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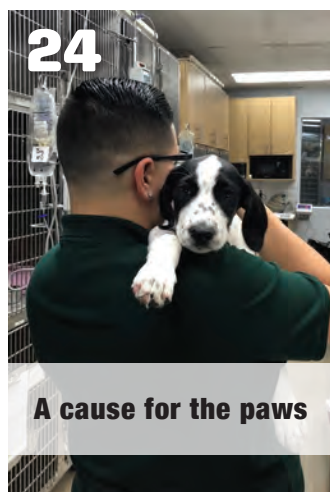
Supporting Action

Florida Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis has established an illustrious record of advocating for law enforcement. He has led the effort to pass legislation to provide officers with the benefits and access to help they need to do their jobs and pursue healthy living. He has gone above and beyond the call of duty to speak out on behalf of officers throughout the state. And he has walked the walk to lead the state's effort to support law enforcement at every opportunity.

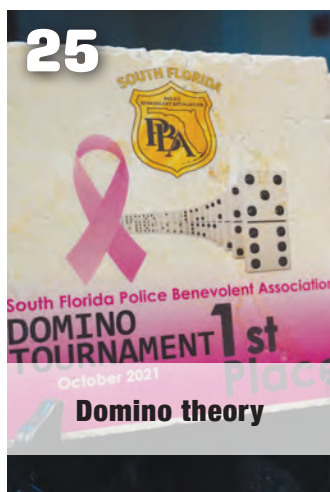
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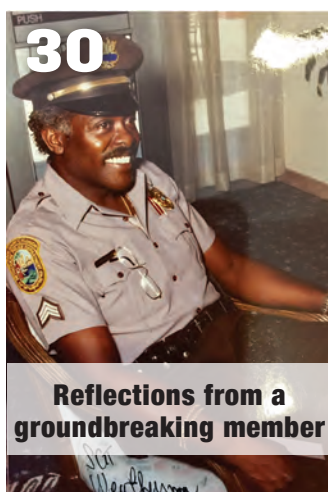
INSIDE STORIES



A cause for the paws



Domino theory



Reflections from a groundbreaking member



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THE PRES SAYS

We're ready



STEADMAN
STAHL

Finally, we're back out among civilization. We've finally got back into a place where it's OK to shake hands. We don't have to wear a mask all the time. We can start enjoying all the events that we've had to cancel for the past two years. We're much better than we were a year ago and, in fact, we're looking forward to the upcoming year.

Morale-wise, I think things are better. We've had some events, like our Domino Tournament in October. Members are just happy with being able to start acting normal again, have a normal life and interact with others.

We are still as busy as ever. We are working on securing good contracts for all our units, like the one our members in Miami-Dade just ratified. If you look at the photos on page 17, you can see how enthusiastic members were in voting for this agreement.

Sometimes, it seems like when we go through something and come out OK, something else happens. We have come through the post-Floyd, riot-riddled, anti-police reaction and the pandemic. And then the Surfside building collapse comes. Sometimes, it feels like we are waiting for the other shoe to drop.

But whatever it is, we're going to be ready for it. We're prepared for it, and we're going to move forward. In our worst moments, the best comes out of our profession. We were getting caught up in this negative news cycle that we were seeing day in and day out. We were finding ourselves demoralized as we worked.

Now, however, we are seeing that the public appreciates what the men and women in law enforcement do. I think we feel it. I don't think we're feeling the us-against-them mentality that was out there. I think that there's a group that exists to divide communities, to divide police and to divide elected officials. But we persevere, we push our way through it, and I think, even now, the ones who were advocating the defunding mechanism have come to realize that we cannot live in a society if we don't have faith and trust in our public safety.

We have it because we have an administration in Florida that values the police. I attend many conferences across the country, and I sit on the board of the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO). The one thing that I hear from law enforcement from across the country is, "We wish we had your governor. We wish we had your politicians." I don't want to say all of them, but the support the majority of the group is giving public safety is noticeable.

At our State PBA conference in November, the governor, the attorney general, the chief financial officer and the Senate president, who is a candidate for agriculture commissioner, all attended to confirm their support. It's a no-brainer to endorse them for the November 2022 election. And it's a no-brainer when it comes to where they stand with public safety. We stand with any elected official who stands with public safety.

CFO Jimmy Patronis was one of the first ones to stand with us. The cover of this issue and the accompanying story beginning on page 20 detail why we can feel confident in how the administration views law enforcement. When COVID started hitting, he was the first one to come out of the gate swinging and made sure that any first responder who gets COVID receives workman's comp.

The guy is consistently standing with first responders. And he is another prime example of how the administration, the governor and our mayor, too, are making sure that first responders have all the tools and resources they need. The governor and the whole cabinet stepped forward, and Jimmy Patronis was a champion of it. I think every police officer, corrections officer and firefighter in this state should be proud of the leadership that's coming out of Tallahassee.

If you have any question about our relationship with the governor, you can see the photo on page 6 with me handing him one of the pink bears we had made to raise funds for breast cancer awareness. As you probably know, his wife, Casey, is now in the fight, having been diagnosed with breast cancer.

We wanted her to have a bear. And we also gave one to Attorney General Ashley Moody because we want them to know that the money we raise selling the bears will be given to the American Cancer Society in the hope that one day, we'll eradicate the dreadful disease. We were once again able to host our Domino Tournament during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and we are proud to write a check for the money we raised to the American Cancer Society.

I just want to reiterate that we're blessed to have a state where we have politicians who don't just say it. They back it up with their actions, and they prove it. They don't try to make law enforcement political. They're just like, "We know what it does, how important it is." Patronis has said it in like 10 different ways.



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Presenting pink bears that South Florida PBA created to raise money for breast cancer awareness to Governor DeSantis (left) and Attorney General Ashley Moody.

STAHL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

They know how important we are to the growth of the economy and the positive feelings that residents have about their state. Look at what has happened in Seattle. The damage they did there in one year will take them years and years to fix. Those guys are never going to let this happen to your state.

Common sense has overshadowed the political rhetoric out there. We are seeing mask and vaccine mandates causing conflict in other states, but we have a governor who stepped in and said you're not going to force it on people. It's somebody looking out for us. They are giving us the tools and equipment that we need, but not forcing a shot on somebody who doesn't want it. They understand that it's a personal choice.

I was getting text messages from many of our members to not let them force this on us. It came up in a couple of our contract negotiations, and we are not going to let that become part of negotiations.

You know, we didn't have choice when we had to go out and

fight that invisible dragon. As a result, we have earned the right to make this a personal choice. We have earned the support we are getting from the administration, and they know it.

As we look forward to 2022, we can be confident that the support from our elected officials gives us hope. I think we can put back the hope in this season of hope. I want to ask all our members and their families to make sure to remember all the positive aspects of our lives, to remember all the blessings we have.

Let's fill this holiday season with hope and make it the best one ever. Please take care of each other. Please take care of yourselves. On behalf of the South Florida PBA, I wish you all the happiest of holidays and a very Happy New Year. Let's look forward to a great 2022.

As always, stay safe, my friends.

Steadman Stahl, President
steadman@sflpba.org

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DAVID
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As we are all aware, October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a campaign that aims to increase awareness and education as it relates to this disease. So it makes sense that we scheduled our annual Hoot Shoot during this time.

Because over 43,000 women die every year of breast cancer in the U.S., including my mother, this event gives us an opportunity to help support the fight against this horrific disease. This year was our second Hoot Shoot, and it was a great success, with the Top Gun going to MDPD SRT Officer Leonard Massi. Second place went to Sergeant Armando Borrego, third place to Officer David Palma, fourth place to Fred Johnson from Crime Scene, fifth place to Corrections Officer J. Pene and sixth place to our own PBA Director Sergeant Anthony "T-Rod" Rodriguez.

I would like to thank all those who organized the Hoot Shoot, including the Special Patrol Bureau, the Training Bureau and the PBA for sponsoring. In addition, thanks to Major Arnold Palmer, Major Carlos Gonzalez, PBA Rep Sergeant Bert Perez, Sergeant Borrego and Officer Kathy Suarez. I would finally like to thank all those that participated. Hopefully, next year will bring even more participants, and we will earn even more money for this important cause.

On another note, as the holidays are soon upon us, I would like to wish everyone a very happy, healthy and safe holiday season, as well as a very happy new year. Also, I want to remind everyone that with the hustle and bustle of everyday life, work, etc., make sure to take the time to count your blessings, whether big or small.

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



Miami-Dade SRT Officer Leonard Massi (center) was the Top Gun at the 2021 Hoot Shoot.



Is the glass half full or half empty?



**NIZAM "ISH"
ISHMAEL
VICE
PRESIDENT**

Hopefully, all of us will be in great health when retiring, so we all should have a regular regimen of exercising and healthy eating. There is another step we should all take, which may be easy or very hard depending on your natural disposition. If you don't already, you should try to start looking at things optimistically.

