting the award.

"I was not expecting this award at all," she said. "It was such a humbling surprise and honor. I was able to take my teammates with me to Savannah to receive the award. I am so grateful because I would not have achieved a quarter of what I did without them."

Her story, however, began years ago on Barbados, a scenic Caribbean island southeast of Martinique and St. Lucia, known for its beaches and botanical gardens. It is a British Commonwealth independent nation where residents enjoy the national sport of cricket and a relaxing afternoon tea.

She said her family has roots on the island dating back to 1600.

"My father's side of the family is from Trinidad, Barbados, England and Corsica," she said. "My father grew up in Trinidad and moved to Barbados when he was a



At right, Fields proudly participates in the running of the Special Olympics torch. At left is Chief Conroy.

teenager. My grandfather, who was born in Barbados, always said we had been on the island for hundreds of years, and he was right. The Fields family has been there since 1600."

Her father has worked in finance his entire life and still does. Her mother's side is from England, but she was born in Rhodesia, now Zambia, and spent her childhood growing up in Zimbabwe. Her mother later managed hotels in St. Lucia and then had her own retail business when she moved to Barbados.

Fields' oldest brother works in export and distribution in Miami, and her middle brother works for the Canadian government.

However, Fields experienced a whole different life before ever serving in law enforcement, although she

had ideations of becoming an officer as a child. She started high school on Barbados at St. Michaels and moved to the United Kingdom at age 15, where she graduated from Elmhurst in Camberley, Surrey, United Kingdom, in 2001.

Her first career passion was dance. After high school, Fields attended college in the U.S., in Greenville, N.C. She's been here ever since.

"I attended East Carolina University, graduating with a BFA in dance and choreography in 2005," she said. "However, I suffered many injuries, re-enrolled the same year, and graduated with a BFA in Design and Production in 2007.

"I began teaching college in 2007," Fields continued, "and part of my hiring agreement was to obtain my master's degree. I attended the Academy of Art University online and received my MFA in merchandising in 2013 and my MFA in documentary photography in 2022 from the same academy."

Fields said she was not sure where she would end up after college or if she would be afforded the opportunity to stay in the U.S., but she did stay, became a U.S. citizen and taught college for eight years, immersing her life into the arts and dance.

"I taught at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke right after graduating college," she said. "I taught theatre, dance and costume design. I built the dance program at the university and was the head coach of the dance team in my final two years.

"During that time, I was able to educate and mentor many students," continued Fields. "I chose this career path at first because I had a passion for the arts and teaching, but I was trying to find something that I would enjoy doing back in the Caribbean."

She was also able to work in Cape Town, South Africa, in the summer of 2012.

"I taught kids who were underprivileged, and many were HIV positive," she said. "Living in South Africa for four months was a very humbling experience."

After teaching eight years and earning her citizenship, Fields opted to switch careers, going back to the dream she couldn't reach in Barbados.

"From a young age, I wanted to be a detective," she said. "However, it wasn't the career field one would get into in Barbados. Not knowing where I would be living after college and not being a U.S. citizen, I did not pursue this career right away."

"My original interest was homicide, but through life experience and having a student who was trafficked, I knew that I wanted to work in human trafficking," continued Fields. "Thankfully, my work ethic and determination have landed me in the area where I can make a difference."

Her first experience with human trafficking was as a teacher. She was deeply touched by a student's personal story, and her interest only grew while in the police academy.

"I wanted to investigate crime and knew how complicated my brain loved the puzzles to be," said Fields. "I had a student who was trafficked. He was in sexual servitude for a year and managed to escape one night when his shackle wasn't secured. During this year the only time he was released was for servitude."

"I had many students confide in me through the years, but this story will always and forever sit heavy on my heart," she continued. "I knew that no one should ever have to live this way, and I knew that human trafficking was my passion. My lieutenant in the academy had everyone write down our law enforcement goals. Mine said to work in human trafficking, and here I am. I love these investigations because not only are you helping people, but these investigations encompass so many crimes, from trafficking, prostitution, fraud, money laundering and drugs. They are not short investigations and take years, but these are the cases that I am passionate about."

Since being at Roswell PD, Fields spent one year on patrol and was assigned to the Special Investigations Section. She specifically investigates vice, human trafficking and money laundering.

