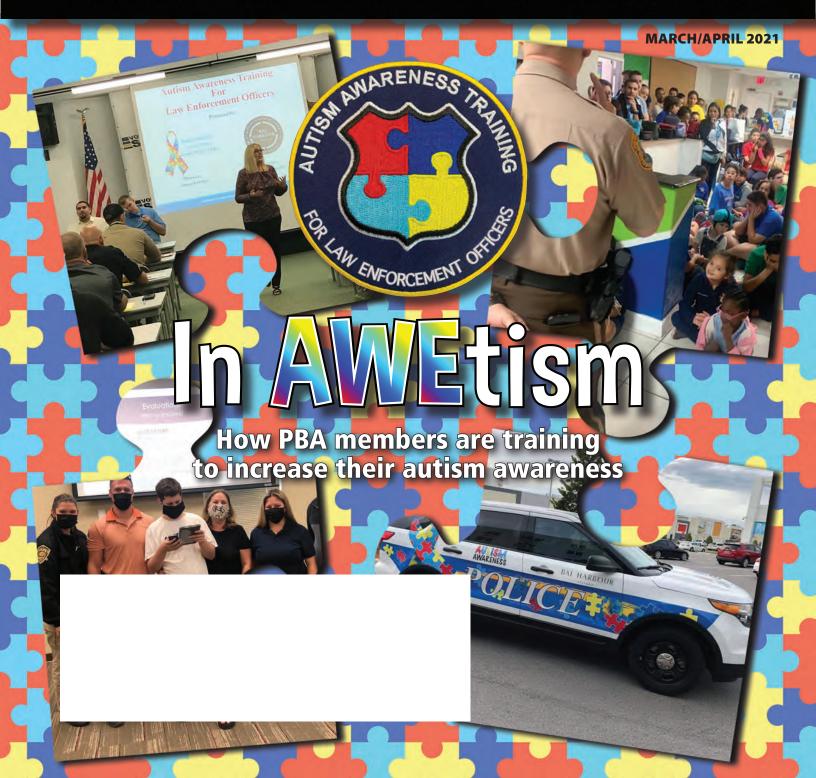


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IN THIS ISSUE OF THE HEAT

COVER STORY



To understand how important autism awareness training could be for law enforcement officers, Bal Harbour Detective Hector Gonzalez needed to look no further than his son, Christopher. Gonzalez has worked with experts throughout the state to develop training for police to better respond to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, like his son, and learn how to help them.

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INSIDE STORIES









Main Number: 561-757-0464 Advertising: 201-880-7288 Editorial: 201-370-4082 Distribution: 201-880-7288 Email: cops@PBAHeatMagazine.com

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VOLUME 39, NO. 2

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THE PRES SAYS

Signs that we are moving in the right direction



STEADMAN STAHL

I caught up with Major Barosela, the supervisor of the Miami-Dade Psychological Services Unit, a few weeks ago. She was telling me that her unit was higher than normal in the number of calls received from members for services. Officers are having a tough time dealing with this COVID, the stress of relationships and everything that's going on. So they've had a great increase in calls for service.

And I think that's a good sign.

Members reaching out for help to look out for their mental health is another sign of hope for this year. That them-against-us mentality fostered by the election has passed. We see members wanting to take care of their health and getting vaccinated. The infection rate is going down. The economy looks good.

We have our politicians that are sticking true to their beliefs and their words in supporting us. And we're getting legislation passed at the state level to strengthen the profession, not weaken it.

We just have to keep chipping away at it.

It's like the COVID vaccine. Nobody wanted it at first. But then as people started getting the shots, they realized that nobody is dying from them. So we're seeing a bit of an increase of officers wanting to get it and family members wanting to get it. Members are calling to ask, "Where can I go to get the shots?" In mid-March, the mayor opened it up for every police officer to get it in Miami-Dade County.

I was hesitant to get it, but I got my second dose on March 20. I educated myself about it. I talked to some people who had COVID and said they regretted not getting the vaccine. I think the initial scare came because the virus came last February and by December, we already had a vaccine.

In government that never happens. Nothing ever moves that fast. So how did it happen? We had a lot of smart people who put a lot of stuff to the side and said, "Let's focus in on this thing." Just like we did with finding a vaccine for other illnesses. That's one good thing about mankind: If you put your mind to it, you can solve just about any problems that we have.

Seems like we had a lot of officers who had family members get COVID, some who got really sick and some who even died from it. They realized it's the real deal. It's like cancer. I think everybody knows somebody that's touched by cancer, and we don't take it lightly anymore.

So we're seeing good signs. We're attempting to get things back to a normalcy. We're shifting out of lockdown. We're getting back to our normal day-to-day life. I see people not taking the small stuff for granted anymore. We have to stay focused on what is really most important in our lives.

The real estate market is strong down here. The economy is doing well. We have been dealing with the contract negotiations with some of the governments, and I don't think the economy is as bad as they were trying to make it out to be. And in fact, it's stronger than I think that most people

There's also hope because we have a governor and state legislators who are supportive of law enforcement. I think that that's another big thing that has helped us out so much here with getting out of this negative environment we had prior to the election. We have a governor, an attorney general and legislators that are putting public safety first. This defunding we keep hearing about, we're not seeing it anywhere in Florida. In fact, it looks like it's going to keep moving in the other direction.

In addition to the Law Enforcement Protection Act the governor put forth late last year, there's another bill the legislature has put out there. The Impeding, Provoking, or Harassing Law Enforcement Officers bill, which is sponsored by State Representative Alex Rizo from Miami-Dade, will prevent these police agitators who show up with their cell phones and try to draw cops offside and consistently barrage them with harassment.

Our Miami-Dade County commissioners also unanimously passed a resolution supporting the bill, which keeps people from being closer than within 30 feet of an officer while they're conducting their work. We call it a halo bill. They are putting a halo around us to protect us, to keep people from sticking their cell phones in our faces and trying to provoke us.

Our attorneys from the South Florida PBA helped write the language for the bill. It's a big deal, and it's going to move forward. And it's another good sign of how we are looking forward and things are looking up for us.

Another sign is the way many of the cities are treating our members in contract negotiations. We have some cities that have been great. We continue to settle contracts that show they are making public safety first.

I've said it before, and I will say it again and again. We've gone through hurricanes. We've made it through other disasters. The one constant has always been first responders.

And that's been a common theme here in South Florida: They are not going to cut public safety.



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How I made my decision on the vaccine



JOHN A. **JENKINS EXECUTIVE** VICE **PRESIDENT**

What is the new normal? We all have our own definitions or assessment of what our new normal is as it relates to ourselves and family. I, for one, have made changes to wash my hands more frequently, use hand sanitizer, wear masks as much as possible, try to dine outdoors and sanitize my home and office regularly.

I found myself asking, Is this enough? I did my own research and spoke to my primary care physicians and several friends who practice in different genres of the medical profession. Trust me, I had many friends tell me the pros and cons, and I listened and read about all the many conspiracy theories. I can tell you - some of the arguments

and conspiracies were far-fetched in my opinion and downright hilarious.

With all the information, I made a sound decision that I felt worked best for me, and I received the vaccine for COVID-19. Although everyone's body reacts differently, I can tell you my experience left my arm sore for a couple of days, and I was fatigued the following day after the inoculation. We all must assess our individual situations and make a sound decision for what is best for you and your family. Do not rely on those conspiracy theories, rumors, naysayers or haters.

This has nothing to do with political views or parties, in my opinion. Have politics come into play, with politicians using our lives and slowing down our local economy as a political pawn? Yes, but as I have stressed in previous articles, remember who those politicians are and whether their politics were good for you, your communities, the economy and the betterment of society. Keep notes for yourself and remember those politicians when they come around asking for endorsements and monetary contributions and more importantly, your vote.

As you may or may not be aware, the South Florida PBA has more than 6,700 members throughout Monroe and Miami-Dade counties. Many of our members are sworn, but we do have nonsworn members who are heavily relied upon, such as police complaint officers and dispatchers, criminalists, fingerprint tech-



Glad to see MDPD Detective Christopher Fernandez, right, doing well. He is a true hero.

nicians, court support specialists, crime scene technicians, the animal services department and transit workers, just to name a few.

We also have many members for whom we do not handle collective bargaining for their agency, but their employees are members for the many benefits the South Florida PBA has to offer, especially what I consider the best and only full-time legal team by a police union in South Florida. Those members are very much a part of the PBA family, and we are proud to serve them.

With that said, the PBA wants to be made aware of any special events, promotional ceremonies, graduations, swearing-in ceremonies, retirements or anything that your agency or section is hosting. Social media is a very helpful tool, but some events and gatherings do go unnoticed or unrecognized. It is impossible for us to be at everything, but we are committed to trying to ensure that we represent, so I challenge you to reach out to me and keep us informed. As always, if you have any questions, concerns or developing issues, or just need to vent, please do not hesitate to contact me at 305-593-0044 or via email at jenkins@sflpba.org.

STAHL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

You have a governor that has dropped anchor that you're not going to be defunding our police officers and you're not going to be taking money from them. And he stands with the men and women of law enforcement.

We are also trying to hold our glass-half-full perspective on our annual South Florida PBA gala. It had gotten bigger and bigger every year. Pre-pandemic, we had record-breaking numbers. More than 1,000 people were attending it.

There's a lot of work and effort that goes into it. There's a lot of pre-planning and stuff like that. And since we don't know where we're going to be at in May, we decided to postpone it and see where we're at a few months from now.

So there's a possibility you could still have one this year. We would still like to try. We'd love to still have it. Maybe a smaller version of it.

We are absolutely going to select and honor our Officers of the Year. As we did last year, we approached it differently. After we selected those members who went above and beyond the call of duty, we made sure that they were recognized and acknowledged. We went to their roll calls and presented them with the plaques and honored their accomplishments.

We're going to do that again this year, and we'd like to have more

of a celebration. That's how we should look at the way we are moving forward. We should celebrate the way things are going.

On March 16, I joined members of the Florida State PBA to attend the funeral for Tampa officer Jesse Madsen. He was killed on March 9 while responding to calls about a wrong-way driver on Interstate 275.