Turns out that optimism is something of a superpower. Being optimistic — assuming that things are likely to turn out for the best — actually correlates to positive health outcomes. A study titled "Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study" looked at autobiographies written by nuns when they were in their early twenties. Their writing was evaluated for emotional tone, and those with the most optimistic outlook eventually lived notably longer than the more pessimistic writers.

Studies such as "Optimism and Its Im-

pact on Mental & Physical Well-Being" and "The Immune System & Happiness" have shown an association between having an optimistic worldview and maintaining physical and mental wellness. Consider the placebo effect, which is the tendency for people to be "fooled" into health benefits when taking something they mistakenly believe to be medicine. The placebo effect is irrefutable evidence of the power of positive thinking.

Staying optimistic is a powerful tool that must be utilized by all law enforcement professionals to survive in our profession. Not only does it feel better than pessimism, but it can also actually drive positive outcomes. Just look around any of our work locations — there are some that we just try to avoid due to the negativity that they bring with them. For some, no matter what it can be, it will never be enough. I have always tried my best to surround myself with people who are positive in all aspects of their lives.

We should all be mindful of the power of positivity, and we need to actively seek it



out. At the very least, try not to let the small stuff get you down. Deliberately try to view the glass as half full instead of half empty, and you may discover that perception is reality. I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving and to those of various faiths, Happy Hanukkah/Hanukkah Sameach, Happy Kwanzaa/Habari Gani and Merry Christmas. Be safe out there, and don't put on too much weight during this time of the year. Please feel free to contact me at ish@sflpba.org or at 305-593-0044.

"If you get up in the morning and think the future is going to be better, it is a bright day. Otherwise, it's not." – Elon Musk

PBA'S ASSOCIATE PERSONAL INJURY COUNSEL

Martin, Lister & Alvarez, PLC



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- National Board of Trial Advocacy Civil Trial Specialist
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- Former MDPD Homicide Detective
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 - Adjunct Law Professor

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JERMAINE
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As the year draws to a close, it is always a useful exercise to take some time to review the past year and all its events. Reflecting on what occurred during the year, what you accomplished and what could have been done better will bring closure to the year and will also provide the space for valuable learning. It is also a good idea to take some time to review the past before thinking about the year ahead. The ongoing COVID-19 virus and Delta variant have uprooted every aspect of our lives: work, school and family. Our thoughts go out to those members and their families impacted by

the virus, and I applaud all those who put themselves at risk daily, whether to save lives or keep the community safe. We were all happy to put 2020 behind us, but this year was no different.

During the month of November, elections were held for the PBA Board of Directors positions. This process allows members to let their voices be heard. Voting is one of the important ways to effect change. All members had the opportunity to put their vote behind the Board members they felt support their interests by standing up for them. One of the most basic elements of any



PBA President Steadman Stahl and PBA Treasurer Jermaine Lawson posing with Officer J. Almanzar at MWDC during a site visit.

democratically organized system is the right of union members to participate in regularly held free and fair elections for leadership positions.

Regular, free and fair elections for leadership are a fundamental element of any democracy, and participation in elections is one of the most important and effective ways for union members to have a say in how their union should operate. Unions also have required processes for casting secret ballots. Importantly, federal labor law explicitly protects members' right to support the candidates of their choice without fear of "penalty, discipline, or improper interference or reprisal." Such rules and processes ensure that all union members have an equal opportunity to make their voices heard.

Thanks to all the members who took the time to participate in this past election. Your participation was essential in selecting the board of directors that you feel will represent your best interests. I am hoping that this new administration will help to propel the union in a new direction. On behalf of the PBA Board of Directors, I want to take this opportunity to wish all our members an enjoyable, peaceful and safe holiday. Please feel free to contact me at lawson@sflpba.org or at 305-593-0044.



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What to know about family and medical leave



**SIMONE
MARIE LOPEZ,
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The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) became effective on Aug. 5, 1993. FMLA allows eligible employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave each year for family or medical reasons. The act covers both public and private employers. FMLA requires employers to grant such leave requests and to guarantee the employee a position upon return from such leave. Generally, this leave is unpaid. However, employees are generally allowed to use paid leave time for FMLA leave. In other words, the family and medical leave requested does not have to be taken “without pay,” if the employee chooses to utilize their leave time.

Employees must meet eligibility requirements before they are entitled to this mandated leave. To be eligible, an employee must have worked for the employer for at least 12 months, and in the 12 months immediately prior to taking the leave have worked at least 1,250 hours. This type of leave can be used for the birth of a child or placement for adoption or foster care;

the care of an immediate family member with a serious health condition; or when the employee is unable to work due to his or her own serious health condition.

Here at the PBA, we most often see law enforcement professionals request FMLA to care for family members or for themselves. It is very important in these situations that you be your own advocate, at least initially. When I say, “Be your own advocate,” this is what I mean: When you apply for FMLA, your agency will provide you with the federal forms to be filled out by you and by your doctor. These are standard forms issued by the government. In addition, however, they may also require you to fill out a written “leave request” or “leave of absence” request form that is generated by your agency, listing the dates or time frame(s) you are requesting leave. This request form should be signed by you and dated, verifying the dates/time-frame(s) you are requesting to use FMLA.

On multiple occasions, we have assisted members who were actually approved for FMLA by their agency and then later received disciplinary action as a result of utilizing this federally mandated leave time. Personally, I have represented several



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members who were disciplined, sometimes involving a loss of pay, for alleged “excessive absenteeism,” when, in reality, the agency had approved the employee for the use of FMLA during the timeframe in question.

It is very important that you keep copies of everything that you sign and submit. In addition, your request form must be consistent with the information provided on the health care certification filled out by your doctor. You and your doctor determine the dates and type of leave time you will need — your agency does not. So, the doctor’s certification form should be consistent with the leave request form submitted to your agency. Also, be aware that leave time can be requested in specific blocks of time, or it can be approved for “intermittent” use, as needed, for health conditions that have periodic flare-ups. Again, you and your doctor decide what your health care needs are.

Makes sense, right? So, here’s where the nightmare begins. Your employer may lose people’s paperwork. There have been instances where the personnel at your agencies have not only lost paperwork but have also unilaterally changed the dates on leave request forms after the employee signed the forms, circumventing an employee’s rights under the law. I know this seems unbelievable, but it is reality. I would suggest you send your paperwork via e-mail and copy as many people as you can in HR. Also, please, please, please, save those e-mails with the attachments, as they were originally submitted.

If you are disciplined in violation of the law, the only defense you may have is those e-mails, along with the attachments you submitted. When your agency tells me you were not on approved FMLA, and therefore were excessively absent from work, it doesn’t matter what we know. What matters is what can be proven regarding the timeframe the leave was requested. Yes, we are required to prove to them that they screwed up. Don’t expect that your agency will provide you with those e-mails and attachments later on in the process. Also keep in mind that regular rules regarding leave still apply, so if you are approved for intermittent leave and wake up unable to go to work due to the FMLA-approved condition, you still need to follow whatever rules your agency has regarding calling in, which sometimes means giving them an hour notice. When you do call in, make sure you advise that the absence is due to an FMLA condition. You do not need to be any more specific than that.

I have also seen instances where employees submitted FMLA requests, and it took so long for the agency to process the paperwork that the agency simply decided it would only approve part of the FMLA requested; the part that began when the last approval signature was obtained on the leave request form. This is sometimes several months after the leave request began. This is not consistent with the law. When you submit your request for FMLA, it is presumed to be approved upon the date of submission, not on the date some administrator gets around to signing it. And FMLA can be approved retroactively, so don’t let your agency tell you that they can’t do it. You should not have to suffer further regarding leave time you truly need to care for your health or your family. You determine the leave time that you need; your agency does not.

If you suffer from an ongoing health condition and have ap-

2021 Pending Grievances	
This list represents the pending grievances filed at the various departments represented by the South Florida Police Benevolent Association as of Oct. 31, 2021 . The PBA legal staff receives numerous other complaints that are resolved by other means.	
DEPARTMENT/DISTRICT	
HIALEAH	1
HOMESTEAD CORRECTIONS	1
HOMESTEAD PD	1
M-D CORRECTIONS	
ASSOCIATION	1
TRANSPORTATION	1
TGK(MHTC)	1
TOTAL	3
M-D POLICE	3
MIAMI GARDENS	4
MCSO (DEP SHERIFF)	1
NORTH BAY VILLAGE	1
NORTH MIAMI	1
OPA LOCKA	5
SWEETWATER	1
TOTAL GRIEVANCES	22

plied for FMLA in the past, your employer is on notice that there is an ongoing issue or request. However, you must update your request in writing at least once a year, which means the same paperwork must be submitted by you and your doctor annually. Please do so before the end of the current year, to get leave approved for the coming year. And, again, keep everything you submit. If you need assistance, we can help you. Some departments’ rules may differ regarding the timing or frequency of renewal, so ask questions about your agency’s policy. Get a copy of it and read it.