Fields is also a member of the North Fulton SWAT Negotiator team and a Task Force Officer with Homeland Security Investigations - Human Trafficking Group.

In addition to being named Outstanding Officer of the Year, Fields was bestowed the "Service above Self" Award - Roswell Rotary Club, End ITNOW and Rotary Action Group Against Slavery - March 2024. This award was presented by The Rotary and Gov. Kemp.

She was also recognized by Roswell Mayor Kurt Wilson and City Council for receiving the GACP Outstanding Officer of the Year award and for exemplary service to the city.

Roswell Detective DeWayne Gooden, recently retired, has been Fields' biggest mentor in law enforcement.

"Gooden knew I wanted to be a detective," said Fields, "and while I was still on patrol, he allowed me to work closely with him on two large cases, which ultimately allowed me to get to know detectives, enabled them to see my work ethic, and learn other aspects of the job."

"Gooden is a wealth of knowledge, and to this day, I still call him to ask for his advice if I need help or don't know the answer," she continued. "I know for a fact I would not be where I am today without his mentorship."

Fields said she loves her work, and her goal is to continue improving and working on her skills. She hopes to be able to share her own passion with others through teaching and speaking at law enforcement conferences.

"I feel very lucky to have accomplished so much quickly, but this job is always changing, technology evolves and the cases get more complicated," she said. "I love learning and will continue to always be hungry for knowledge, mentors, and contacts. Policing isn't that different from the business world. Contacts are everything and can make or break a case."

"I want to be known as a thorough detective in and outside the courtroom," continued Fields. "I want to teach and speak at conferences eventually, give back to those who want to learn, and share what I have done right, what I have done wrong, and how I could have done it better."

Meet Hayden Linton: Ark. scholarship recipient, future nurse

By CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

Hayden Linton was born in San Diego, Calif., but has called Rogers, Ark., home since the age of 3 when his dad retired from the Navy.

His hometown offers a powerful sense of community that Hayden appreciates.

"No matter where you go or what you are doing, you will always be greeted by happy people, with a smile on their face," he said, "In Rogers as a kid, it was also very rare to be bored. We have countless hidden gems behind every corner that make this city so entertaining to live in and so easy to call home."

His parents are built-in role models for serving the public in Rogers. Being a law enforcement officer was a dream of Hayden's dad, Steven Linton, since he was a child. He has enjoyed serving with Rogers Police Department for the past 16 years where, he said, "no two days are ever the same."

Hayden's mom is a teacher at Rogers Heritage High School, Hayden's alma mater as of May 2025. Not only does she help her students daily, but she was also able to help Hayden put together everything he needed to apply for the PBF Division scholarship.

It's easy for Hayden to name his parents as the greatest influences in his life.

"They have always been there for me, no matter what, and have been a great influence for what I want my family life to look like one day in the future," he said.

Seeing his parents' commitment to the community likely played a part in Hayden's choice to major in nursing. He plans to work as a nurse after college, to get real-life healthcare experience and to save up for medical school.

Then, eventually, he hopes to study anesthesiology and become a certified registered nurse anesthetist or

physician associate.

Both are roles which he said would "allow me to take on a more advanced role in patient care and make an even greater impact."

High school gave Hayden plenty of opportunities to be involved. He proudly represented RHHS on both the varsity baseball team and by serving as an officer Health Occupations Students of America. He received the Rogers-Lowell Chamber Award three times and was in the Rogers' Honor Academy too.

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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Jeffrey Pollock, vice-president of the Northwest Chapter of the Arkansas Police Benevolent Association, presents a check to Hayden Linton. With them are chapter Vice-President Calvin Frierson (l) and Hayden's father, Stephen. Hayden is from Rogers, Ark., and will be attending Drury University. He is majoring in nursing and hopes to become a CRNA or PA.

He was also an active member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and worked with Link Crew to foster a positive school environment and serve as a mentor to younger students.

Refereeing for Upward flag football and distributing meals to families in need through his church also kept him busy. Hayden accomplished all of this while maintaining a 4.2 GPA.

His skill as a pitcher has earned Hayden a place on the baseball team at Drury University in Springfield, Mo. Being able to continue playing the sport that he loves, while taking advantage of Drury's strong medical program, solidified his college decision.