He intentionally maneuvered his patrol SUV into the path of a speeding, impaired driver in an attempt to stop him and save others. He was a husband and father of three and a Marine. He was a seven-time Lifesaving Award winner.

He lost his life protecting somebody he didn't even know. As a lot of our officers go through every day. I think Jesse reminds us that you can't take life for granted. And that life is fragile.

Stay safe, my friends.

Steadman Stahl, President steadman@sflpba.org

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The threat to crucial qualified immunity protections



The South Florida Police Benevolent Association is very much opposed to efforts to change the qualified immunity protections for law enforcement officers, especially our members. Qualified immunity allows officers to perform their duties without fear of having to defend themselves against false claims for damages and protects all

reasonable law enforcement officers, except those who are intentionally breaking the law. Good cops hate bad cops. Qualified immunity only protects good cops.

Qualified immunity is a protection for the policing profession, and any weakening modification will have a horrible impact on law enforcement officers' ability to fulfill their public safety mission. It also will devastate the profession, especially with regard to recruitment and retention, and may limit officers' ability and willingness to respond to critical incidents without hesitation. Qualified immunity protections allow police officers to respond to incidents without pause and make split-second decisions, while relying on the current state of the law in making those decisions. This protection is essential.

Additionally, qualified immunity does not prevent individuals from recovering damages from police officers who knowingly violate an individual's constitutional rights. It is untrue that the legal doctrine shields bad officers engaging in criminal conduct. We will always protect our members' rights, and our members will protect the public's safety, but our members need the protections currently afforded by qualified immunity.

The anti-cop rhetoric and antics such as eliminating qualified immunity, defunding the police, political prosecutions and taking away our "military equipment," among others, are not working anywhere in our country and have taken a toll on morale. Additionally, they have caused a lot of officers to be reluctant to engage in the type of proactive policing I did as an RID sergeant in the '90s, when our robberies were over 8,000 per year. We were deployed by stats, and we reduced robberies dramatically. In 2020, there were 965 robberies. For the past several years, politicians, academics and the talkinghead media have claimed that proactive policing of low-level crimes, also known



Congratulations to Palmetto Bay Officer Madeline Brodeur on her retirement.



Congratulations to Officer Kristine Patten on her retirement after 30 years.



Congratulations to Aviation Officer David Dooley on his retirement.



Congratulations to Sergeant Henry Sacramento on his retirement.

as "broken windows" policing, is a waste of police resources; they, instead, push community programs. The problem is, the really bad guys out there are laughing at us because no one is proactively looking for them, and they will continue their criminal behavior until caught or killed from the hazards of their profession.

Our great members will still put on the badge and still rush to crime scenes after someone has already been victimized. Unfortunately, we will still get beaten, stabbed and shot protecting the good from evil, and that large area of discretionary proactive policing, which aims to prevent crime before it occurs, will take a hit.

A recently retired officer told me: "Any cop doing enforcement today without be-



Congratulations to Airport Detective Raul Esteban on his retirement.

ing mandated is crazy." The modern-day narrative about policing has become very political. When powerful players in society, such as celebrities, professional athletes, politicians and the media, send the message that proactive policing is racist, the cops will have no choice but to follow orders to do less. Our members will always show up to their calls and do their jobs as mandated.

It's the above-and-beyond that has a huge positive impact on reducing crime. Remember: Be careful what you ask for, as vou might get it.

As always, stay safe, wait for your backup and if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 305-593-0044 or greenwell@sflpba.

Educate yourself on the Florida Retirement System



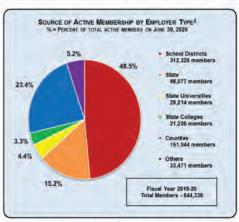
CAPTAIN NIZAM "ISH" **ISHMAEL TREASURER**

The Miami-Dade Police Department just completed its promotional testing process for 2020-2021 for the ranks of police sergeant, police lieutenant and police captain. Congratulations to all the MDPD officers, sergeants and lieutenants who placed on the respective police sergeant, police lieutenant and police captain

eligibility lists. There is so much speculation about how many promotions will be made. Do your homework, and do not listen to the rumor mill; contact me, and I will help you figure out where you stand. There are many variables to consider, such as employees who are in the investment plan who may retire at any given moment. There are some who will be in the 25-and-out group, meaning no Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP) for them. There are always the

ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP DATA

	ACTIVE MEMBERS BY SYSTEM/CLASS ¹	
		# of Members
FRS:	Regular Class	550,053
	Special Risk Class	75,161
	Special Risk Administrative Support Class	107
	Elected Officers' Class	
Senior Management Service Class		7,771
	Renewed Membership:	
	Regular Class	7,691
Special Risk Class		1,182
	Special Risk Administrative Support Class	1
	Elected Officers' Class	113
Senior Management Service Class		209
	Subtotal (FRS only):	644,328
Teach	ers' Retirement System	8
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences ²		2
	Subtotal (other systems):	10
	TOTAL (all systems):	644,338



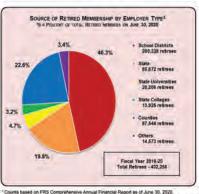
ones in the DROP who will not complete the full 60 months. They are just one bad day away from leaving.

I always encourage all employees in the FRS to learn about their retirement benefits. According to the Division of Retirement, the FRS Pension Plan is currently the fourth-largest state retirement system in the U.S., with more than 2.6 million active, retired and terminated vested and nonvested members and \$162 billion in assets. The division pays out \$11 billion a year in retiree benefits, maintains the service history, vesting and membership status records and collects nearly \$4.5 billion annually in employer and employee contributions from more than 1,000 employers for all FRS members.

According to the latest FRS membership data, as of June 30, 2020, there are 644,338 active members, consisting of regular class, special risk class, special risk administrative support class, elected officers' class and senior management service class. There are 33,593 members currently participating in the DROP. There are also 432,258 retired members who have earned and are currently enjoving their FRS. I salute the retirees for their service!

RETIRED MEMBERSHIP DATA





Tough times ahead — 2021 Legislative Session

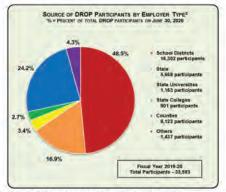
I want to encourage everyone in the FRS to monitor SB 84, which is sponsored by Senate Governmental Oversight and Accountability Chairman Ray Rodrigues, who is a Republican representing Estero, Florida. Estero is a village in Lee County, Florida, with a population of just over 22,000.

This bill closes the pension plan (defined benefit) to new enrollees and requires all new enrollees to participate in the investment plan (defined contribution), effective July 1, 2022. The bill does not impact the rights of any current FRS enrollees to select participation in the pension plan or the investment plan. Changes included in the bill pertain only to FRS members initially enrolled in the system on or after July 1, 2022. SB 84 is 32 pages long and can be found on the website www.myfloridahouse.gov. It will be very interesting to see what this bill develops into. As I stated above, stay informed with facts and do not listen to the rumors.

Please take some time to review all the information (videos, bulletins and newsletters) available to each of you about the FRS at www.myfrs.com. Please feel free to contact me at ish@sflpba.org or 305-593-0044.

DROP PARTICIPANT DATA





A part of something bigger than ourselves



LIEUTENANT JERMAINE LAWSON SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

I hope that the year so far is going amazingly well for everyone and that your March is off to a great start. On behalf of the PBA and the Board of Directors, I would like to use this opportunity to congratulate all members (MDCR and Monroe County) on their recent promotions. I want to wish every single member

nothing but the very best in their new positions. All your hard work and sacrifice have paid off. Nothing good comes easy.

The life of a law enforcement officer is not always easy. We face challenges and hardships like everybody else. Incidents involving law enforcement are tough on families. Officer Bautista's home was devastated by an electrical fire in December of last year, leaving the house uninhabitable. Officer Bautista and his family were displaced, and their personal belongings, along with their pets, were lost in the fire. It is never an easy task to regroup and to pick up the pieces, and a devastation of that magnitude is very hard to take.

On Jan. 15, 2021, MDCR and the PBA hosted a benefit car wash with all proceeds going to the Bautista family. The PBA would like to personally acknowledge and thank the Public Affairs Bureau, which was key in getting the information disseminated department-wide. Other key participants included the TGK Administration allowing us to host the event on their facility grounds, MDPD officers being present at the event, helping volunteers wash cars and getting their own vehicles washed, all the MDCR officers who volunteered their time to help, all the people who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make this fundraiser possible and all the retirees who came out to support it. We cannot express our thanks enough to all those who supported this event — it would not have been possible without your generosity. I know this is a very small step, but the outpouring of support for Officer Bautista and his family was overwhelming.







The MDCR and the PBA hosted a benefit car wash



MDCR Director Daniel Junior helping out at the benefit car wash.



The South Florida PBA present a donation of funds raised at the car wash to MDCR Officer C. Bautista.



From left to right, Transportation Officers G. Thrower and R. Palaez, Corporal Ramjattan and Officer A. Robinson.

Donations came in from complete strangers, like Alyssa Soto, who said with a brother in law enforcement, tragedies like this hit close to home for her family. Alyssa said she heard about the car wash on the radio and decided to bring her car out and donate money to the family.

"It's amazing to see how all these departments come together," Soto said. "It's cool to see people coming together to support a good cause."

This is just one of the many wonderful things that can be achieved when hands and hearts join together. There is strength in numbers that will only be realized when we come together. When we pull together for a united cause, the power becomes unlimited. The PBA would like to extend a personal thank you to everyone, including the community, in making this fundraiser a success, despite its tragic theme. The change or transformation that occurs from our community is something greater than what just a small portion of the community or an individual can achieve. Bringing people together through a shared activity spreads good will and makes the act of giving more satisfying for everyone. I know there might be skepticism, but only together, as a community, can we give beyond our individual means. Participation is essential in becoming a part of something that is bigger than ourselves.

On to a very sad note: In the month of February, our department suffered another heartbreak. We were again in mourning for the loss of one of our own. Officer Llanes became our second casualty of the deadly COVID-19 virus. To make matters worse, he was one of our longest-serving members. Officer Llanes served MDCR in commendable fashion for more than three decades. A funeral service is never a good thing, but it allows us the opportunity to pay our last respects. On behalf of the PBA and the Board of Directors, I would like to extend our deepest sympathy and. most especially, our prayers of support to the Llanes family.