If you come to the Legal Department after you have received discipline and tell us you were on approved FMLA, you will need to provide us with the paperwork to prove your agency has violated the law. Can we do a public records request of your agency? Yes. Do we always receive a complete response to these requests? No, no and no. Please be your own advocate. And remember, we are here to help. I have, with the assistance of astute and organized clients who kept their paperwork, been successful in restoring lost wages and lost seniority that resulted from bureaucratic incompetence. Sounds harsh? Not at all. It is what it is. We are here to make sure that the rules are followed. We are also here to educate you so you can assist us in the cause. Be careful out there and stay safe, always.

Looking ahead to a great new year



DENNIS
BAMBACH
RPOC
PRESIDENT

On behalf of the RPOC Board of Directors, I would like to wish our membership the happiest of holidays. I cannot believe we are almost to the end of 2021. It has been a trying year with many highs and lows, but as we near the end it feels like we have rounded the corner and are inching back to normalcy. I am encouraged by the strides that have been made against COVID and am hoping for a better new year.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to get together as we used to in the past, but we are working to achieve that goal. Our members throughout the state are beginning to have their get-togethers, and the April reunion in Lake Mary is a go. Please make your plans to attend early, as I am hoping for a great turnout.

Here are reports from our officers for this issue:

Ed Spisak, Treasurer: Our January mail-out will have reunion information as well as membership renewal information.

Attention, seniors (those over 75) and honorary and life members: Out of our current members, almost a quarter of you fall into those categories and are very much valued and respected by RPOC. We would appreciate it if many more of you would take the time to update your status and let us know how you are doing. This can be done by adding a note to the reverse side of your membership renewal form when you receive it in January. You are also invited to email us any time at rpocpba@bellsouth.net or visit our website, www.rpocpba.org, and use the "Contact Us" tab at the top of our home page.

John Fraley, Vice President: Being retired for almost 26 years has given me cause to understand what it was like to appreciate the job we did, the friends we worked with and the experiences we encountered on a day-to-day basis. As we reflect on our lives in the pandemic era and the many social issues that current law enforcement personnel deal with daily, be thankful and remember those before us. Jimmy Baggett, Frank Kovacs and Lloyd Hough — may they all rest in peace. They were part of the foundation that has made the RPOC what is today. Dennis Bambach has stayed the course, and we are a better group because of his efforts and dedication to the Retired Police Officers Council.

Going forward, the Otis Chambers Scholarship Fund has been very successful, and I'm expecting more applications in 2022. The RPOC board is extremely happy with the interest and results thus far. With that being said, I'm asking members to donate what they can to the fund when renewing their membership. On behalf of the RPOC board, thank you for your support.

Jerry Rudoff, Sergeant-At-Arms/Website Administrator: A bit of congratulations is in order for our general membership. We have been achieving above 67 percent readership of our eNewsletter. These are great numbers and show that our members are interesting in receiving current, up-to-date information about what is happening in our LE retirement community.

We are also pleased to say that if you have not joined our private RPOC Facebook page, you are missing out on some very important information as relates to your Medicare and AvMed benefits. When you do request access to the page, please answer all the questions asked, as that makes it easier for us to

verify and confirm you are who you say you are. We are pleased to have Stephanie N. Ranfys, whose expertise is in Medicare and various AvMed programs, as our very own RPOC consultant who is just a click away. For general questions, she is able to answer in response to your post so that all may learn. And of course, if your query or information is personal in nature, you can private-message her and she will respond privately. So regardless, you have your very own private Medicare/AvMed specialist at your fingertips. Oh, and Stephanie is very much aware and sensitive to your needs as a retired police officer, as she is married to one of our own retirees.

Lastly, as many of you are aware, we no longer have access to the Miccosukee buffet for our luncheons, as they have closed it down. So we are currently looking for a suitable place to continue our monthly luncheons and our Christmas party. If you are aware of such a location and/or have access to the management of such a location, please feel free to send us the information: name, location, contact information, size of facility, type of food and if they are able to accommodate between 50 to 100 people at any given event. Until then, see you online.

Reba Miller, Chaplain: "Those we love don't go away, they walk beside us every day, unseen, unheard, but always near, still loved, still missed and very dear." It is with a saddened heart and spirit that we honor the passing of these beloved friends and members:

- Gary S. Hancock, October 2021
- Lloyd F. Hough, October 2021
- James J. Pinkerton, October 2021
- Joe C. Quick, September 2021

We also send special wishes and condolences to RPOC member Charlie Holt and his family on the loss of his beloved wife, retired MDPD Sergeant Juana (Joann) T. Bassey-Holt, and to member Donald Rhindress on the loss of his significant other, Esther Knuck.

Special thoughts and prayers to all our members and their families during the upcoming holidays. Blessings to all. Peace and provision.

And finally, I would like to include the following message I received from Carol Quick:

"Thank you from the Quick Family for your kind and loving thoughts. Our family is overcome with all the support we have received. Joe was truly loved. A big thank you to all who were with us at the service and those who sent condolences, flowers and planted trees in memory of Joe. Love, Carol and Family."

We would like to welcome the following new members: Clora Adkins, MD Corrections, and Kenneth Loveland, MDPD.

Regarding next year's reunion, the dates are April 14–17, 2022. The Marriott Lake Mary has assured me that they will be taking all the necessary precautions to ensure a safe and healthy reunion. Further information will be forthcoming.

On behalf of the Board, we hope you all have a happy and healthy holiday season!

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.



David Horowitz
Miami-Dade Corrections
& Rehabilitation



Eddie Smith Jr.
Miami-Dade
Police Department



Jose Lam
Miami-Dade Police Department



Keith James
Miami-Dade Corrections
& Rehabilitation



Manny Blanco
Miami-Dade Police Department



Patrick Van Gils
Miami-Dade Police Department



Randy Rossman
Miami-Dade Police Department



Ronald Miller
Miami-Dade Corrections
& Rehabilitation



Sylvia Batista
Commission on Ethics
& Public Trust



Taina Kemp
Miami-Dade Corrections
& Rehabilitation



Will Sanchez
Miami-Dade Police Department

Officers raise funds on wheels and on the field



SERGEANT
KENNETH
HORGAN
POAT
ASSISTANCE
COMMITTEE
CHAIRPERSON

Every year, our annual “Cops Ride for Kids” event raised money that goes directly to children of law enforcement officers. Christmas bundles are prepared and distributed to all the various agencies in Miami-Dade County, and eventually an officer will hand-deliver the gifts. A big thank-you goes out to Coral Gables Major Rudy Gonzalez and retired Miami-Dade Lieutenant Rudy Gonzalez Sr. They spearhead this event every year and give countless hours of their time to make it happen.

This holiday season will be sad for many families. Many have lost family members due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also lost five law enforcement officers to the virus. Their names will be added to the Wall of Honor. Their children will also be added to the POAT Holiday Gifts for Surviving Children list of those we will never forget.

Our list now includes 70 children who receive gifts not only

at Christmas, but also on their birthday, so they know we will never forget them. Every year until they turn 18, they receive a birthday card and gift. Then, on their 18th birthday, they receive a check for \$2,000 to help prepare them for their future.

POAT will always remember the families of our officers. Whether it be the 79-year-old daughter of Homestead Police Chief Frank Brantley, who was killed on March 17, 1952, or the 8-month-old daughter of Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Lazaro Febles, who died on Aug. 14, 2021, of COVID-19, POAT will always be there for them.

The POAT family wishes you all a merry Christmas, a happy new year and a happy holiday season!

Please join us for the upcoming 8th Annual Homeruns for Heroes Kickball Tournament, which will be held at Kendall Indian Hammocks Park Jan. 14-15, 2022. The park is located at 11395 SW 79th St. If you're interested in forming a team, contact Major Thamy Gonzalez at 305-216-6605 for team registration. The team registration fee is \$350, and team T-shirts are included. The deadline for team registration is Dec. 3.

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PBA
Associate General
Personal Injury Counsel

Ratification Perpetration

South Florida PBA bargaining unit members from Miami-Dade County came out in force to ratify the new collective bargaining agreement. The vote was overwhelming to ratify the new contract.



The table is set

Florida PBA has things in place for success
in the 2022 legislative session and perhaps beyond

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

Maybe it's the Florida PBA's table now.

A couple of years ago, the PBA worked hard to demand a prominent seat at the table. Such is the way an organization's relationship with – and its accompanying influence on – leadership is often classified.

Before Governor DeSantis and his current administration took office in 2019, the PBA had to speak up to keep from taking a back seat when issues related to law enforcement came through Tallahassee. But when the governor, Attorney General Ashley Moody, Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis and State Senate President Wilton Simpson spent four hours speaking to members from across the state at the Florida PBA Conference on Nov. 12, well, maybe the union has procured some of the best seats in the house.