It also helped that Springfield has many options for entertainment and fun things to do as a college student. Enjoying some of his favorites such as fishing, watching sports and playing sports video games should be easy to do in the area.

Finding a place for trivia contests may be something Hayden should try too. A little-known fact about him is he has a wealth of knowledge about baseball and football stats and history.

Steven Linton said he is "very appreciative of the support SSPBA has provided to Hayden with this scholarship." It is because of his membership in PBA that his son was eligible to apply.

Steven is grateful for the representation of the PBA and its overall support of law enforcement that he has observed in his years of membership.

Hayden expressed his thanks to the PBA as well.

"I am so thankful to receive this scholarship," he said. "This sum of money puts a huge dent in what I need to pay, and I could not be more grateful."

With Hayden now full swing into college life, his favor-

ite movie quote has probably run through his mind a time or two. It is from Rocky III, when Rocky and Apollo are training. Rocky is on the brink of giving up for the day and wants to push things off until the next day.

Then, Apollo emphatically tells Rocky, "There is no tomorrow!"

"This quote just hits me hard in the context it is used, because it is an inspiration to not be lazy and always to push yourself harder," Hayden said.



Hayden with his dad on Senior Prom night



Hayden pitching during a Heritage High School game



Hayden signing his letter of intent to play at Drury. From left to right are his mother, Harmony Linton, his little brother, Ethan Linton, Hayden and father, Steven Linton.

ABC Investigator Supervisor Keith Ford shares information

By CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

Seven billion dollars. That's billion with a "b."

That is what the alcoholic beverage business in Kentucky is estimated to be: a \$7 billion industry.

This industry is precisely what Keith Ford, as an investigator supervisor with the Kentucky Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, is tasked with helping to oversee.

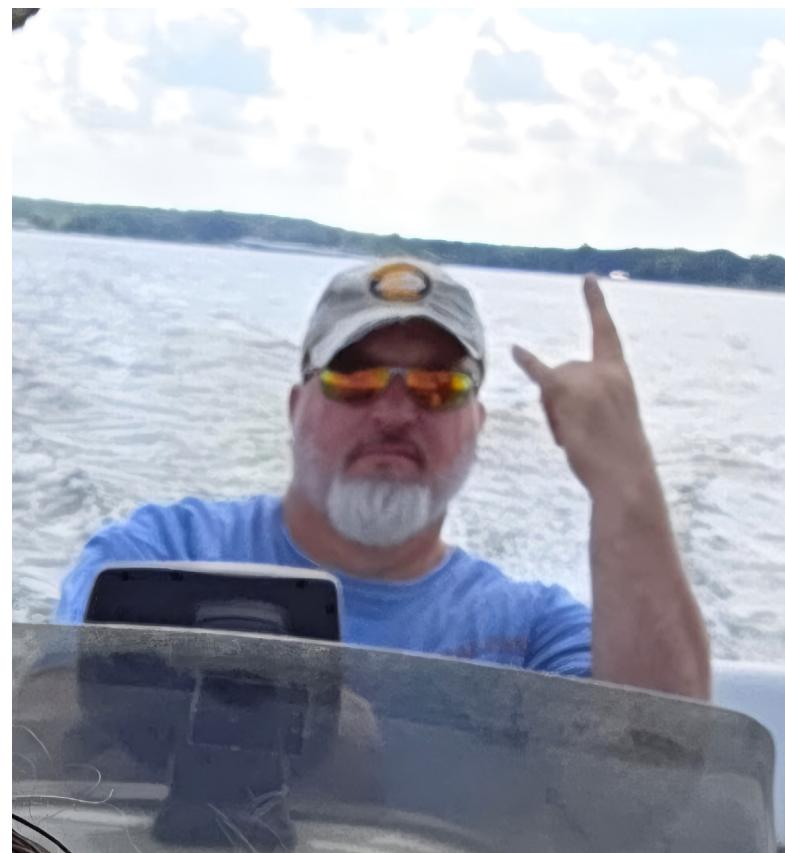
In his position, Ford manages seven investigators in Louisville-Jefferson County who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to the alcoholic beverage industry.

These investigators are sworn peace officers who have authority over criminal matters, as well as administrative authority over any entity with a license to manufacture, distribute, sell or serve alcohol.