Since his passing, there have been

some memorable stories about this remarkable man. Let us honor the sacrifice that Officer Llanes made for our department and his community. The outpouring of support from the law enforcement community was phenomenal. Their demonstration of honor, unity and brotherhood is a sight never to be forgotten.

Even though recent figures suggest that COVID numbers are now on the decline, we must continue to make a valiant effort to keep our surroundings and work areas cleaned and sanitized. Members are encouraged to stay home when feeling ill, avoid close contact with people who are sick, wash your hands often, be alert for symptoms, follow guidelines if symptoms develop, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, and stay apprised of guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Please feel free to contact me at lawson@sflpba.org or at 305-593-0044.

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Collective bargaining refresher



ANDREW AXELRAD GENERAL COUNSEL

Section 6 of the very first Article of the Florida Constitution states, in part: "The right of employees, by and through a labor organization, to bargain collectively shall not be denied or abridged." This is the foundation of collective bargaining rights in Florida and is so important that it is at the very beginning of the Constitution.

As we approach "bargaining season," which really is close to a year-round process, it is important to remember how bargaining works and what the PBA does on your behalf. State law requires that no bargaining agreement can be more than three years, so we generally try to negotiate three-

year agreements. This is not always the case, as some municipalities, like Homestead, routinely negotiate two-year agreements. Also, from a strategic standpoint, a shorter agreement sometimes makes sense. Strategy is the key word, and it drives everything in bargaining.

That can sometimes be frustrating for members, who may want to know everything that is going on at all times. While in a perfect world there is no issue with that, we know that often despite our best efforts, when innermost strategy is shared too much, management becomes aware of it — which defeats the purpose of having a strategy. That is not to state that anyone is intentionally leaking information, but as we all know, the more people with information, the less it stays private.

The first step in the bargaining process is obtaining information from the bargaining unit about what the wants and needs are. This can be through a bargaining unit meeting, sending out surveys, or any number of other ways. Generally, we will know what the first few priorities are, including enhanced pension benefits for those bargaining units not in FRS, compensation and insurance. Priorities four through seven or so really advise as to what's going on within the membership.

While we don't necessarily present proposals for everything listed on everyone's wish list, as ideas received by two different members often contradict themselves, we still want to hear from everyone, as the most outlandish idea may spark a perfectly reasonable proposal. That is the kind of outside-the-box thinking that drives new benefits, which can then be shared with other bargaining units.

Your bargaining team then puts together proposals and schedules a first bargaining session. While every unit is different, I personally like to have substantive proposals ready to present at the very first session. That is not to say that every proposal will be presented then. The timing of proposals is also strategic, and certainly how the employer responds to proposals, and the proposals they themselves present, affects what other proposals we present and when. This is also sometimes a source of frustration to our members, as we get asked, "Why didn't you ask for this?" There is a strategic reason, even if 100 percent of the bargaining unit wants that particular proposal.

Also keep in mind that there is just as much strategy from the employer's side of the table. They want to have us show our cards before they do. Add to that the budgetary component, and the process really gets complicated. We will generally not cost out what our monetary proposals will cost to the employer, as they will not trust our numbers anyway. The employer also

2021 PENDING GRIEVANCES

This list represents the pending grievances filed at the various departments represented by the South Florida Police Benevolent Association as of Feb. 28, 2021. The South Florida PBA legal staff receives numerous other complaints that are resolved by other means

means.		
DEPARTMENT/DISTRICT		
HIALEAH		
		1
HOMESTEAD		
		2
CORRECTIONS		
ASSOCIATION	1	
TGK	2	
TGK(MHTC)	1	
MWDC	1	
PTDC	1	
TOTAL		
		6
MIAMI GARDENS		4
NORTH BAY VILLAGE		1
NORTH MIAMI		1
OPA LOCKA		3
SWEETWATER		1
TOTAL GRIEVANCES		19

will be hesitant to agree to much without knowing what their budget looks like. Most municipal budgets are driven by revenue from ad valorem (real estate) taxes, and those numbers for an upcoming year are released in an estimated form on June 1, with the final numbers released on July 1.

More strategy is involved here, as we want to begin bargaining in early to mid-spring so the employer knows the costs of proposals prior to finalizing their budgets in late summer. However, they do not want to get into the nuts and bolts of substantive economic proposals until they know what their budget numbers are. We generally do not agree with this idea, as that argument only applies to the first year of a bargaining agreement anyway when we are negotiating a multi-year agreement.

Clearly, this article is only offered to highlight collective bargaining from 30,000 feet, and it can't possibly do justice to the intricacies involved. But it is hoped that it will provide the foundation for what to expect (and what not to expect) as we begin the process for your municipality, whether that be in the next few weeks, next year, or two years from now. It is often difficult to do, as your profession is based primarily on controlling a situation, but just remember that everything the PBA does is to gain the most benefits for as many people as possible. In the end, it is you — the bargaining unit members — who ultimately vote up or down on an agreement.

We know we can't get everything that everyone wants (after all, it is a negotiation). But if we're on the right track, we want to ultimately see a bargaining agreement be overwhelmingly ratified, as opposed to being agreed to by a very small majority.

In the next issue, we will discuss what happens when an agreement can't be reached and an impasse is declared. Stay tuned.

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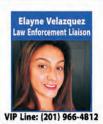




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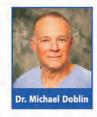
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Save the date for next year's reunion



DENNIS
BAMBACH
RPOC
PRESIDENT

We are finally reaching what seems to be a turning point in this awful pandemic. It has been a very trying year for everyone. We were disappointed to cancel the reunion again this year but felt we should err on the side of caution to keep everyone safe. We do have the Marriott booked again for next year, and with any kind of luck we'll be able to finally get together again. Please be sure to mark your calendars for our 31st Annual Reunion, which returns to the Lake Mary Marriott Thursday, April 21 through Sunday, April 24, 2022.

I would like to advise our membership that this is an election year for the RPOC. If you are interested in running for office, please contact anyone on

the board or send a letter to the following address: Retired Police Officers Council, P.O. Box 570790, Miami, FL 33257-0790.

Here are reports from some of our officers:

Ed Spisak, treasurer: Members, your treasurer would like to thank those of you who have made your 2021 dues payments, along with generous donations to Membership Assistance and the Otis Chambers Scholarship Fund. A special thanks to the members who have completed and sent in their updates and so kindly made their special donations. This year's annual mailout has brought positive responses from many members, new and old. At this time, we still have 170 members who have not responded and would like to remind you that your dues are payable by March 30. There is still time. We appreciate your membership and participation in RPOC and do not want to lose any of you.

John Fraley, vice president: We have received two applications for scholarships through the Otis Chambers Scholarship Fund. We are in the process of reviewing the information provided by the applicants. Both students displayed a keen interest in their goals and their desire to further their education. The applicants submitted essays that were clear and well written. They displayed their academic interests, and both had grade-point averages that demonstrated success at the high school level.

We will continue to accept applicants through April 15, 2021. I encourage all members to review our webpage and submit applications for this scholarship opportunity to deserving students from our family of retired police officers.

Jerry Rudoff, sergeant at arms/information officer: These past couple of weeks have been extremely difficult and emotional, as many of our former friends and colleagues or their spouses have passed. We have endeavored to post this information on our social media, but unfortunately many times we do not hear about these things on a timely basis. That is why we must rely on our friends and law enforcement family to let us know when life-changing events happen to our own. It is our understanding that the Department publishes the passing of members of MDPD for line-of-duty deaths only. And of course, let us not forget that there is much good news out there that we would like to hear about such as marriages, kids, grandkids or life milestones.

Regarding our social media, some of you might have noticed that on Facebook we have both a group and a page. The differ-

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NEWS FROM THE POLICE OFFICER ASSISTANCE TRUST

Events or no events, the support never stops



KENNETH
HORGAN
POAT
ASSISTANCE
COMMITTEE
CHAIRPERSON

SERGEANT

So, you have not heard much from POAT recently. As we embark on yet another year into this pandemic, we still have little to tell you about the fundraisers and events that keep us going. Like most charities, POAT has had to cancel events and fundraisers. We started last year with canceling the Police Officer Assistance Trust Annual Memorial Golf Tournament held at Indian Creek, and then, in lieu of our annual Police Memorial, we had a virtual rather than in-person memorial to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice. As we continued through the year, Holiday Gifts for Surviving Children fundraising at the malls, our annual Cops Ride for Kids and the Homeruns for Heroes Kickball Tournament were all cancelled!

While all of these events were canceled, POAT's most important mission never stopped: assisting

law enforcement officers and their families in times of need. In the past year alone, we added eight children to the Holiday Gifts and Birthday Gifts for Surviving Children and assisted officers who experienced serious effects from the COVID-19 virus. Most sadly, we have lost six law enforcement officers during this pandemic time frame. Their names will be placed on our Wall of Honor. Those who died during 2021, including FBI Agents Dan Alfin

and Laura Schwartzenberger, will be honored at next year's Police Memorial.

Through all of this, the Police Officer Assistance Trust has stood alongside every officer. The Trust is strong, thanks to all of the Miami-Dade County law enforcement officers and the Miami-Dade County community partners that have always supported us in the past. During these challenging times, please remember that you are part of the POAT family. As we begin to emerge from this pandemic, we will again call on every officer to support POAT. Until that time comes, we will be here as always. If you or someone you know is in need of assistance, refer to our website at POAT.org or call the office at 305-594-6662.

Save the date for our annual Remembering Our Fallen Heroes Memorial Golf Outing, scheduled to be held at the exclusive Indian Creek Country Club on May 3. Golfers throughout South Florida will be teeing up for a chance to assist Miami-Dade County fallen officers' families. Come help support your law enforcement community as you enjoy an extraordinary day of golf at this exceptional and restricted venue. Please contact Annette McCully at 305-970-2776 for further information.