"I think this is probably the most pro-law enforcement, pro-corrections cabinet we've ever had," Florida PBA Executive Director Matt Puckett submits. "The governor, the attorney general and the CFO all have a real love for law enforcement, and it's not just words. It's not just like, 'OK, I got to show up and get a picture with the police unions or whatever.' They're thinking. The governor wants to make Florida an employment hot spot for law enforcement throughout the country."

The administration has certainly put its cards on the table and dealt PBA members a winning hand. In addition to the \$1,000 bonus the governor dispensed to all officers in 2021, Patronis orchestrated covering worker's comp claims filed by those who contracted COVID on the job.

Moody, who is married to a law enforcement officer, implemented a Back the Blue campaign to recognize outstanding police work when she took office. And now Simpson, who has established a formidable record of supporting law enforcement in the state legislature, has been endorsed by the PBA as a candidate for agriculture commissioner.

"I think they all connect with law enforcement officers," Puckett asserts.



From left, South Florida PBA Vice President Nizam "Ish" Ishmael, Governor DeSantis, South Florida PBA President Steadman Stahl and Executive Vice President David Greenwell at the Florida PBA conference in November.

"They understand how vital it is and it does flow from the top. It's wonderful to have friends, people that you can count on. That's the name of the game. You want to have those connections, so good things happen for our members. I mean, at the end of the day, you want them thinking about the welfare of your members, and I believe all of them do."

These relationships should set the table for the PBA to address its legislative agenda in the 2022 session, which begins in January. The main course for this year's session, however, will be redistricting the entire state.

That initiative typically takes up a lot of time and is prone to a lot of distractions. Some of the redistricting could cause representatives who have been loyal to law enforcement to have to run against each other in November. But the PBA seems to have built enough long-term relationships with legislators to sustain redistricting.

The big legislative initiatives might get put on hold, as a result. But this coming year, the legislature has enough general revenue at its disposal that folks who work for the state – in particular, corrections and highway patrol officers – might

be in a position to score some wins and maybe have some of the pay issues that have been going on fixed.

The PBA has also been in talks with legislators about positive reforms for pensions. Not just FRS, but municipal pensions, too. Those conversations might take a couple of more years to come to fruition.

"But if you want to make Florida a destination hot spot for law enforcement employment, you're going to have to create a little uniformity," Puckett adds. "I think that there's a real will to do that, and we may see some steps in that direction this year. It may not be the grand slam everybody wants. But in 2022, we may get on base, and we may hit a double. And we can continue to capitalize on that for the next few years."

The PBA would like to have more conversations with legislators about mental health support for law enforcement officers. And the union will put effort into pushing through the additional COVID coverage Patronis is proposing in his Bridge to the Badge program.

But there's just no way to know what will move. Puckett noted that interim committee meetings this fall did not hear a lot of bills because so much was done during the 2021 session. After redistricting, much attention will be given to how to best use the surplus of revenue that has been accrued.

"They have some recurring dollars, but they have a lot of nonrecurring dollars," Puckett details. "So, you might see a lot of 'Let's do this one time,' like the bonus thing."

As always, the legislative session will be subject to the best-laid plans being taken off the table.

"A hurricane hitting or another incident can change the whole trajectory of the session," Puckett reminds. "There are unknowns and I'd love for it to not happen. I think probably just for our own personal mental health, we could use a break from all the chaos. But you have to expect the unexpected. That's why you try to look for opportunities. And there's a lot there, so we'll see."



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The Chief

Florida CFO Jimmy Patronis has worked relentlessly to build a bridge with the state's law enforcement officers



■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

When the cavalcade of the state's top elected officials addressing the 2021 Florida PBA Leadership Conference in Cape Coral progressed to one of law enforcement's biggest fans, the applause turned up to reverberating levels. But not for him.

A few minutes into his speech, Florida Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis crescendoed ovation-igniting remarks by asking those in the room who had responded to the Surfside Tower tragedy to stand up and be recognized.

"Go ahead and stand up so we can give you a round of applause," Patronis declared.

Nobody applauded louder and longer than the Florida CFO, who in four years of leading the state's financial management has walked his backing of the blue even more than he has talked about support. And it's a rare speech, appearance or day that Patronis does not express substantive words of admiration and appreciation for those who enforce and maintain law and order in the state.

During his presentation to the Florida PBA, Patronis shared that when he is out with his sons, Theo and Johnny, when-



From left, South Florida PBA Vice President Nizam "Ish" Ishmael, Florida CFO Jimmy Patronis, South Florida PBA President Steadman Stahl and Executive Vice President David Greenwell at the Florida PBA Conference.

ever they see somebody on the job, he asks them to shake the officers' hands and thank them for their service. Shortly, thereafter, Patronis detailed his "Bridge for the Badge" program that could provide hearty financial support to families of officers who have ongoing issues with COVID that cause them to miss work.

The PBA has already endorsed Patronis for the November 2022 election, and it's because he makes statements like this seemingly any time he steps up to a microphone:

"Look, I'm a big believer in prosperity, and, at the end of the day, none of that ever takes place if you don't have a robust safety net that works 24/7/365," he emphasized. "In addition, the work law enforcement does in building relationships in our neighborhoods is important. Florida's law enforcement builds stronger communities, and that's because of the bonds you build."

Florida PBA Executive Director Matt Puckett has been working with Patronis since 2006, when he began serving in the state legislature. Puckett has witnessed what fuels the CFO's devotion to walk the walk for law enforcement and get your back.

"He's got a real way about connecting with people," Puckett described. "He remembers the conversations he has with

you, and that's a result of caring. It's not just perfunctory. He spends a lot of time getting to know folks, and that comes from a very genuine place inside of him."

Building bridges

Genuine investment from Patronis in the long arms of law enforcement has sprouted and manifested in many ways, shapes and forms. Clearly, there is something about Jimmy that when he meets a law enforcement officer and his or her spouse, he greets the spouse first to say, "thank you." Clearly, he has had an up-close and personal view of how vital the police can be and has never forgotten what that's like.

Perhaps it is the memory of how deputies who happened to be eating at his family's restaurant in Panama City stopped an 18-year-old from running out on the check that enabled Patronis to see how first responders respond. Perhaps it is the experience of witnessing more than 1,800 officers come to his hometown to help when Hurricane Michael hit the panhandle in 2018.

Or maybe it was going on his first call with Hillsborough Fire Rescue in 2017 when he was the state fire marshal, which is also part of his gig.

"It's a 911 call, I'm in the engine and en route we have to pull over and stop," Patronis recalled. "I'm asking, 'Why are

we stopping?' Because the Hillsborough County sheriffs had to go in and cool off the scene."

Puckett notes that Patronis's devotion to walking the walk motivates him to be on the scene when first responders respond. He was on the ground at Surfside, and what South Florida PBA members saw there is what they see every day with Jimmy.

"There are people who are gifted politicians and there are people who are genuine," Puckett continued. "He's got both. He's genuine, but he's also got the gift. He knows how to connect with people. He doesn't really put on a persona. Once you meet him, you're like, 'This is how this guy always is.'"

Few elected officials are as grounded as Patronis. He is now a partner in his family-owner seafood restaurant, Captain Anderson's, that has been serving Panama City for more than 50 years. He earned his associate degree in restaurant management from Gulf Coast Community College and a bachelor's degree in political science from Florida State University.

His public-service career began as an intern in the Florida Senate and the United Kingdom's House of Commons. Following college graduation, Gover-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22





From left, Attorney General Ashley Moody, Governor Ron DeSantis and CFO Jimmy Patronis at a cabinet meeting.



THE CHIEF CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

nor Chiles appointed him to the Florida Elections Commission, and he was later reappointed by Governor Bush.

Patronis served in the Florida House of Representatives from 2006 to 2014, representing his hometown region in the Florida Panhandle. He was appointed to serve on Florida's Public Service Commission, as well as the Constitution Revision Commission, which meets every 20 years to propose changes to the state constitution.

After being appointed CFO by Governor Scott in 2017, he ran in 2018 against Jeremy Ring. Despite Ring going into election day with a five-point lead in the polls, Patronis defeated Ring, receiving 52 percent of the vote.

Since being elected, Patronis has traveled the state exhaustively, working to help the economy flourish and urging residents to engage in government. All the travels have reinforced what will always be the tipping point for the state's

success.

"If we're taking care of the safety and welfare and peace of mind of our citizens, a lot of prosperity can develop," Patronis asserted. "I think a lot of it goes back to a state that supports law and order. Supporting law and order has a price to it. In my book, that's a price we can't afford not to meet."

Bridging the gap

As part of the cabinet, Patronis has been fortunate to see the return on some of the most timely and deserved investments in law enforcement that have been made. Recently, he was making an appearance in Palm Beach County. As he does most days on the road, Patronis turns on the 5 a.m. local television news to get a feel for what's going on in the community.