"Ensuring the associated products and services are fit for use and consumption is crucial to maintaining the integrity of the industry," he said. "We investigators are responsible for facilitating alcohol licenses being issued by conducting initial site assessments and ensuring continued compliance by conducting site inspections at licensed premises.

"Investigators also respond to complaints -- sales to minors, sales by non-licensed entities and other alleged violations -- at all levels of the three-tier system: manufacturing (distilling, brewing), distribution and wholesaling, and retail sales and service," Ford continued.

After being a police officer and detective for 25 years prior to working with ABC, Ford knew how to "police." But in this new role of his, he found an entirely new realm of administrative regulations -- things one would not think of as being part of a police officer's job in the traditional sense. For example, there are at least three chapters of statutes specific to alcohol regulation and an entire code of administrative regulations as well. This means that being a sworn peace officer with the



Kentucky ABC Investigator Supervisor Keith Ford

authority given to an ABC investigator carries a great deal of responsibility with it.

"Being able to distinguish between criminal versus administrative and finding a balance when confronting non-compliance was an interesting, yet challenging, task when I started in this new career," he said. Ford is clear about his favorite part of working with ABC.

"Mostly my favorite part of being an ABC investigator is interviewing license applicants at the retail level -- bars, nightclubs, restaurants, etcetera, and learning about why he or she decided to open the next pizza joint or comedy club. Hearing their stories of 'I always wanted to open a music venue' or 'I make a great pizza, and I want to share it with everyone' has fascinated me."

In addition, his experience with ABC provided Ford with the knowledge and background he needed to be

a speaker in a recently-held seminar titled Fraud Academy. This program has a target audience of employees from all levels of banking including front line personnel, BSA officers, compliance officers, deposit specialists and security officers.

The Kentucky Bankers Association's webpage for the Fraud Academy explains the event to potential participants:

Fraud Academy is a pioneering initiative designed to arm bankers with the skills needed to detect and combat fraud. Our unique program features insights from experts across the DEA, FBI, the Secret Service, law enforcement, and the financial industry, offering a robust education in fraud prevention from those who know it best. With fraud costing every bank valuable time and money, our curriculum targets over eighteen types of fraud, including check fraud, elder fraud, cybercrimes, and introduces effective prevention tools. Equipping bankers with the knowledge to minimize fraud-related losses and protect your institution's bottom line."

"My role in this seminar was to peak on what (are) considered 'high risk businesses,'" said Ford. "The high-risk businesses, as far as banking is concerned, involve businesses that rely heavily on cash and the potential criminal activity that is associated with these types of businesses."

Ford's experience with ABC gives him a unique perspective since ABC regulates liquor stores, convenience stores, nightclubs, bars, restaurants and gentlemen's clubs.

During his presentation at 2025's Fraud Academy, he was able to share some experiences of high-risk businesses engaging in the marketing and sale of counterfeit goods, violations of gambling laws, violations of laws pertaining to drug trafficking and marketing and sale of drug paraphernalia, violations of FDA requirements, tobacco laws, and other specific violations that normally go unnoticed by financial institutions.

"The purpose of my presentation was to bring awareness of the potential for criminal activity to the banking industry."