The Board of Directors of the Police Officer Assistance Trust is proud to offer seven scholarships this year. The following \$2,000 scholarships are available to the son or daughter of any full-time

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

RPOC CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

ence being that our group is private, and only current members have access to the conversation and information that we pass along that is relevant to you. The page, on the other hand, is public and is there strictly to promote the RPOC, but no related discussions take place on that page. Lastly, you may have noticed that some folks have disappeared from our private Facebook group. The reason is that only current RPOC members have access to that page, and those that allow their membership to lapse are purged. Let's all avoid the purge, as we need your support now more than ever as we find our collective way through this COVID environment.

Reba Miller, chaplain: We reach out to all our members and friends, sending our support and condolences, following the passing of these dedicated brethren (people belonging to a particular and unique group):

Thomas "Tom" Ringler (Nov. 26, 2020) Charles "Charlie" Pearson (Jan. 18, 2021) Allan "Al" Goodman (Jan. 26, 2021) Scott "Scotty" Partridge (Feb. 18, 2021) Timothy "Tim" Davis (Feb. 26, 2021) Albert "Al" Llapur Sr. (March 1, 2021) Melvin "Mel" Crandall (March 4, 2021) Bobby West (March 7, 2021)

We also extend our hearts and support to retired Officer Gus Ewell and his family, on the passing of his wife and soulmate, Sue Ewell.

"Lord, open the eyes of my heart, to receive blessings you send daily."

We would like to welcome the following new members: Thomas Ferguson Jr., MDPD; George Terp, MDPD; James McDonnell, MDPD; Gilbert Visbal, MDPD; Ana Ibarra, MDPD; and Daniel Escarra, MDPD.

POAT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

law enforcement officer employed by any agency in Miami-Dade County:

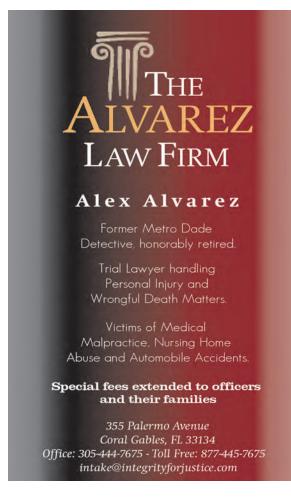
- Paul Janosky Art and Criminal Justice Scholarships (two separate scholarships)
- Mike Byrd Crime Scene Investigation Scholarship
- Christopher W. Todd Law Related Majors Scholarship (also available to officers)
- Roger Castillo Perseverance Scholarship
- Amanda Haworth Perseverance Scholarship
- Chuck Duncan Determination Scholarship

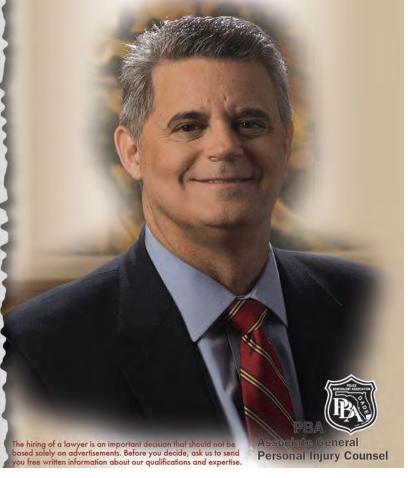
One recipient for each scholarship will be selected and will re-

ceive a \$2,000 check to use toward his or her college expenses. All applications must be received by May 3. Please visit our website at www.poat.org for specific guidelines and requirements. For further information, please contact the POAT office at 305-594-6662 or poatoffice@msn.com.

The Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Ceremony will be held at Tropical Park beginning at 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 6. All Miami-Dade County law enforcement officers who have died in the line of duty, dating back to 1895, are honored at this ceremony. It is our duty to honor the memory of those officers who have died protecting and serving the citizens of Miami-Dade County.

Thanks for your support, and stay safe.





Partnership between PBA and St. Thomas University provides new benefits for members

The South Florida PBA and St. Thomas University have entered into a new partnership agreement that brings a special opportunity for all PBA members.

St. Thomas has established an exciting new initiative: the Institute for Ethical Leadership within the Gus Machado College of Business. David A. Armstrong, J.D., the university's president, felt that the time was right to focus on the principles and applications of the theories of leadership, stressing the importance of integrity and ethics. He notes, "There has never been a greater need for ethical leadership in our world, and the Institute for Ethical Leadership stands shoulder to shoulder with our communities and organizations to meet that need."

The institute, now in its first year of full operation, offers three degree programs in ethical leadership: a bachelor of arts (B.A.), a master of arts (M.A.) and a doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.). The main benefit of the partnership arrangement is that PBA members will receive a 20 percent tuition discount for any of the three degrees. This cost reduction, combined with the various employers' tuition reimbursement benefits, makes seeking advanced degrees at STU affordable for all.

Your president, Steadman Stahl, serves on the institute's

Community Advisory Council to ensure that the needs and concerns of the PBA are considered in planning and implementing the academic curriculum. This, coupled with the relational approach to learning employed by the institute, redefines higher education, putting the students' strengths and capacities front and center.

Application-based projects take the place of traditional exams and lengthy papers, allowing for students to maximize impact for their organizations and ethical leadership practice. The accelerated course progression and willingness to accept transfer credits allow students to maximize their pace of study while minimizing overall cost. Additionally, nationally recognized faculty and caring staff create the foundation for student success, while ensuring ease of processes from application through graduation.

Now is the time to consider enrolling and reaping the benefits of having a degree that helps develops your network and advances your career. Contact Dr. Patricia Bloodworth at pbloodworth@stu.edu to join the ethical revolution and start your educational journey today.





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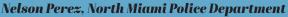
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Congrats to retired members

The South Florida PBA is proud to honor retired members who have put in long hours and outstanding service for their departments and communities. Join us in honoring these great members and exceptional public servants as they celebrate their retirement.







Magdalena Maquieira, Miami-Dade Police Department



Jose Edreira, Miami-Dade Police Department



Douglas Almaguer, Miami-Dade Police Department



Ken Ottley, Miami-Dade Police Department



Curtis Johnson, Bay Harbor Islands Police Department

The Pembroke Pines Police Department is HIRING!







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saturday, June 5, 2021

MANDATORY Captain's Meeting
6:30 P.M., Wednesday, June 2
PBA, 10680 NW 25 ST. Doral, FL
Final registration is at the Captain's Meeting

Pick up your tournament t-shirts for your crew

Tournament & Weigh-In Saturday, June 5

The tournament starts at 6 a.m. from any port

Weigh-in will be from 1-4 p.m. at Matheson Hammock Park 9610 Old Cutler Road, Coral Gables, FL 33156

> \$325 per boat (up to 4 anglers) or \$275 if registered <u>before</u> June 2 \$50 for each additional angler

Stop by or call the PBA for more information: 10680 NW 25 ST, Doral, FL 33172 - 305-593-0044 - greenwell@dcpba.org www.dcpba.org





BY KAREN JENKINS

It took less than one minute of Teresa Becerra watching an endangered child on a news broadcast to recognize he had autism.

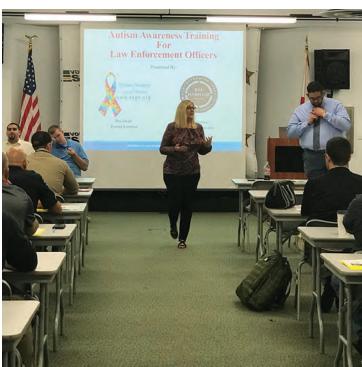
She saw what could happen to her own son, Robert, who was 2 years old at the time and becoming mobile, reflected in the young boy who had gone wandering to a local Dunkin' Donuts. Law enforcement officers on the TV screen referred to the situation as an example of "elopement," when an autistic individual intentionally tries to leave the safety of a guardian.

"Children with autism are highly prone to do this," explained Becerra, who is from Miami. "It's a parent's challenge from pretty much the time they can walk, and it's a constant effort on their part to try to escape from anywhere they are."

The parents had been searching frantically for their child. After he was located, the parents were contacted by law enforcement and received two life-changing pieces of information. Their child was safe. And they would be arrested on felony neglect charges.

When Becerra saw the report on the news in 1998, she was shocked. The parents claimed that they shouldn't be charged, because their child was simply wandering. It was the first time Becerra realized that both her life and her son's life could be in danger because of his autism.

Autism is a complex, lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a per-



Autism Society of Greater Orlando President Donna Lorman partners with Bal Harbour Detective Hector Gonzalez to provide an eight-hour autism awareness certification.

Out of harm's way

The Circuit Court of Miami-Dade is training members to approach individuals with disabilities safely and appropriately

When officers take the oath to protect and serve, their primary goal should be maintaining safety — for themselves and for their community — during responses.

That's why Habsi Kaba has led the 11th Judicial Circuit Criminal Mental Health Project Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) in Miami-Dade since 2003. In the program, Kaba seeks to create understanding within the first responder community about the importance of understanding behavioral health and identifying autism in a pre-booking capacity to mitigate

"We work with police agencies to make sure that they are connected to all the right resources, that they have policies and procedures in place," Kaba explained. "We get out of these silos that we've all been working within and start working together."

Kaba creates programs that foster compassion, understanding and connections within behavioral health, criminal justice and first responder communities. In the CIT training, officers receive 40 hours of specialist training designed to assist them in identifying signs and symptoms of mental illness and disabilities. One of the key presentations comes from Teresa Becerra, who conducts autism awareness training.

"I help educate officers on what they can expect when responding to a call that involves someone with autism," Becerra shared about her role in the Circuit Court as the mother of a 25-year-old son with autism. "I'm one of the very few instructors that brings their child with them."

Kaba affirmed that of the different segments of the training, the autism awareness portion is often one of the primary ones that gets positive feedback from the attendees.

"It's one of the most enjoyable segments, because they really see the human side to it," Kaba expressed. "So officers, we find, have great sensitivity and motivation to assist individuals with autism and also with mental illness when they realize what mental illness really is."

In addition to teaching officers how to respond to individuals with autism, CIT training takes officers through mental



"Officers, we find, have great sensitivity and motivation to assist individuals with autism and also with mental illness when they realize what mental illness really is."

Habsi Kaba

illness training that includes psychosis, PTSD and suicide awareness.