On this newscast, he saw a report from a retention pond where a 3-year-old girl who had gotten out of the house drowned. Amid the tragedy, he thought about the first responders who had to

be on the scene and tell the girl's parents what happened. And the mental strain that would put on them.

He was thankful that day that he had worked so hard to get the state legislature to pass the bill in 2018 that allows first responders who meet certain conditions to access indemnity and medical benefits for PTSD without an accompanying physical injury.

"If it had not been for his support and constant lobbying from his position on the cabinet, that bill would never have passed," Puckett confirmed. "He made that legislation a reality."

South Florida PBA members having to deal with the crime scene and giving death notices to the families of the 98 souls lost at Surfside were equally grateful for the PTSD bill.

"The mental toll that takes on those women and men is why the PTSD bill was the right bill to pass," Patronis added. "They day that happened at Surfside, we had boots on the ground immediately – counselors and help because we knew what was coming."

When the pandemic took a toll on law enforcement, Patronis led the way with a more timely governmental response. The expertise he has gained in worker's comp as CFO led him to muster insurance carriers to provide coverage to officers who contracted COVID and had to miss work. Under the governor's emergency order to address COVID-related issues, the state's Department of Financial Services covered officers' COVID-related worker's comp claims.

Now, the CFO's Bridge for the Badge initiative has a first objective of continuing to care for officers affected by COVID. Knowing that there are plenty of funds in the state's coffers, Patronis will work with legislators during the 2022 session to provide financial support for families of officers who have incurred costs and loss of salary when hospitalized with COVID.

But apparently walking the walk is not enough. Patronis is ready to run with Bridge for the Badge, which was developed in collaboration with the PBA, even more formidable.

"Now is the time to double down on support for law enforcement," he reiterates. "I think Bridge for the Badge is just the right thing to do for those men and women who have stood by this state over the past two years dealing with an enemy that is unseen that has posed as many challenges as COVID has both mentally and physically. And we're not getting any pushback because people like being safe, and being safe means more law enforcement."

A bridge not too far

Bridge to the Badge intends to create a necessary avenue of support from state government to law enforcement. Truth be told, however, the infrastructure linking the current administration to supporting law enforcement might be more of a superhighway.

The administration seems to have prioritized the PBA as its leading collaborative and advisory organization on law enforcement matters. That's a big reason the entire cabinet attended the state conference and Governor DeSantis and Attorney General Ashley Moody preceded Patronis in speaking. And why current Senate President Wilton Simpson joined them as the ticket's candidate for agriculture commissioner next November.

Their platform for the next year will only intensify the administration's support for the police. Patronis submits that there should be a law to make it illegal for any city with a rising violent crime rate to defund anything from their law enforcement. And he reasons that the crime rate in Florida has been dropping year over year consecutively for 49 years because, "We let law enforcement do their jobs."

Before the 2021 Florida legislative session, Patronis talked the talk that set a path for walking the walk.



Jimmy Patronis greets President Biden when he arrives at the site of the Surfside condo collapse.

"I vow to fight against anything that would defund or hurt the police," he explained. "Moreover, as a member of the Florida cabinet, I will not support any cuts to FDLE or public safety budgets that hurt our partnerships with sheriff's departments or any police forces in our communities."

And so when the cavalcade of the state's top elected officials addressing the 2021 Florida PBA Leadership Conference progressed to one of law enforcement's biggest fans, the CFO concluded his remarks that gave PBA members something to cheer about.

"Florida is funding the police because we love the police," Patronis decreed. "We are funding the police because we like going to bed without feeling like we're going to be robbed. We're funding the police because it's hard for a tourist economy to work when angry mobs can run around unchecked."

"We're funding the police because we want our kids to know that if they're in a dangerous situation, they can ask the police for help. And, most importantly, we're funding the police because we love this country."



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A Rescue

How a Miami-Dade officer and a battered dog saved each other

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

Covered in bloodstains, soaking wet from the force of the pressure washer, the once vibrant pointer mix huddled in a dark corner. Broken glass lined her fur alongside the multiple stab wounds she had suffered. Her neck was unable to move from the weight of the bricks smashed against her.

Then, Miami-Dade Officer Valentina Vespa found her — it was a beacon of hope.

Vespa responded to a call from a neighbor who heard high-pitched cries and yells. She stumbled upon the scene of broken glass lying on the kitchen floor, a puddle of water and broken bricks from outside scattered across the floor. And in a corner of the house, she found an unrecognizable dog drenched in blood.

Vespa rushed the dog to an animal hospital, where she was immediately placed in an incubator. Doctors told Vespa the pointer mix might not survive. The dog had suffered multiple cigarette burns along with stab wounds. She could not open her jaw because her owner had used bricks to smash it. And she was riddled with broken bones and sprains.

The dog, whom Vespa named Luna, was in the hospital for months.

"I went every day, morning and night, to see her," recalled Vespa.

It was the beginning of a long road to recovery, something Officer Vespa would come to know well through her own battle with COVID-19.

Although it has been a year since Vespa fell ill to COVID, she still feels its side effects every day. After spending a few months in a wheelchair, she has regained strength in her legs and now uses a cane to walk. But she fights the pain of daily migraines and memory loss.

"I'm seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, and I don't have problems with my lungs anymore, or oxygen," Vespa declared. "I'm just thankful to be able to at least breathe normal again. It's been very challenging. I think challenging would be the best way to describe it."

Vespa recounted that Luna has been the inspiration to give her strength through all of this.



Miami-Dade Officer Valentina Vespa and Luna.



Luna recovered from all her injuries and can bark again.



Officer Vespa adopted Luna to provide her with a safe home.



Officer Vespa visited Luna every day to help hand-feed her until she regained her strength.

When Luna was still in the hospital, she formed a special bond with Vespa. In the beginning, she would only eat when Vespa was with her. Vespa recounted the calls she received from the doctors asking if she would be visiting Luna for the day because the dog was still not eating.

"I went every day, and I would take her outside slowly so that she could get better and kind of lift her spirits, because she was really, really sad. And I would have to hand-feed her and she would only accept that from me," explained Vespa, tears choking her voice. "She knew who I was, and she showed that. From the second she sees me, she runs crazy. It makes me cry when thinking about it."

Once Luna began regaining her strength, she was placed in protective custody at the hospital and Vespa decided to fight for custody of her. She stood before the civil court to adopt Luna and won.

The name Luna holds a lot of meaning for Vespa.

"Luna means moon," she noted, "and the moon goes through many phases. I feel like she could do just that and recover, too, as well."

But when Vespa was placed in the hospital due to COVID, she feared the worst and placed Luna in the care of her lieutenant, Robert Hourritiner. She wanted to make sure Luna would be safe and loved no matter what happened.

"He has a young daughter and has a mini version of Luna, and they get along

really good," Vespa described. "And his dog is actually going blind, and as soon as they got together, it's kind of like she acted like her guide dog. Now they're inseparable. It's so beautiful. It was tough, the separation, but she's in a perfect home right now."

Although the separation was difficult, Vespa knew it was best for Luna.

"I didn't think I was going to make it back from COVID, to be honest," Vespa added. "I wanted to make sure that she was in a good place."

As a big-time animal lover and 10-year volunteer at a local shelter, Vespa never expected to see this kind of horrific scene on the job. But she believes she was meant to be there, at the right time and place, to save Luna.

Vespa has found strength and perseverance through Luna's story. It inspires her to keep fighting for the helpless. She thought back to the moments leading up to when she found Luna, pointing out how the neighbors made the phone call.

"I'm thankful for the neighbors that called," Vespa admitted. "Because although they weren't certain whether it was a dog or a human, they heard something. There comes a point where a dog is no longer crying or barking like a dog and more as a cry for help."

It was that simple phone call that saved Luna's life.

"Otherwise, we wouldn't know," Vespa assured. "I would've never been able to pick her up and take her to the hospital."



Luna formed a special bond with Vespa.

Vespa has seen other dogs in shelters that have been abused like Luna. Some abusers never pay for their crimes, which is why Vespa ensured that Luna's abuser served time in prison. Vespa wants to raise awareness about ways to protect the helpless, whether it be children, the elderly or animals.

"We are the voice," declared Vespa passionately. "Luna has definitely inspired me to continue fighting for the voiceless."

Thanks to Vespa, Luna is now in a safe and loving environment. And thanks to Luna, Vespa has found strength to continue fighting for herself and others.

"Now, post-COVID, I can say throughout the time that I've been sick, I've been going through a lot of challenges and trying to fight off depression," Vespa related. "You almost don't feel human anymore."

And although there were many times Vespa thought she had hit rock bottom after questioning whether she would ever be able to walk again or continue doing the things she loved, Luna became an example for her. From Luna clinging to life, fighting to be able to eat again and live like a normal dog, Vespa found hope when she needed it the most.

"I think when I sit back and I look at it, I feel like her story helped save me throughout my COVID journey," Vespa added. "That's why I say, Who saved who?"