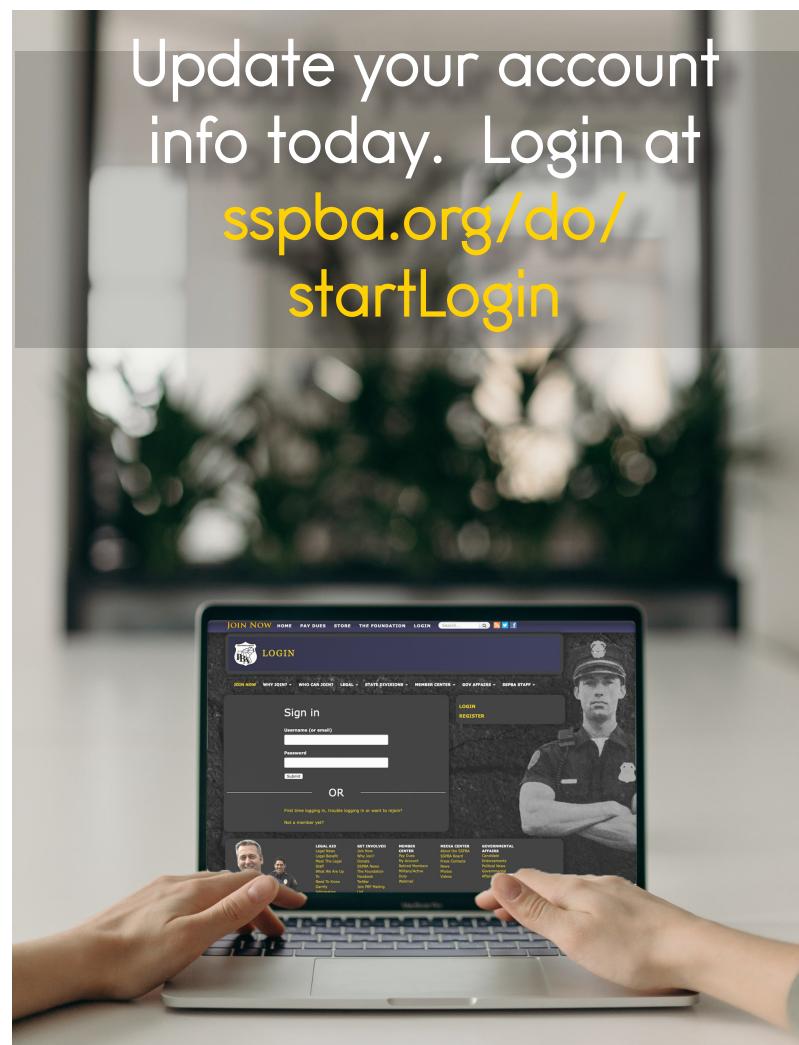
Ford first became aware of Fraud Academy through Shane Ensminger – a friend and former supervisor of

Ford – who recruited him to help with the event. Ensminger retired from the Lexington Police and went on to become the director of the Financial Intelligence and Security Unit at Central Bank in Lexington. He, along with Jessie Southworth of the Kentucky Banking Association, was crucial in the development of the Fraud Academy program.

"Since its inception, the seminar has grown exponentially with members and attendees from across the globe," Ford said.

In the past few years, Ensminger has conducted this seminar on his own. However, Ford was added to the roster this year to share the special insight that working with ABC affords him.

The expertise that Ford brought to the Fraud Academy is also culled from the totality of his law enforcement





Ford with his wife, Charity, and sons Logan, Sawyer and Cooper

experience. Ford has served for 33.5 years, working in several roles during that time. Aside from his position with ABC, he's also been a narcotics detective as well as a general detective.

Immediately after Ford earned his B.A. in criminal justice from Marshall University in Huntington, W.V., he began his LE career as a corrections officer at the Ca-

bell County Jail in Huntington, a job he held for nine months before he started with the Lexington, Ky., Division of Police, in February 1993.

Lexington PD sent Ford and the other new recruits to rookie training at the Department of Criminal Justice Training in Richmond, Ky., for the Basic Law Enforcement Academy, Class #220. He remained with Lexing-

ton until his retirement in 2012.

Once retired from Lexington, he became a detective with the Versailles, Ky., PD for five years. Ford then went on to work with the Kentucky Department of ABC, beginning as an investigator in 2017 – the same year he obtained his master's degree in criminal justice administration from the University of the Cumberlands. In February 2020, he stepped into his role with ABC.

Ford said he's been fortunate in his policing career to have some wonderful role models and mentors.

"From FTOs, supervisors, managers and just outstanding teammates, I have been very lucky," he said.

On the personal side of things, Ford and his wife, Charity, have been married since 2004 and have three sons – Cooper and Logan, twins who are 18, and Sawyer, who's 20. He's had discussions with Logan, a criminal justice major who wants to be a detective.

When discussing a career in law enforcement, his son assured him that he is ready for the job.

"A police academy will train me to be the police in current times and that's all I will know. It will be fine," said Logan.

Ford's advice about a career in law enforcement comes down to this: "Learn as much as you can about the job, the career and the pitfalls associated with it. Make an informed decision but rely on the training of today's academy to work in today's field. It is not the same, (as it was in the past) – and maybe that is OK."