Throughout the different modules, law enforcement officers are able to learn from individuals with lived experiences in mental illness, autism and other developmental disabilities to better understand how to keep themselves and others safe during responses dealing with non-neurotypical subjects.

"This is key, and something we need to continue to educate society about," Kaba relayed about the different types of training officers receive. "I know that we hear a lot now about reform and defunding police, and that couldn't be a bigger mistake, because through educating society — which is also a part of what CIT does — my main task is to provide training and resources and collaboration with law enforcement."

In 2019, Kaba joined the CIT International Board of Directors to expand the goals of the program. She is currently working with a law enforcement agency in Spain to help give international officers training resources.

Her ultimate vision is to stand in front of a classroom of law enforcement officers who feel empowered to walk into any situation and immediately recognize the condition of a subject.

"It starts with education," Kaba relayed. "We're trying to teach everyone how to be more in tune and aware of people with mental illnesses and how to better assist them — just training them in what's out there."

AUTISM CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

son's social skills, communication, relationships and self-regulation. It is defined by certain types of behaviors and is a spectrum condition that affects people to varying degrees.

"No one knew what autism was back then, so my heart kind of went out for both," Becerra shared. "I had to make sure that the police department there understands, because they probably have no idea why this child did this. It was twofold for me, because I was very interested in helping [the family] and very interested in helping law enforcement."

Becerra vowed that from that day forward, no law enforcement officers would ever be put in a situation again of not knowing how to approach an individual with autism.

She went to the agency she had seen on the broadcast and

asked if she could talk to the officers. They agreed.

"I gave them what I didn't even realize back then was a small training. They didn't understand how this little boy was capable of taking himself that far," Becerra expressed. "Then I started reaching out to experts in the field of autism and law enforcement. They were grasping at me because they realized that I could help them."

Two decades later, Becerra has trained more than 18,000 law enforcement officers across the state of Florida. She is currently an instructor in Miami-Dade for Judge Steve Liefman's Criminal Mental Health Project Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) as an autism expert.

Her mission is to make sure that law enforcement officers know how to safely and effectively approach people like her son Robert during a response. It's a training that several South Flor-



Gonzalez teaches a group of officers from Miami-Dade during a 2019 training session.

ida PBA member departments have had for some of their officers and many more hope to get, as Becerra extends it throughout the community where she was raised.

"It was sort of a thing I was thrown into, but the impact for me was also so great," she affirmed. "I had always wondered, what would law enforcement do if I was in a car accident and I was unable to respond? How would they take care of my son? How would they keep him alive?"

Making a difference

Bal Harbour Detective Hector Gonzalez, a proud PBA representative, always dreamed of playing football and baseball with his son in the backyard. He has two daughters, but when Christopher came along, he looked forward to some father-son activities.

But as Christopher's autism began to develop, Gonzalez realized that his size and lack of coordination would cause his childhood to be different from that of his peers. He also understood that his son's stimming — repetitive behaviors — could make him seem dangerous to law enforcement officers.

"I believe that all officers need to be able to see all the characteristics of autism," Gonzalez shared. "It's good for the officer to pick up on certain cues in order for the officer to not possibly react harshly."

When Gonzalez began his career as a law enforcement officer 23 years ago, his son was 5 years old. Similar to Becerra, Gonzalez began to get nervous about how other officers might handle interactions with Christopher. He had to take action to make sure everybody could be protected.

"I realized that officers were not properly trained to really deal with individuals with autism," he expressed. "Police belief is basically if somebody gives you an order to an instruction that you fail to obey, you may be dealt with as a person not complying. Autism doesn't work that way."

Gonzalez grew passionate talking to his brothers and sisters about the need for autism awareness training. In 2012, he joined with Donna Lorman, president of the Autism Society of Greater Orlando. Lorman also has a son with autism and saw the vital need for law enforcement training to educate officers to recognize characteristics and mannerisms associated with autism.

Lorman's son, Andrew, had his first interaction with law enforcement in elementary school. He was in kindergarten when Lorman got called in by the principal, who was threatening to charge 5-year-old Andrew, who was bigger than his classmates, with battery on an employee.

"It was at that point that I realized she didn't know anything

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



Officers from agencies across South Florida and beyond have completed the eight-hour course taught by Lorman and Gonzalez and received certification recognized by the state of Florida.





Bal Harbour officers were decked out in honor of Autism Awareness Month.

about autism," Lorman said. "The chances are that a responding officer wouldn't know either. That kind of began my determination."

Gonzalez and Lorman joined forces to develop Autism Awareness Training for Law Enforcement Officers. The eight-hour certification — for which Gonzalez is a state-certified instructor and Lorman is a federal-certified instructor — is a course that the pair takes to law enforcement agencies around Florida. Christopher and Andrew are integral parts of every single train-

"You can't train law enforcement officers without individuals with autism being part of the training," Lorman relayed. "We wanted to make a bigger difference in the community."

Changing lives

During one of these trainings in Brevard County in 2013, they noticed an officer sitting in the front of the room. It was one of the first sessions Lorman and Gonzalez had ever conducted.

The officer crossed his arms and leaned back with an angry look. When Gonzalez and Lorman began the training, he refused to cooperate, even after some of the other officers shared that they had autistic children.

"I don't care," the officer declared. "If somebody hits me, they're going down."

Gonzalez and Lorman went through their presentation about how to recognize the characteristics of behavioral autism and the dangers that families of autistic individuals face when their children are nonverbal, avoid eye contact or appear aggressive

As he does in every training, Gonzalez showed the perspective of being both a father of an autistic son and a law enforcement officer.

"People with autism live really tough lives because of the way they perceive the world," Gonzalez shared with the class. "It's a tough position to put an officer in, to make a split-second decision without being able to recognize the situation."

And then Christopher and Andrew entered the room for the hands-on portion of the training. Hours passed, and the officer in the front slowly began to soften.

"We kept showing how innocent [individuals with autism] were," Lorman said. "They're not having an aggression to hurt you. They just don't have the verbal skills to say, 'You're hurting me.' They don't understand how to say, 'I'm frustrated because your radio was too loud."

Gonzalez walked the class through de-escalation techniques with the help of Andrew and Christopher. He demonstrated to the officers how to have patience, utilize clear and concise questioning and count down from 10 — not up to 10 — to help autistic individuals focus.

Lorman and Gonzalez picked the gruff officer for every scenario, making him get up and interact closely with Andrew and Christopher. By the end of the eight-hour certification, they said he sat at the front of the class with uncrossed arms and tears streaming down his face. That officer stood up to address the class, but spoke mostly to Andrew and Christopher.

"I want you all to know, I was inappropriate," he said. "I will own this. I can tell you, based on this class, I have arrested individuals with autism. I have been that cop. You made me better prepared and with better understanding."

Creating a legacy

Becerra doesn't just teach an autism awareness curriculum. She lives it every day.

"I think all of us that do train in Florida, we're all very passionate about what we teach," she relayed. "The passion in our



Miami-Dade police officers speak with children with autism in honor of Autism Awareness Month.

classroom is intense. All the officers remark on that, about the difference it makes in the learning environment."

Law enforcement autism awareness trainings are necessary for officers to have the tools they need to handle any call involving a person with autism. They ensure that officers don't end up taking action that could result in a suspension or termination. They keep individuals with autism safe — and in extreme cases, alive — when dealing with law enforcement.

Gonzalez believes that all law enforcement officers across the country need to attend at least one autism awareness training in their career.

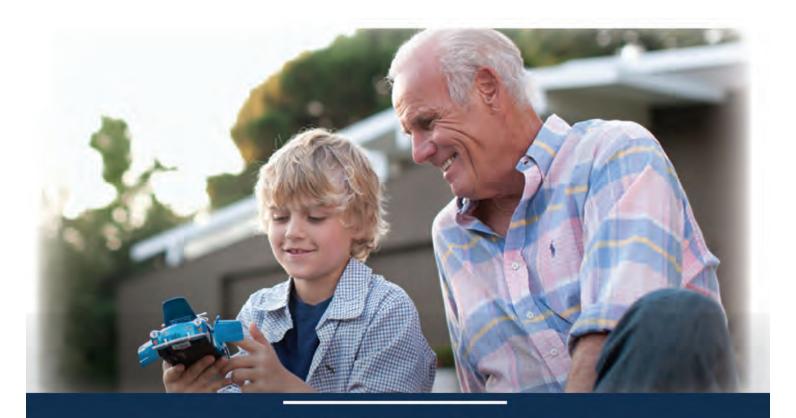
"My goal is to teach law enforcement officers to understand autism, and then also try to teach parents with autistic children to understand law enforcement," he shared. "If both sides are able to continue to teach each other and do things the right way, we'll be able to save a lot. That's my goal."

When Gonzalez stands with Christopher in front of a classroom of officers, he realizes that he may never be able to throw a football around the yard with his son. They will likely never have the ability to go to a batting cage.

More importantly, however, they've become partners in what has become a life's work of teaching law enforcement officers. They charge all officers to expand their horizons and have an understanding of the individuals they protect and serve. They work together every day to change the landscape of policing.

It's a monumental achievement that helps officers understand how individuals with autism perceive the world and how to appropriately respond when a split second could mean life or death.

"I cannot describe what a proud accomplishment it is to see my son truly teaching. He's really the one teaching me on the job," Gonzalez praised. "If Christopher could save the life of an individual with autism or the career of a man or woman in uniform, then my son's legacy will be made."



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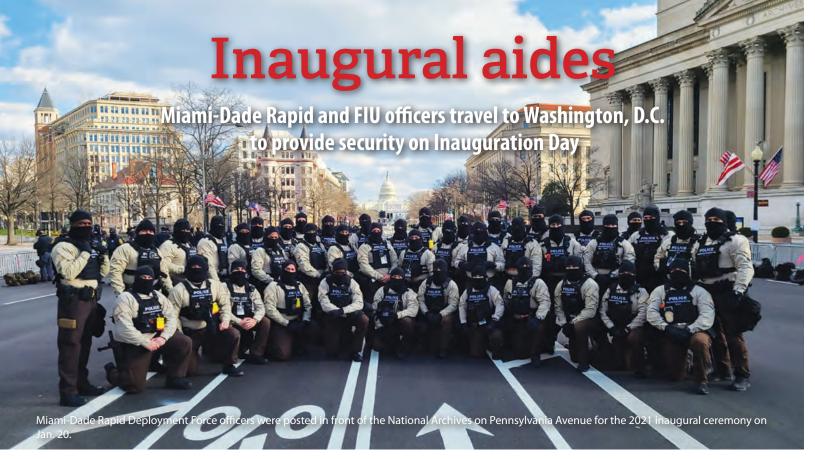


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BY ROSEMARY AN

The historic buildings in D.C. were fenced and boarded up. Jersey barriers lined the nation's capital. The U.S. Capitol Police, National Guard and U.S. Marshals were armed and posted on every corner to ensure that nobody — especially domestic terrorists like the ones who had stormed these grounds two weeks earlier — would breach the premises.