Intake and Release Points

A look at the MDCR Intake and Release Bureau highlights specialized work of corrections officers

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

When perpetrators come into the Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation facility, it can be like the first day of school. Spring breakers line up for processing along with returning inmates, who already know the drill. Some comply with orders, while others resist. The job of an MDCR Intake and Release Bureau (IRB) officer is not for everyone. It's tough work that requires members to go through an application process and receive highly specialized training.

And Lieutenant Antonio Johnston, who supervises the morning shift, can attest that not every officer can walk, as some call it, the toughest beat.

The IRB is a 24-hour operation divided into three shifts. As the sun rises, Johnston begins his shift each morning with up to 30 officers and five supervisors, all of them trained to handle one of the toughest jobs. Their ability to work as a team, communicate with aggressive or mentally ill inmates and relate to inmates takes priority to ensure everything runs as smoothly as possible.

"In this area, we go through a special

training to be very safe," Johnston explained. "We do get refresher training every so often to make sure that we perform our tasks to the best of our abilities."

But the IRB is a unit that many corrections officers strive to work for.

"You have to apply for this area," Johnston said. "It's not an area that you just come and start out of the academy. It's a team working environment, and most of our staff are seasoned veterans. Pretty much all of them know exactly what to do to make this process work."

Johnston compliments these officers by noting that they have to wear many hats throughout the shift. Many times, IRB officers have to deal with combatives, the ones who resist intake and can even get physical or violent.

"With their combative nature, they're unable to understand whatever we tell them," Johnston explained. "Those are the ones that are under the influence of alcohol or drugs or are mentally ill. So those are the ones that we have to process separate from the general population."

But dealing with combative prisoners requires IRB officers to maintain another key element of the job.

"The key to the job is to be professional at all times, regardless of provocation, because we have to take into consideration that, like I said, these inmates are mentally ill," Johnston explained. "They are under the influence of alcohol and drugs. We have to remember that we work for corrections and ensure that the image that is portrayed back here, be on our Ps and Qs, and at the same time we have to work in a collaborative manner to ensure that the task that is set at hand is done."

Although their training has enabled them to protect themselves, other risks — like infection — present themselves. And with the rise of the COVID pandemic, Johnston found it even more imperative to be mindful of his environment and take precautionary measures to protect himself.

The inmates coming to IRB are from all walks of life and arrive from various locations, including local agencies or other jurisdictions. In this line of work, you never know who you will meet. But on the hardest days, IRB officers might have to deal with disgruntled inmates who are under the influence.

"They come in under the influence, and then we keep them, there are no drugs or accessible drugs for them to take, so they rehab, so to speak," Johnston said.

At the root of it all, Johnston sees their humanity. For him, returning inmates means they're already familiar with the intake process. Although that should make his job easier, he also knows it means they have not found the help they desperately needed.

"Some of them do go back out, and they do come back because there are no rehabilitative services out there," Johnston continued, describing one of the aspects of the job they hate to see. "So, they go back to their community, and they see the same folks that were hanging around, where they end up doing the same thing again. It's like a revolving door."

In addition to the intake process, IRB officers also have to handle the release of prisoners. As at the end of the school day, they all go their separate ways. Newly processed inmates might receive their first court appearance to determine if they will remain in custody. Others are released under their own recognizance back to the streets. Others have served their time and are going back into society.

Working with the MDCR can be one of the toughest jobs in all of law enforcement. At the heart of it all is not just a demand for respect, but the kind of compassion and empathy they must readily embrace.

"Folks don't really understand," Johnston said. "When it's you in the streets, with your work, you can tell them you work for corrections. They say, 'You do that? You deal with all those guys who are criminals?' Yeah, but they're still human."

Jobs Well Done

Monroe County Sheriff's Office deputies continue to achieve distinction

■ BY ROSEMARY AN

Monroe County Sheriff's Office deputies are always going above and beyond the call of duty. Just look at the members who earned recognition at the most recent department quarterly awards. They include officers who have solved attempted murders and sex crimes, helped to control the spread of COVID in detention facilities and graduated from the police academy with honors.

They include officers like Detective Mario Benedetti, 36, who solved nearly 10 cases in three months by working with agencies like the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the U.S. Marshals to locate and identify perpetrators. He has solved countless cases in less than six years on the job, many involving high-profile crimes such as attempted homicide.

In September, a man dragged a woman for nearly 1,100 feet in a 2021 Chevy Silverado pickup truck after her left foot got stuck between the running board and the front door. He knew she was stuck, as she was screaming for help. He stopped the truck, put the gears in reverse and ran over her right leg, only to put the truck in drive and run her over again. He continued dragging her until he finally stopped the car and got out.

"Hanging from the running board, she's telling him, 'You're trying to kill me,'" Benedetti recalled. "He looked at her, got back in his car and luckily she was able to untangle her foot and drag herself away before he took off again. But he had every single intention of killing her."

Benedetti arrested the man, who is now in jail pending charges. He has also solved many sex crimes, including a cold case from 1984 of sexual battery with a deadly weapon. He identified the perpetrator and told the victim, who was in her 20s at the time of the assault, that the person responsible for the crime was found. In another case, he arrested a 62-year-old man for molesting a 4-year-old girl.

"That's stuff I never thought I was going to see," Benedetti shared. "It changes you. You see movies and you think that will never happen in real life. Well, they do."



From left, Detention Deputy of the Quarter Larry Carey, Deputy Sheriff of the Quarter Detective Mario Benedetti, Sheriff Rick Ramsay, Support Member of the Quarter Dagmar Piegler and Reserve Deputy of the Quarter Sarah Porter at the MCSO Quarterly Employee Awards ceremony on Nov. 5.

Another example of MCSO deputies doing outstanding work is Detention Deputy Larry Carey. A supervisor who doesn't hesitate to devote his time, Carey sometimes works without taking days off to handle COVID issues in all three department detention facilities. He oversees housing the inmates and works tirelessly to make sure violent inmates are separated from nonviolent inmates and people infected with COVID are isolated from the rest of the inmates.

"It was tricky, being that we're already limited housing with this facility," Carey explained. "But I don't complain. Just give me the utilities to do what I need to do, and I'll make it happen."

Carey said his dedication to keeping inmates safe, calm and collected comes from keeping a positive attitude. Whether on the job, in the community or at home with his wife, Carnetra, and their six kids, his objective is to remain optimistic while getting things done with good people.

"It's busy," Carey admitted. "But I just love my job."

In another display of exceeding expectations, Deputy Sarah Porter, 35, who always had her sights set on a career in law enforcement, was selected as class captain at the police academy. She won a leadership award and graduated in October with the highest GPA in her class

as well. She started working for MCSO as support staff until she joined the Reserves and is now a full-time deputy in field training.

"You can't do anything halfway, it's got to be 120 percent," Porter said. "I'm appreciative of the mentors who I've met throughout my journey so far. I made a lot of connections who were influential and had great advice."

These role models are just some examples of officers who continue to display excellence. They were honored at the MCSO Quarterly Employee Awards ceremony in Marathon on Nov. 5, with Benedetti as the Deputy Sheriff of the Quarter, Carey as the Detention Deputy of the Quarter and Porter the Reserve Deputy of the Quarter.

The recipients accepted their awards in front of family and loved ones, which was the most gratifying part of the distinction. Benedetti said the award gave him the chance to prove to his 11-year-old son Sebastian that hard work pays off.

"He told me, 'I'm proud of you, Dad, good job,' and little things like that mean the world to me," Benedetti said. "I always tell him, 'The sky's the limit for you, son, and if you work hard, you're dedicated and you treat everybody with respect, you accomplish everything you want in life.'"



Domino Effect

South Florida PBA pinks outside the box with event to support Breast Cancer Awareness

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

Miami-Dade Corrections Sergeant Alvin Cushnie recounted hearing the words no one is ever ready to hear. Only a year ago, his wife was diagnosed with breast cancer.

But after long, tedious months of chemotherapy, countless radiation treatments and numerous surgeries, he can finally say what most people only hope to: His wife is a cancer survivor. And through it all, his law enforcement family had his back.

"They were awesome," Cushnie said of the encouragement he and his wife have received. "They really came to our aid and supported us. And even though they couldn't come around, the financial support and the calls and the texts and everything, it was just great. Just to know that you've got people who care about you. It was always a blessing."

As an officer for 29 years, Cushnie has been an active presence in the community. So, when he heard the South Florida PBA Domino Tournament was being held in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, he knew he needed to be there. The Oct. 23 event turned out to be a great opportunity to support a cause that was now part of his everyday life.

And what a night it was. Tiles clacked outside PBA headquarters, where members laughed with each other and played intensely under a tent. They were dressed in every shade of pink. Music drifted through the air with the smell of cigar



It was all thumbs up at the South Florida PBA Domino Tournament, where members gathered to raise money for breast cancer awareness.

smoke lingering inside, where pink ribbons and balloons symbolized the cause everyone was fighting for. The PBA also had special pink bears made to give to survivors who attended.