He also shared a moment when his son, Sawyer, poured salt in Ford's wounds regarding his long record of police work.

"My oldest son was invited to join me and some friends at a restaurant to watch Monday Night Football last year," said Ford. "He declined. I asked him why, and his response was this: 'Dad, I don't want to sit around you and your friends while you all tell the same three stories of when you were the police in

the 1900s.'"

With children old enough to tease him about being from the 1900s, dealing with an empty nest is just par for the course. But though their nest is empty, the Fords' gas tank needs to be full. Mom and Dad have stayed busy on fall Saturdays this year as all three of their sons play football for different schools in the area.

"Sawyer is a punter at University of the Commonwealths, Cooper is a long snapper at Murray State University and Logan is a kicker/punter at Lindsey Wilson University," said Ford. "We have been at one game or another every Saturday since the end of August and we have been fortunate to have attended two games in one day on two occasions, but that was a lot of driving."

When they find spare time, the family has a house at Kentucky Lake and enjoy getting away there as much as possible.

"Last summer we hit it just about every weekend," Ford said. "Boating, swimming and keeping up the maintenance of the house seems to occupy most of my time."

He does find time to fit in Cincinnati Bengals football, calling himself a fiercely loyal fan. Despite the frequent disappointment that the team seems to generate, Ford admits he will always forgive them and take them back.

When working in his life-long profession, protecting and serving his community are just second nature for Keith Ford. He and his counterparts have a big responsibility in Kentucky's ABC agency.

He isn't afraid to branch out to try new things as he's gained experience, either, whether it's ensuring compliance, responding to complaints or speaking to a group of bankers on avoiding fraudulent activity.

A favorite quote of his sums up his approach to his career perfectly, "Decide what you want to be in life and start being it."

The attorney behind VAPBA's collective bargaining breakthroughs

By Rich Goszka
VAPBA/WVPBA STAFF REPRESENTATIVE

For law enforcement officers across Virginia, the past several years have marked a turning point. After decades without collective bargaining rights, officers finally gained access to a structured and credible system that allowed them to advocate for their pay, safety and working conditions in a meaningful way.

Standing quietly but decisively at the center of that transformation has been attorney Will Thetford of Simms Showers LLP, whose calm approach, meticulous preparation and deep respect for the officers he represents have helped reshape the landscape of policing in the Commonwealth.

Thetford and Simms Showers were assigned by PBA to handle the legal side of VAPBA's collective bargaining efforts.

Long before bargaining became an option, Thetford and his firm were already advocating for officers facing disciplinary disputes, procedural violations and workplace challenges.

But even effective legal representation could only respond to individual incidents. Officers lacked a mechanism to correct the broader, systemic issues affecting morale, pay equity, scheduling and the ability to work in an environment where expectations were clear and consistent.

When the Commonwealth finally authorized public-sector collective bargaining, Thetford understood immediately how transformational it could be, and he stepped forward to guide officers through the complex process of building bargaining committees, interpreting new ordinances and translating officer concerns into polished, data-driven proposals.

His work quickly became foundational. He served as chief negotiator for the first police collective bargaining agreement achieved in Virginia since the 1970s, setting a modern template that would shape negotiations elsewhere in the state. As jurisdictions realized what was



Attorney Will Thetford

possible, Fairfax County, Alexandria, Charlottesville and others turned to him for guidance. Each locality had its own political climate and internal challenges, yet officers consistently credit Thetford's steady hand, deep legal knowledge and clear communication for helping them secure fair and forward-looking agreements.

In Fairfax County, the results were especially significant. Over the contract's first two and a half years, Fairfax officers saw double-digit percentage pay gains as a direct outcome of the bargaining led by Thetford and his team.

The contract modernized the county's compensation system, clarified promotional pathways, improved wellness provisions and strengthened scheduling and assignment processes. Officers often describe it as the first time their compensation and

working conditions truly reflected the professionalism and expectations of their roles.

Fairfax VAPBA Chapter President Steve Monahan experienced this transformation firsthand, explaining that Will was instrumental in helping the Fairfax Chapter secure its first collective bargaining contract. He added that Thetford "continues to be the trusted attorney we rely on whenever contract issues arise," and that his professionalism and steady guidance make him "an invaluable partner to our officers."