"Some of the [officers] said it felt like walking into Baghdad," observed officer Michael Cal, one of the Miami-Dade County PBA members who worked the presidential inauguration on Jan. 20. "It was like you were in a war zone."

Members of the Miami-Dade and FIU police departments were invited to work the massive, military-esque security detail at a ceremony that was unlike any other inauguration the nation has ever seen. They joined 6,000 officers from across the nation to secure the perimeter of the U.S. Capitol, including Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues, from any potential threats like the ones that occurred when insurrectionists seized the building on Jan. 6.

"Nobody drove past. The president wasn't there. No people to support or protest," described Jorge Encinosa, a Miami-Dade officer who worked the inauguration. "It was a ghost town except for us. I am thankful that nothing happened and that we came back home safely."

The chosen ones

When the Miami-Dade Police Department was invited to the presidential inaugural ceremony for the fifth time, the Rapid Deployment Force team was once again assigned to represent the county in Washington, D.C. The Metropolitan Police, who orchestrated the massive operation, sent the officers a Memorandum of Understanding stating that they would be deputized by the U.S. Marshals for the inauguration.

"I even met Police Chief Robert Contee of the Metropolitan Police Department, who thanked us for being there," explained Eddie Bermudez, who led the Miami-Dade contingent. "Their department would not have been big enough to handle the

magnitude of the inauguration."

Officers Bermudez, Encinosa, Lazaro Rodriguez and Robert Gonzalez, who lead the Rapid Deployment Force Incident Management Team, flew their contingent of 45 officers to Washington, D.C., on Jan. 17. They were detailed to secure Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the National Archives, between 7th and 9th streets, for the incoming president on Inauguration Day.

"I'm proud that we got chosen to lead the department," Gonzalez remarked. "I believe the Rapid Deployment Force was chosen to represent us due to our training and what we specialize in."

FIU was invited for the second time and deployed officers Jose Ramirez, Michael Gonzalez, Danny Fernandez and Cal to the ceremony. FIU Chief Alex Casas dispatched the officers, who were certified through training with Miami-Dade's Rapid Deployment Force team.

The FIU officers were stationed several blocks away from the Miami-Dade team, between 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. They noted during their detail that the city was heavily secured — like a militarized zone — and there were other distinctions due to what was currently going on in the world.

"A lot of people don't even get to experience [the inauguration] once, but I got to see it twice," Cal noted. "And it was interesting to see how times have changed since COVID. In Florida, things haven't really changed, but once you go up North, it was like a shell shock."

Ready for anything

Encinosa and Gonzalez, who oversaw the preparation for the team's deployment to D.C., took care of the equipment, itinerary, tickets, boarding passes and TSA clearances before meeting the rest of the team at the headquarters command post in Miami-Dade. The officers discussed the potential situations that could arise at the ceremony, especially with the heightened sense of desperation that followed the mayhem at the Capitol on Jan. 6.

"We were confident in our training and how we would ad-

dress certain issues," Encinosa noted. "We can disperse huge crowds while maintaining the integrity of our lives, their lives and property."

Running miles with gas masks, getting tear gas deployed and going through tremendous mental training are part of what the Miami-Dade Rapid Deployment Force officers endure quarterly to become recertified. This is the kind of expertise that the Metropolitan Police needed on that day.

"Anyone going through that school — it wasn't an easy class," said Manuel Gonzalez, a Miami-Dade Rapid Deployment Force officer who experienced the inaugural ceremony for the first time.

The Rapid Deployment Force is one of Miami-Dade's fulltime mobile field forces and deals with protests, riots and civil disturbances. The officers are trained so that if a riot like those during the George Floyd protests does occur, they line up in line formation.

When they arrived at their lodging, the officers changed into their Class A uniforms and gathered outside to be deputized alongside about 300 other officers from across the country who were staying at the same hotel. They felt prepared for the special distinction they were about to receive.

"Being deputized by the U.S. Marshals is a memory I'll never forget," Encinosa revealed. "It really felt like we were all there for the common cause of believing in a free democracy. As a proud American, I was happy to be there for the purpose of a presidential inauguration."

Meanwhile, the FIU officers, staying at a different hotel, had a swearing-in event of their own. At the Washington Hilton, the four officers, along with more than 2,000 officers from across the nation, were deputized by U.S. Marshals on the same night.

"As officers, you can never think everything is going to go smoothly, but where you're going to the hotel that first day, you're like, 'Wow,' because you are extra-prepared," Cal noted. "And on the day of, we felt like there's no way anything can happen, because Secret Service, U.S. Marshals and police departments across the nation were there."

Officers like to take time after being sworn in to get to know each other, but COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and social distancing hindered the usual festivities.

"In past inaugurations, it was almost a celebration," said Gonzalez, who attended the 2017 inaugural ceremony. "All the departments would get together in an arena, and the officers would meet each other, exchange patches and challenge coins, but we didn't get to do that this year."

The big day

By 2 a.m. on Jan. 18, the hotel was bustling with officers getting ready for Inauguration Day. Bermudez, along with his team, headed to their post in front of the National Archives by 4 a.m.

The 6,000 officers from all over the country lined Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the White House. The U.S. military was posted behind them. It couldn't have been a more extraordinary day.

"About eight of our officers attended the previous inauguration, so they know," Bermudez explained. "It was a little different this time. There was no public. There were nonscalable fences. And the National Guard was everywhere."

For the officers who were deployed to the nation's capital to witness an inauguration for the first time, it came as a shock when President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris did not make the traditional trek along the parade route.

"Historically the president-elect would drive down Pennsylvania Avenue and then drive back to the White House after being sworn in," Bermudez described. "But this year he broke [with] tradition. Even though we were able to witness a historic



From left, FIU Officers Danny Fernandez, Jose Ramirez, Michael Cal and Michael Gonzalez were posted on 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue to secure the nation's capital.

moment, think about it: You're looking down Pennsylvania Avenue, and it's a complete ghost town. The only thing you saw was officers from different agencies in the country."

For more than 12 hours, and despite being rained and snowed on, the officers proudly represented Miami-Dade in a historic inauguration security detail. It was an effort that required enormous coordination for the ceremony to go off without a hitch.

"I have to tip my hat to the Metropolitan Police," Gonzalez explained. "They had to plan, prepare and logistically move around 6,000 officers. It's amazing what they do."

FIU officers were fortunate to get a perspective of the inauguration that many others did not have access to. Being posted at the beginning of the parade route, they were able to see the incoming president and vice president in the presidential limo.

"They were 20 feet from us," Cal recalled. "I had no idea how thick those glass windows were until I saw up close, but they were pretty thick. It was surreal that there weren't any crowds, but it was still a cool experience."

Cal remembered the 2017 inaugural ceremony, when he and other FIU officers enjoyed the nation's capital in full effect. They visited Arlington National Cemetery and even took part in the Women's March as civilians the day after the inauguration.

"This time we couldn't go see any monuments, because they were closed off," Cal remarked. "But after what happened on Jan. 6, which was tragic, I can say I was there two to three weeks after, for years to come."

By late afternoon, the Miami-Dade and FIU officers were relieved from their posts. At past inaugurations, officers would leave at 7 p.m. due to the crowds. But this year, they had enough time to get back to their lodging and eat a well-deserved hot meal at the hotel restaurant.

"The hotel knew what was going on and was accommodating to us despite the COVID restrictions," Gonzalez noted. "We chatted up and had a great meal."

The impact of the historic day also had a particular significance for some officers.

"I won't be seeing another inauguration, because I'll be retired," Bermudez revealed. "So to be at Washington, D.C. and be a part of the inauguration, that's something to take home."



BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

Retirement for Miami-Dade Sergeant Juan Carlos "JC" Prellezo, after serving for more than 28 years, includes hanging with his retired K9 partner Thor, relaxing in his backyard, which he landscaped to look like Hawaii and enjoying being 10 years sober. And he takes phone calls.

Officers across the county have been calling JC to confide some of their challenges with addiction or threatening addiction. He has been able to offer them some peer support from somebody who has overcome addiction to drinking and painkillers he used to heal from trauma related to work. He provides confidentiality, as guaranteed by a law the Florida state legislature has enacted.

And he has been advocating the value of agencies developing peer support systems, as Miami-Dade's Psychological Services Bureau has been doing.

"During my healing the past couple of years, I realized that this is a huge problem," JC begins. "It knows no boundaries, from officers who have been in great, great trauma to the toughest cops in the world, to just those who have witnessed certain things. And the biggest problem is that as first responders, you're not supposed to look to anybody for help."

Prellezo knows too well how trying to handle it all on your own can open the floodgates of addiction. His path to sobriety with the help of faith-based leaders and therapists taught JC to understand how all the traumas and triggers led him to learn what happens when the Rolodex of your mind is as full as so many officers tend to keep it.

"Then, you have to put another card in there, and it's like, 'Oh, s---, now what?" he details. "That's where your issues start. You start acting out. You start drinking. You start acting recklessly. I've been there. I've done that."

This is where JC tells about his triggers. One of the most troubling came when responding to a case of a 16-year-old girl who had been caught shoplifting. Her parents were very upset about it. She wrote a suicide note and drove her car into a canal. Nobody had been able to find her until Prellezo spotted tire tracks leading off the edge. He was there to see her pulled out of the water.