Behind the hugs of reuniting with loved ones and the laughter of camaraderie, there was a greater meaning. Millions of women have survived and are still battling breast cancer, and together, they wanted to support them.

PBA Secretary and Miami-Dade Officer Jennifer Valdes helped organize the event. Since the event had not been held since 2019, she hoped sponsors would step up and members would come out for the cause.

"It was nice having people come out and have a good time enjoying themselves," Valdes said. "Making the donations, having the domino competition, and seeing everybody excited about it and who's going to win. It was really nice to get donations, especially after such a long



time."

By the end of the night, PBA members had raised more than \$2,500 to benefit the American Cancer Society and the PBA Love Fund, which provides resources to officers and their families in need. Local businesses donated items to be auctioned, including a glass domino table, gift baskets and gift certificates.

In the end, Eddy and Zulen Aldura teamed to win first place in the tournament just ahead of Mike Tabernero and Eric Palmer in second place and Julio Burgos and Aurelio Carmanates in third. As the entire PBA reunited for a night, members enjoyed gathering around domino tables, trading barbs and supporting a cause that has impacted everyone in some way.

"It's one of those events that for whatever reason, our guys always look forward to," Valdes explained. "So going back to having that was nice. It almost brought you back to where we left off prior to all



Eddy and Zulen Aldura teamed up to win first place in the tournament.



Second place went to Mike Tabernero and Eric Palmer.



Julio Burgos and Aurelio Carmanates took third place.

this craziness. It's always nice when you get that email that says, 'We're putting together a Domino Tournament.' It's almost like, 'Oh my God, we're there.' We're going to do something. It's known to all of us."

For members like Cushnie, the event was a breath of fresh air. It held significance for him, being the first time he was able to see everyone after cancer had turned his life upside down.

"Personally, for me as a caregiver, just to get out and be around different people, it's just a blessing. It's a stress relief," he added. "You can forget about what you're going through for a period of time. So I think that's a great thing. It's necessary."

And after a long year of events that shook the community, PBA members felt the bond of their brotherhood as they ral-

lied together for a worthy cause.

"It was nice, definitely, because it had been quite some time, and really the unknown of whether or not you were going to be able to get together," Valdes added.

Surrounded by his law enforcement family once again, Cushnie felt a new sense of encouragement.

"It was just great to see everybody," Cushnie said. "It was great for everybody to support the cause because it was a domino tournament, but it was for breast cancer. Everybody who came was supportive. There are people who didn't play dominoes, didn't smoke cigars, but they came out for the fellowship and the support. And as we said before, that's what it's all about."



A lucky member took home a beautiful glass table, which was donated for the event.

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REFLECTIONS

Catching up with a renowned South Florida PBA Member

Promoting the Cause

Henry Weatherspoon was a pioneer who changed the Miami-Dade Police Department for African-American officers

Henry Weatherspoon came on the job in June 1966 as the 19th African-American officer in what was then known as the Miami Public Safety Department. Out of the 19 officers, just one had the position of sergeant.

Fifty years later, there were 565 black officers in the department, including 15 captains, 29 lieutenants and 88 sergeants.

"It was unbelievable," he reflected. "I still can't believe the change that has occurred in all those years."

None of that would have happened if it weren't for Weatherspoon. As a longtime advocate for change, who even had to break through some PBA barriers, Weatherspoon helped paved the way for a more inclusive Miami-Dade Police Department.

At his first assignments with road patrol and the motors unit, Weatherspoon and other black colleagues noticed that there was a disparity in the number of people of color getting promoted compared to those who were not.

"They would skip over us, and we weren't promoted," he recalled. "They waited until they had white applicants on the list and promoted them. So we [wanted] to do something about it."

He and a coalition of black officers created the Progressive Officers Club to effect change. Out of 85 black officers, 14 of them, including Weatherspoon, filed a civil lawsuit against Miami-Dade County in the early 1970s.

The court determined that the county had to promote black officers, and the lawsuit was settled in 1979. Weatherspoon went to work the next day to learn that he'd be transferred to auto theft. He was the first black officer working in that unit. Six months later, he worked with the Public Information Officers during the 1980s riots for a year until he took the corporal exam and joined the SWAT team.

When he was promoted to sergeant in 1983, it was a record-breaking achievement for black officers. He was one of eight black officers who received promotions to sergeant at the same time.

"We made history," Weatherspoon said. "That had never happened in any police department in the country."

Weatherspoon and the POC's relentless efforts to help black officers receive the promotions they deserved made a clear impact in the department, as a growing number of black officers started to get hired. He also said officers were promoted more often and easily to homicide, robbery and investigative units as well.

"Our promotions were made not on color or ethnicity, but on how you scored on a test," he explained. "Then they went down the line, and they couldn't skip people, which was great."

Weatherspoon earned his last promotion and became a master sergeant in charge of the station. He oversaw car orders, vacation schedules and basically ran everything in the station.

"To be a master sergeant, a black guy, it was fantastic," he shared. "All these [officers] worked for us and became our own personnel."

On top of being a pioneer for black officers in the department, Weatherspoon was also a dedicated PBA member. He always attended the monthly meetings and was quickly noticed as someone who did not hesitate to get involved. He spent more than 15 years as a representative. He served on the board of directors and worked with the scholarship committee.

"I did everything for the PBA," he said. "My wife used to tell me, 'You care more about POC and PBA than [anything else].' You can't



Henry Weatherspoon, second from right, pictured with six of the eight officers who made history by being promoted to sergeant in 1983.

Henry Weatherspoon's Record

- Served 30 years with Miami-Dade Police Department
- Retired as a master sergeant in 1996
- Founding member of Progressive Officers Club and served as president
- Served as treasurer of Progressive Officers Club until 2016
- Member of PBA Board of Directors for more than 15 years
- Member of PBA Scholarship Committee

just sit back and wait for people to do stuff when you know what's right. Get stuff done [by getting] involved."

Weatherspoon's involvement with the POC and the PBA led to so many achievements to be proud of that it is difficult for him to choose his favorite. But one memory stands out. He served as president of the POC for two years starting in 1983 and was instrumental in bringing the Martin Luther King Day Run through Liberty City to life.

"I thought that was the greatest thing to do," he said. "When I signed the papers, I called the King Foundation and asked if we could use their name to do the run."

The Martin Luther King Day Run is held annually, with some runners who have participated for 20 years. Throughout the years, the run became so significant that the department started to assign escorts and security detail all along the course. In 2020, long after Weatherspoon's retirement, the run was alive and well — and the runners weren't just people of color.

And now at 80 years old, Weatherspoon can look back on a career of leading groundbreaking change for African-American officers in the department and advancing causes beyond the job. For him, however, it's almost unfathomable to consider how far things have come.

"I still can't believe it," he said. "We've come a long, long way."



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Members Only Section

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

South Florida PBA members honor Breast Cancer Awareness Month

South Florida PBA members traded in their typical silver badges for soft pink ones to add to their uniforms and pasted pink logos across their squad cars in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

PBA members especially wanted to honor officers who

have survived breast cancer, including Pinecrest Officer Andrea Romero and Aventura Officer Teresa Williams. Agencies throughout South Florida held multiple events to support the cause throughout October, from playing softball games to hosting fundraisers.

Aventura



Aventura PD Officer Teresa Williams shared her story as a nine-year survivor of stage 3 breast cancer. Her children have been her source of hope and inspiration.



MCSO

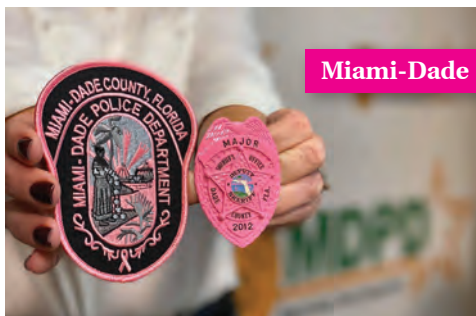
On Wear It Pink day, MCSO deputies sported a pink tops in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Medley



Medley PD updated its squad cars with pink ribbons and added details to their mirrors and wheels.

Miami-Dade



Miami-Dade Director Alfredo Ramirez III replaced his silver badge with a pink one while officers added pink embroidered badges to their uniforms.



Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation

Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation walked with the community during the annual Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk.



West Miami



West Miami participated in the Miami-Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police event held at Miami International Airport.

South Miami



South Miami PD added large pink ribbons to the front of its squad cars in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Pinecrest



Pinecrest joined West Miami at Miami International Airport in solidarity with survivors of breast cancer.

Doral



Doral held a car wash on Oct. 16 and donated all the proceeds to the American Cancer Society.