The same level of impact can be seen in Alexandria, where Thetford helped negotiate a contract that brought long-needed structure and fairness to a department ready for greater transparency and stability. The agreement clarified assignment and transfer processes,

strengthened shift differentials, improved labor-management communication and enhanced procedural protections that give officers confidence in how workplace decisions are made.

Officers there often remark that the contract introduced predictability into a profession known for its unpredictability, grounding major workplace decisions in clear standards rather than unwritten expectations.

Charlottesville's agreement is equally significant and stands as one of the most comprehensive CBAs in the state. Officers there gained improved investigatory protections, fairer promotional and training processes, enhanced wellness and return-to-work provisions and clearly defined policies governing take-home vehicles, K-9 assignments, overtime practices, and body-



SCHOLARSHIPS

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worn cameras. Specialty pay, court pay, FTO compensation, shift safety minimums, benefits and leave provisions were also strengthened.

The transformation has been deeply felt among Charlottesville's rank and file. Officer Courteny Lowe expressed it clearly, saying, "Will Thetford has provided a knowledge base and professionalism that is unmatched. His abilities to write up contract language, identify potential issues, mitigate problems before they happen, and wordsmith solutions have been a huge help to both our department and to the city we serve."

"Will has worked above and beyond the call on multiple contracts from their infancies that will set the precedent for collective bargaining throughout the state," Lowe continued.

Across each of these jurisdictions, one theme is consistent: Thetford brings a unique ability to understand the daily realities of policing and translate them into fair, enforceable contract language. Officers who have worked with him say he listens carefully, prepares thoroughly, and approaches every issue with an eye



Thetford during a conference presentation

Join us on **Friday, January 23**, as the PBF, SSPBA, and MSPBA conduct an informational seminar about PTSD and law enforcement suicide. Hosted at the **Broadmoor Baptist Church** in **Madison, MS** from **8 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Facts for LEOs:

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.



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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.



Thetford outside courthouse, post-jury trial.

toward long-term solutions rather than short-term wins.

His style is not combative but collaborative, grounded in data, practicality and a genuine belief that officers and communities both benefit when the workplace is predictable, professional, and supportive.

His professional background prepared him well for this role. A graduate of Regent University School of Law and Patrick Henry College, Thetford clerked for the Rockingham County Circuit Court and completed internships with a federal district judge, a Commonwealth's Attorney's Office and a First Amendment litigation firm.

Over the course of his career, he has represented hundreds of officers, litigated complex cases in state and federal courts, defended multimillion-dollar judgments before the Supreme Court of Virginia, conducted independent investigations and written extensively on employment and constitutional issues.

Yet what distinguishes him most is not his resume but his approach – precise, respectful and grounded in a sincere commitment to the officers he serves.

That approach has earned him admiration from colleagues throughout the profession. Joni Fletcher Cawthon, director of Legal Services for the SSPBA, described Thetford's impact by noting that he "brings a valuable combination of skill, professionalism and genuine care for the officers he represents."

She emphasized that his work in Virginia has established a model for effective and ethical officer-focused representation.

At the statewide level, the sentiment is the same. VAPBA President Joe Woloszyn has said that Will has been "a transformative force for law enforcement in Virginia."

He noted that Thetford's expertise, dedication and integrity have strengthened chapters, empowered officers and elevated the collective bargaining process statewide.

Woloszyn added that VAPBA is proud to have him as a trusted partner and advocate for the men and women who serve communities throughout the Commonwealth.

As more jurisdictions adopt collective bargaining ordinances and others prepare to follow, it is clear that Will Thetford's work has helped define a new era for Virginia law enforcement.

Through his thoughtful guidance, data-driven preparation and unwavering respect for the officers he represents, he has ensured that their voices are finally reflected in the policies, pay structures and working conditions that shape their careers.

For many officers, the story of collective bargaining in Virginia is the story of being heard for the first time in decades. For many of those chapters, the person who helped make that possible, the person who sat across the table turning their concerns into meaningful change, was their attorney: Will Thetford.

LAPBA scholarship recipient is rooted in faith and family

BY CINDY BAUGHER
COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT COORDINATOR

Katee Woodward, recipient of the Louisiana Division scholarship from the Police Benevolent Foundation, is abundantly clear when reflecting on her gratitude and good fortune.