Fast forward to another incident when a girl was in a car accident. Prellezo responded to find her barely alive, with her body split in half. He watched her breathe her last breath. Eventually, these incidents would overload his Rolodex, already full of what he would later learn was post-traumatic stress spawned from his mother's depression over the death of his 12-year-old brother, her repeated suicide attempts and even overdosing.

"I was never a big beer drinker. I was never a big liquor drinker. I didn't even like the taste," JC reports. "But I figured out quickly that by drinking, it would numb me out. I would pass out. That was something that was beneficial to me, because I didn't want to deal with things."

He added that he left his wife for eight months and pretty much focused on killing himself through alcohol.

"I would get in the shower in the morning, and my head felt like a beach ball," JC continued. "I swore ever single day, 'This is it. I will never drink again.' But as the day went on, I already planned my next bottle."

What Prellezo could not come to terms with at that point was that the pain being caused by the trauma was not weakness. It is normal for law enforcement officers to feel pain.

He realized that officers need to be empowered by validation that seeing somebody who has been killed or taking somebody's life is not normal. He found that he had to come to terms with that understanding of trauma, that it's just as traumatic for the guy who pulls the trigger.

JC took his first steps toward sobriety with the help of a friend in fire rescue who was trying to ramp up a peer support program at his agency. He wants his story to not only inspire officers to find that somebody who has walked in first responder shoes can be of great help, but also to get supervisors to support the value of peer support.

"It's one of those things where command staff would previously think would open Pandora's Box. They would think by talking about it, they would have all these officers crying and holding hands," JC states. "And it's just the opposite. You get a better employee. You get an employee who calls in sick less. You get an employee who is not going to get out of the car and beat the snot out of somebody for no reason. Because the officer is now balanced, and if he has an issue, he is now talking about it."

Peer support is, first and foremost, confidential. According to the state law, officers can talk to a certified peer counselor about anything and maintain confidentiality unless they threaten to hurt themselves or anybody else.

But the best part is the chance to talk to somebody who has felt the way you have. Prellezo has volunteered to provide peer support because he has had all those thoughts that somebody who is overloaded with stress and trauma is feeling.

"You understand how things are," JC confirms. "And you also understand, 'Listen, today, I can't deal with this.'"

Miami-Dade is one agency in the county that has seen the value of a peer support program. Psych Services has created Backing Our Brothers and Sisters in Blue, or what they call BOBB. It is also named as a tribute to bureau leader Major Melissa Barosela's father Bob, who was a lieutenant in the department.

Lieutenant Babette Rox works with the outreach department in Psych Services and is spearheading the peer support program. They had planned to ramp up in 2020 with a network of trained peer counselors among officers who wanted to volunteer, but the pandemic put a hold on the progress.

Currently, there are five counselors who each have completed a three-day training. Rox hopes to have another class of 15 trained by summer, and the plan is to have one counselor at each district and bureau.

"In order to be certified, it's a very extensive vetting process, because it's very important for us to have people who have a heart for helping others and providing assistance to their sisters and brothers in blue," Rox discloses. "They will be on call in their districts, developing those relationships, because each district and bureau has a unique environment."

The program has been in the works for a while, and with the state legislature-backed confidentiality, it is ready to flourish. And officers can trust that when talking to a peer support counselor, confidentiality is absolute.

"If officers are performing in the role of peer advocate, they cannot confirm or deny that they even spoke to a person," Rox adds.

Peer support has become a very successful avenue to keep officers strong and healthy in both mind and body so they can better serve the community. Because everybody needs a way to clean out the Rolodex.

"If you want a department that flows and have employees who are more productive and better for the community, then officers need to have a healthy out," JC advocates. "This is not weakness. It's normal. And officers need to understand it's OK to feel normal."



Now Accepting Applications for PBA Scholarships!

The South Florida PBA Scholarship Committee accepts applications for scholarship funds between January 1st and April 15th of each year. Applications must be postmarked by April 15th for acceptance. No exceptions! Scholarships are based on financial need as well as merit. All information provided will be kept confidential. Scholarships are awarded once a year.

Eligibility Requirements (all criteria must be met to be considered):

- 1. Applicant must be a child of a South Florida PBA member with a minimum of one-year membership or have prior Board approval. Children of retirees are not eligible to apply.
- 2. Applicant must be, or plan to be, a part-time or full-time student at an accredited two-year or four-year college. Graduate students are not eligible to apply.
- 3. Applicant must include an essay, of no more than 750 words, about growing up in a law enforcement family and what it means in this day and age of negative information about police and corrections in the media, and how will it shape your college experience and beyond. The essay must be typed, double-spaced, using 12-point Arial or Times New Roman font only.
- 4. Send application, essay, Letter of Acceptance (first-time applicants only) and an official transcript with GPA in one package to: South Florida PBA Scholarship Committee, 10680 PBA Memorial Blvd. (NW 25th Street), Doral, FL

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A life saver

Key West Officer Jorge Mayorga-Lopez honored for rescuing a drowning child

BY ROSEMARY AN

Key West Officer Jorge Mayorga-Lopez was in New Town when he received a call about a child drowning in a hotel pool on the evening of Dec. 29, 2020.

It took a minute or two for Mayorga-Lopez to arrive at the scene of screaming, crying and panic. The young boy had already been pulled from the pool and was lying on his back as his parents tried to revive him. A crowd of people had formed a circle around them.

"People were trying to help, but nobody knew how to do CPR," Mayorga-Lopez recalled. "It was so chaotic."

The officer parted the crowd so he could get through to the child. He started chest compressions, and after six or seven attempts, the young boy, who had eaten a meal just before entering the pool, started to throw up. Mostly a lot of water.

Mayorga-Lopez quickly rolled the boy over on his side to open his airway.

"He was throwing up for a few seconds," Mayorga-Lopez explained. "I didn't want him suffocating on his own vomit."

The boy started gasping for air. After asking the parents what the boy's name was, Mayorga-Lopez started calling it out. But the boy was still not responding.

Fortunately, paramedics arrived on scene. They picked up the officer's rescue.

He might have rendered aid for just a few seconds, but to Mayorga-Lopez, it was a true test of the calling of a first responder to provide help when it is needed most.

"That was my first time doing CPR after training in the academy," shared Mayorga-Lopez, who had been on the job for 14 months at the time of the incident. "And the first time I responded to a call like this, especially a kid."

The officer recalled hearing the parents' shrieking cries during the incident and how he felt that, amid trying to keep their little boy alive, he also needed to calm them down. While he made sure the child would survive, he asked the parents to race to the hotel lobby to call the paramedics.

"The way they were crying was different from what I have seen or heard before," Mayorga-Lopez remarked. "I wanted to do what was best for both the child and the parents, so I tried my best to keep [the parents] busy."

The paramedics carried the young boy into an ambulance and took him to a local hospital. By the time Mayorga-Lopez got there, the child was talking. The boy had fluid in his lungs, and he needed to be taken to Nicklaus Children's Hospital.

"[The parents] appreciated what the doctors, paramedics and I did for the child," Mayorga-Lopez mentioned. "Before I left, I even gave them my business card so that if they needed anything, they could let me know."

Reflecting on the incident, Mayorga-Lopez admitted it was very stressful compared to other calls he has responded to.

"Seeing a child almost dying is totally different," Mayorga-Lopez described. "I was doing my best to get [the boy's] attention because he was out of it, gasping for air, and breathing but not responding at all."



Key West PD Officer Jorge Mayorga-Lopez, left, was presented with the Lifesaving Award by Chief Sean Brandenburg on Feb. 19.

The young boy's parents were not the only ones who recognized Mayorga-Lopez's lifesaving heroics. The officer planned to attend Key West PD's annual awards ceremony at the Grand Key Resort on Feb. 19 because he was a close friend of Leo Hernandez, who was about to receive the department's Officer of the Year award.

But when he attended, Mayorga-Lopez found a surprise. He unexpectedly received a Lifesaving Award from Key West PD Chief Sean Brandenburg.

"It was exciting because I didn't expect it," Mayorga-Lopez revealed. "Because I was just glad the boy is OK, and especially his parents."

The officer emphasized that he didn't save the boy for commendation. He just wanted to do the right thing and make sure the parents could go home with their little boy.

"It was painful to watch the way they felt, cried and reacted," Mayorga-Lopez disclosed. "I hope I don't ever have to go through something like that."





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Celebrating South Florida PBA members and the way they serve every day



In honor of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who once said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others," Miami-Dade South District officers escorted the inaugural One South-Dade MLK Unity Bike Ride and day of service on Jan. 18.

Commissioner Kionne L. McGhee of District 9 partnered with the 305 Urban Bike Club, Breaking the Cycle and Miami-Dade officers to create the bike-ride event, which began in South Dade at the Cutler Bay Park and Ride in the east parking lot of Target.

Twelve police departments joined the community in the bike ride for unity and peace. The mission of the event was to create "one community" and build relationships while biking in honor of King.

"There's a lot of people in the community who don't know what we do as law enforcement and are surprised when they see us out there on bikes, painting houses or assisting with feeding hundreds of people," said Miami-Dade South District Lieutenant Alexander Rice, who biked the event. "So it's important to get the message out there that while there's a lot of negative aspects to our jobs, there's also positive ones, like being able to assist the community."

Miami-Dade South District officers arrived at the park at 8 a.m. to set up for the post-bike barbecue before the three-hour ride began. The 25 Miami-Dade officers, including 10 who were on bikes, conducted traffic control as well as made a safe bike route for the participants.

"This was the inaugural [ride], so we're hoping to continue it next year," Rice remarked. "It provides a different outlet as opposed to just a parade, because this way we are interacting with the community instead of blocking off intersections to watch a parade go by."

The bike route was approximately 8 miles one way, going through Cutler Bay, unincorporated Miami-Dade and back to the starting point. The route made a one-hour stop in West Perrine for the "day of service" portion of the event, where bikers added plants to and painted a senior citizen's house before continuing their journey.

"It was a really unifying event because community members from little kids to older adults came out," said North Miami PD Chief Larry Juriga, who participated with two other officers. "Law enforcement from all around South Florida, men, women, young and old, we were all riding together."

After the bike ride, about 200 to 300 participants flocked to the barbecue for Southern-style barbecue chicken and ribs to commemorate their successful inaugural community bike ride for MLK Day.