“Anything and everything I have been blessed with in life is by the grace of God,” said Woodward. “I can only give thanks to Him for all my blessings like this in my life. He already has a plan for me, and He knows what is best for me and my future.”

Katee is quick to give the credit to her parents for her solid upbringing and for “showing her God’s love every day.”

Katee’s father, Robby Woodward, is a Louisiana State trooper and her mother, Sandy Woodward, is a secretary at the school from which Katee graduated in 2025, Ouachita Christian School. Located in Katee’s hometown of Monroe, La., both the school and her hometown hold a special place in her heart.

“I have loved growing up in north Louisiana,” she said, “because it is where my mom and my grandparents were raised. I got to grow up having my grandparents less than 30 minutes down the road. I grew up in the same school as my mom and her sisters, and have gone to church with people who grew up with my mom. Growing up here has made me never want to live anywhere else because it is home.”

Katee is remarkably close to her family and even chose her college, in part, because her sister, Gracie, goes there. Her sister previously received a PBF scholarship.

“I am going to college at Harding University in Searcy, Ark.,” said Woodward. “I picked this school because my sister goes there and I have been going to church and basketball camp there since middle school, making me slowly fall in love with it.”

The Christ-centered education available at Harding appealed to her as well.



Katee Woodward with her proud dad, Louisiana State Trooper Robby Woodward, at her graduation

At Harding, Katee will be majoring in exercise science. She hopes selecting this major will enable her to find a career that combines her love of sports and helping people. She pictures herself eventually collaborating with athletes as an athletic trainer.

As an athlete, Katee played basketball throughout middle and high school, and earned district and parish awards along with a state basketball award.

She was also a member of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, National Honor Society, Art Club, Impact Club and Foreign Language Club, holding leadership roles in several of these.

Academically, Katee challenged herself by taking honors level, AP and dual enrollment classes throughout high school. By graduation, Katee was sixth in her class with a 5.27 GPA.



Trooper Woodward with his daughters, Katee and Gracie

Katee said she feels grateful to be the recipient of the scholarship from the PBF, calling it a blessing to have people willing to help students get a college education. Her father noted that, through his membership in PBA, he “experienced a connection throughout the region to help and assist my fellow law enforcement officers but especially their families.”

“My older daughter was blessed with a scholarship as well and it was very beneficial to her beginning her collegiate career,” he said.

The trooper encouraged fellow officers “to join, forth-with.”

Katee’s desire to help people by becoming an athletic trainer is not unlike her father’s feeling about serving the citizens of Louisiana through law enforcement for the past 29 years.

“The strong undeniable desire and determination to serve, give, love and protect,” Woodward said of his reasons for going into law enforcement. “Constantly striving to help preserve lives and property while working to improve the quality of life for all within the state of Louisi-

ana alongside all fellow servants.”

With her father serving as a trooper, Katee pointed out that his profession has given her a unique perspective in how she views first responders.

“I see firsthand the sacrifices that they go through,” she said. “His willingness and aspiration to make a difference in the state’s safety show me just how hard he works and pushes me to work just as hard in any profession I take.”

Katee’s parents are proud of her and believe her choice to be an athletic trainer aligns well with her own desire to serve and help others.

“Katee’s involvement in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and in Southeast Leadership Training for Christ has made her so comfortable leading, guiding and in her own fellowship that I am confident this scholarship will be used wisely by her in achieving her goals at Harding University,” her dad said.

When it is time to decompress, Katee might be found drawing, cooking or watching television and spending time with any dog. She admitted she has an unusual trait when it comes to her food preferences: odd combinations.

“Broccoli in ketchup, pickles in cheese dip, and,” she said, “jalapenos on just about anything and everything.”

As she steps into this next phase of her life at Harding, Katee remains grounded by her family and her faith. She named her brother, oldest of the four siblings, as the greatest influence in her life.

“He truly shows what a Christ-led life looks like, and I aspire to have the love and compassion that he shows to everyone,” she said.

Katee also shared that her favorite, and only, leader is God.

“He is the true source of all my decisions and everything I do. I strive to do everything in His glory,” she said. “He sent His son to die a gruesome death on the cross for our sins, it is my duty to live my life every day for Him.”