"Everyone was mingling, and we had a variety of music from different cultures," Juriga recalled. "The thing we wanted to stress is that everyone was together and heading towards the same direction."

By 2 p.m., the participants started to filter out and go back home.

"What better weekend is there than Martin Luther King Jr.'s for law enforcement and the community to partner in a unified cause," Juriga noted. "It was a great celebration that I was proud to be a part of."



MCSO Officer Ana Coello creates connection with students

Ocean Studies Charter School Student Resource Officer Ana Coello never hesitates to show her students the positive side of law enforcement interactions. When the officer from The Monroe County Sheriff's Office saw a need for connection in the pandemic, she got to work.

Coello coordinated a Law Enforcement Day at the charter school on Feb. 12 to connect with the students. Her goal was to show the students that although different law enforcement officers have varying uniforms, they are all community helpers who work together to make neighborhoods safe.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission made a presentation on animal safety. Also in attendance were the bomb squad, SWAT team, major crimes unit, traffic enforcement unit, road patrol and the star of the show — MCSO's K-9 Coral.



Corporal R. Perez of Hialeah Gardens PD received a commendation on Feb. 4 for locating a missing 2-year-old in early January. The search included multiple agencies, an aviation unit and K9s to locate the young boy. Sergeant M. Molina and Detective J. Gorotiza also awarded three officers, O. Barban, J. Moleiro and Lorenzo, with Appreciation Certificates for their help in the incident.







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Aventura Police Department celebrates resident's landmark birthday

Officers from the Aventura Police Department, along with members of the Miami-Dade Fire Department, celebrated an extremely special resident of Aventura on Jan. 22.

The first responders came together for a birthday parade route for Lenore Elias, who celebrated her 90th birthday on the day of the event. She has lived in Aventura for 60 years and was the first resident at the Plaza at ParkSquare, moving in when it opened two years ago.

Officers were proud to flash their patrol vehicle lights and honk their horns for Elias, who has demonstrated immense involvement in her community. She has volunteered for multiple charities and headed the PTAs at Highland Oaks Elementary School, Highland Oaks Junior High School and North Miami Beach Senior High School.

She has been an active member of Beth Torah synagogue since 1965. Elias helped found the Miami Project to fund research to cure paralysis in 1983 after her oldest daughter was injured in a car accident, becoming a paraplegic.

After the parade from first responders, Elias received a birthday certificate from Aventura Police Chief Bryan Pegues, along with an APD teddy bear to help commemorate her landmark birthday.



Ringing in safety in El Portal

The El Portal Police Department is dedicated to keeping residents safe, particularly with a special delivery on Feb. 11. Two lucky citizens, selected at random, were given video doorbells to attach to their homes.

Officers in El Portal have recently been able to use the Neighbors app by Ring as an exceptional tool to assist in solving various home-invasion and package-theft cases.





Lieutenant Curtis Johnson retires from Bay Harbor Islands

Lieutenant Curtis Johnson with the Bay Harbor Islands Police Department was ushered into retirement on Feb. 3 by South Florida PBA President Steadman Stahl and Johnson's coworkers.

Johnson began his law enforcement career on Sept. 24, 1992, and faithfully served his community for years, receiving promotion to administrative lieutenant in November 1999. The South Florida PBA honored Johnson with a plaque as he begins this new phase of life.



Key West PD awards ceremony

At the Key West PD awards ceremony at the Grand Key Resort on Feb. 19, Chief Sean Brandenburg presented three awards to officers. Officer Leo Hernandez received the Officer of the Year award, Officer Craig Wynn took home the Lifesaving Award and the Records Department team collected a Unit Award.







Hialeah Gardens PD Officer of the Year

Corporal Leonardo Valdes from Hialeah Gardens PD community policing received the 2020 Officer of the Year award on Feb. 23 for demonstrating professionalism and a high degree of moral character throughout the year. He also spearheaded several pandemic recovery events while excelling at his duties.



Miami-Dade PD helps beautify a home

Miami-Dade PD South District officers teamed up with members of the community for a home beautification project for a senior citizen on Jan. 18. The day of service included repotting plants and flowers, painting the house and mingling with volunteers while making a difference in the community.





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Thinking about real estate? Now's the time



RICHARD TSCHERNIA

We all know that the past year has been filled with hardship, suffering and loss for many. Congress was forced to enact a stimulus package to repurchase mortgage-backed securities. This made for a shift in bond markets, which led to historically low interest rates. The goal was to make financing more affordable and stimulate more purchase/refinance transactions.

The big question for 2021 is, What will happen after record-breaking mortgage rates? Predicting the impact on home values and mortgage rates can only

be done by looking at the past. History does repeat itself, and mortgage rates, along with property values, are cyclical. History will always be the best reference for what is to come.

Rates and property values have close ties and most often take opposite directions from each other. When interest rates are low, property values rise as home buyers spend more due to affordable financing. As mortgage rates rise, home buyers on the fence shy away, and demand slows. Demand is always the determining factor for value.

Another factor for home values in 2021 and the road ahead is foreclosures. It is estimated that there are 225,000 to 500,000 homeowners in danger of losing their homes to foreclosure. Court proceedings were limited due to the pandemic, which delayed the number of foreclosure proceedings/completions. Without a stimulus package for homeowners in delinquency, many of the foreclosures currently in hang time will be finalized. Foreclosure inventory will rise, and this will add to the negative impact on home values.

Our advice to any homeowner who has not already refinanced to lower rates is to do so ASAP! The end of low rates is near, and home values will decrease. If you have considered lowering your monthly payment or your loan term (30-year to a 25/20/15), renovations, debt consolidation or investing, the time to act on it is now. Your ability to act on any of the benefits of refinancing is greatly limited by your home's value. A lower home value will leave you with less opportunity. It really is the time to plan and act in preparation for higher rates and lower home value.

Foreclosure properties offer a unique opportunity to those with foresight and resources. They are priced according to the amount of improvement needed to make them marketable. The ideal opportunity is buying a home that needs the most work in the most expensive neighborhood you can afford to invest in. The reason for this is the ability to improve and gain equity.

If you were to purchase a \$100,000 home that needs \$100,000 of renovations to look like the rest of the neighbors, and the neighborhood has a median price of \$300,000, you have an opportunity to build equity of \$100,000. This may be difficult in a market with less demand, which makes research/knowledge necessary. Investing in a state/county that has tenant laws favoring the landlord would make it so you can rent the property with reduced risk of loss while you hold the asset until demand for sales increases.

Cross Country Mortgage offers home financing for investment properties that includes financing for improvements. It is on one fixed loan, with reduced rates and costs for first responders and union members. If you have secured your primary residence financing and are considering investing in real estate, this may be what you are looking for.

If you have not yet considered refinancing and taking advantage of current rates and home values, it is important that you give us a call. For first responders/union members, all bank fees are waived, savings thousands of dollars in junk fees.

Richard Tschernia is the Senior Vice President for National Affinity Lending at Cross Country Mortgage. Contact Cross Country Mortgage at 833-724-8700 or union@myccmortgage.com.

The Best of Health

Are you drinking enough water?



MARLENE MADRUGA

Your health has never been more important than it is today. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have realized that good health gives you a fighting chance in fending off disease. As first responders, the mere nature of the profession lends itself to environmental factors and behaviors detrimental to your well-being. Shift work, overtime, stress, sitting for long periods, poor food choices, not getting enough sleep or not getting enough exercise are just some of the factors that affect your overall wellness.

The goal of these articles is to provide one tip each month to improve or enhance your health.

The definition of health has changed over the years. One was once considered healthy if he or she was free from disease or health problems. In today's world, health is viewed more as an overview of an individual's overall well-being or wellness, taking into account a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health, among other factors. Let's take a look at our first tip of the month.

Hydration: Why is drinking water so important? Drinking enough water throughout the day is vital for good health. It maintains the body's fluid balance, flushes out toxins, decreases cravings, increases energy and reduces inflammation along with numerous other benefits. So, how do you know if you're drinking enough water?

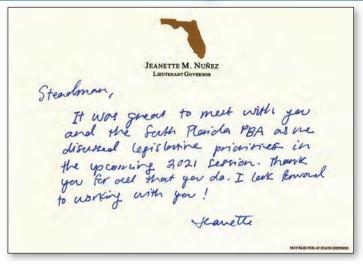
The amount of water your body needs on a daily basis varies depends on your body size, your level of activity and the temperature where you live. A good rule of thumb is to drink half of your body weight in fluid ounces daily. For example, if your body weight is 160 pounds, then you would need to drink approximately 80 ounces of water. You know you're drinking enough water when your urine is on the light side and you're having to empty your bladder every two to three hours. When you first start to increase your water intake, you will need to go to the bathroom more often than you are used to, but after a few days your body should adjust.

Adjusting to this at first will take some getting used to. Here are some tips to get you started:

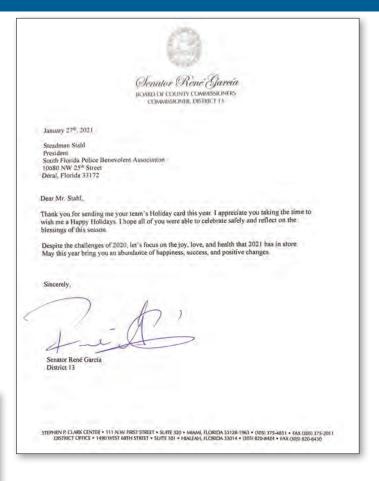
- Drink one to two glasses first thing in the morning. You have been asleep for seven to eight hours, and your body needs to be hydrated. Rehydrating will lead to clearer thinking and better energy.
- If you don't like the taste of water, add lemon, mint leaves or fruit to add flavor.
- Keep a water bottle or container at your desk or in your car at all times, so that you always have water readily available to you.
- Track your water intake throughout the day.
- Sip water at intervals during exercise.
- Try to limit your caffeine intake to moderate amounts, as it's a diuretic and can deplete the body of water.

Marlene Madruga is a retired Miami-Dade Corrections sergeant. Contact her at 305-487-3338 or PhoenixRisingLifeCoaching@yahoo.com.

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