Medley officers make teenager honorary cop for the day

If you know anything about the Medley Police Department, you know the backbone of everything they do is service. They continually show their love for the community. And when a young teenager named Emanuel asked to take a picture with one of their officers, it led to a moment he would never forget — an invitation to visit the department.

Medley PD Public Information Officer Luis Rivera was conducting a vehicle stop when a woman approached him and introduced him to Emanuel, who was visiting from Nicaragua to receive a prosthetic leg. Emanuel smiled excitedly when he saw the police lights because he always had a dream to become an officer. After Rivera noticed Emanuel's amazement at his uniform and badge and took a picture with him, he invited him to visit the department.

"We set a special day for him," explained Medley PD Lieutenant Artie Jinete. "We made arrangements for him and his family to come to our station. We hosted him for the day and toured him around, put him in a police car. He met the chief, and he was here with all of us. And we gave him some goodies, some

toys and police memorabilia."

Jinete, Rivera and the other officers could tell this was a special day for the young boy as they noticed his expression of gratitude.

"He was very happy and very positive," recalled Jinete. "He couldn't believe that we were taking the time to make him feel special. He was very appreciative of everything."

"He told me, 'Thank you so much. This was an unforgettable day in my life. You're like another friend to me,'" Rivera said.

He recounted how emotional Emanuel was because the police in his country were so different. But Rivera also understood exactly how he felt.

"That happened to me," explained Jinete. "When I was growing up, I would see an officer and wave at them, and they would turn their lights on. That's what made me want to be a police officer in the future."

"And it's funny," Jinete said, "because he had a prosthetic leg. You could tell that that didn't affect his life at all. He was just a happy person. So it didn't let that impact his overall demeanor."



This small moment was another example for Jinete of what the Medley Police Department is all about. "I've been here 30 years," he shared. "That's what we instill in our guys, to do this. And then the officer took it upon himself to know that that's what we want. And basically, you're following through on the mission of the Medley Police Department, which is to engage the community in a positive light."

"That's just who we are."

Doral PD hosts Cancer Slam Softball Tournament

On Oct. 23, the Doral Police Department hosted a Cancer Slam Softball Tournament for Breast Cancer Awareness Month and invited five other departments to play. Members of the community and law enforcement families cheered in the stands as they watched Doral, Medley, Sweetwater, Hialeah Gardens and Miami-Dade Schools Police play against each other.

The tournament consisted of four games leading up to the championship game, with all proceeds benefiting the American Cancer Society. After some tough games, the Miami-Dade team took home the title.

"The members of the department wanted to do something in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, so they put this together," Doral Captain Nancy Fernandez explained. "We had people that were out for a day in the park that walked up and sat down in the bleachers to hang out with their kids for a little while."

For the Medley Police Department, it was important to participate to show support for a great cause.

"We participate in different events to sponsor, to helping any cause," Medley Lieutenant Artie Jinete added. "We do that all the time."

For South Florida PBA members, devoting time to help a great cause is part of the norm as they continue to help the community and support one another in any way possible.

"It was only because of the teamwork from all the different agencies and the support from the community that this was really a successful event," Fernandez shared. "At one point or another, almost everybody has been touched in one way or another by cancer, so it's a cause most people support and will do whatever they can for it."



MCSO detectives share crime-solving techniques with students

Monroe County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) detectives shared the latest crime-solving techniques with Treasure Village Montessori Charter School in October. In three different events, students between the ages of 8 and 12 learned about how fingerprints and DNA work from detectives who solve crimes daily.

At the Plantation Key substation, MCSO detectives taught students how fingerprints are a person's individual trademark and how they are used to identify people. Then the students were able to see the proof themselves.

"They were able to lift their own fingerprints from certain objects," said MCSO Detective Lissette Quintero. "Nobody has the same ridges in their fingerprints."

MCSO detectives also spent time speaking about how investigation in the real world works, despite the kind of crime solving the students have seen on television.

"It's very difficult to explain to them how the real world works without tarnishing those fantasies that they maintain," Quintero shared. "Then they can



ask any questions and get real answers from [law enforcement officers]."

Quintero added that MCSO detectives try to host crime-solving presentations and activities with students as often as possible to get involved with younger people in the community.

"It's for them to maintain that trust in law enforcement," Quintero relayed. "We want them to understand the work that we do, share the need for law enforcement in everyone's day-to-day lives and make [the students] feel safer."



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Pinecrest officers cheer on the Sundevils



On Oct. 16, Pinecrest PD joined the Sundevils football team to cheer them on during their Football with Law Enforcement event. Pinecrest officers revved up in their Batman Motorcycle Unit, with special appearances from Batman himself and McGruff the Crime Dog. Pinecrest PD cheered on the Sundevils and shared a message for foster parents to help keep youth in the community safe.



Miami-Dade Animal Services helps animals find forever homes

Miami-Dade Animal Services held its MEGA Match-A-Thon event on Oct. 23 at Tropical Park. They were able to help their animals find safe and loving homes within the community.

Miami Gardens PD marches with the community in Justice Walk

On Oct. 9, Miami Gardens PD participated in the first National Faith and Blue Justice Walk. This event was created with the mission of helping to build bridges in the community. Miami Gardens PD marched alongside members of the community and other leaders to promote peace and justice.



South Florida PBA members support local Halloween celebrations

Decorated squad cars rolled through the streets just in time for Trunk or Treat as everyone's favorite spooky holiday appeared. South Florida PBA members worked together to create a Halloween the community would never forget and partici-

pated in many events, from a Halloween bike ride through the community to the annual Halloween Safe Streets Fair. The community happily celebrated with the officers as they dressed up in their favorite costumes.

MCSO



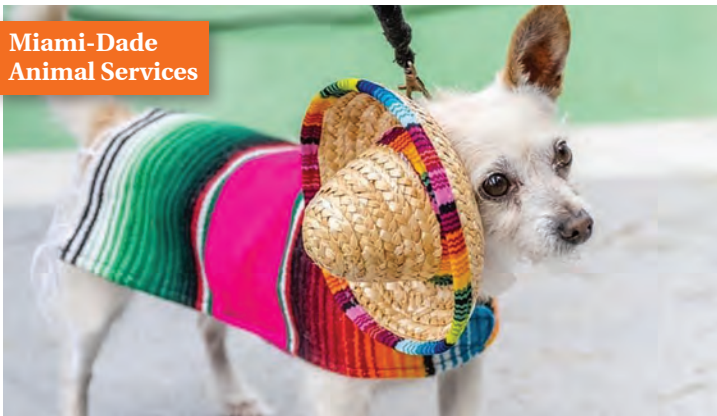
On Oct. 30, Lieutenant Tom Walker and Deputy Jon Doughtry joined members of the community for the Big Coppit Key Halloween Bike Ride.

Doral



Doral PD decorated its squad car with a black dragon and set up a table with goodies for the kids.

Miami-Dade Animal Services



Miami-Dade Animal Services held a costume party for its animals, including this dog sporting a sombrero and colorful blanket for his Halloween costume.

Sweetwater



Sweetwater PD held a Trunk or Treat event for children and youth in the community to enjoy.

Homestead



Homestead PD decorated its squad car trunk with a creepy skeleton for Trunk or Treat.

Miami-Dade



Miami-Dade PD participated in the Spooktacular event, handing out goody bags to children.

South Miami



South Miami PD celebrated the annual Halloween Safe Streets event with a gift made for them by Sunshine Designs Studio.



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Hidden expenses can cost a lot



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The saying “What’s cheap ends up being expensive” is true for many things in life, but when it comes to the expenses in your retirement accounts, it is almost never true. In almost all situations, the lower the expense, the better it is for you over the long term.

When I meet with clients for the first time, they are often unaware of the expenses within their retirement plans. One of the easiest and largest costs to identify is the expense ratio of a fund. This is what a fund charges to manage the portfolio and pay their financial representative.

Here is how to have a look and see what you are paying. Grab your most recent quarterly statement, and toward the end there should be a menu that lists all the eligible funds in the plan. The list includes all the performance numbers, and the farthest column to the right should say “Gross Expense Ratio.” Under this column, you will see the costs embedded within each fund. Generally, the lowest expense is the best fund within that category. The least expensive funds can charge as little as .04 percent, while others can go over 1 percent.

Even scarier, for those who have invested in mutual funds in a self-directed brokerage account, the mutual fund fees can be in excess of 2.5 percent. To find this out, simply Google the symbol of the fund and it will be listed there.

Let’s look at an example of a best- and a worst-case scenario. Let’s say you have \$250,000 in your deferred comp. Say your investments earn a reasonable 6 percent per year over the next 20 years. If your expenses are .04 percent, you would amass \$795,754. If your expenses are 2.6 percent, you would amass \$487,922.

This apparently small difference in fees could cost you \$307,000 dollars in unnecessary expenses!

Make sure that you are able to sit down with your financial professional to review the different costs within your plan and the funds they have recommended. If your financial professional holds the designation of Certified Financial Planner™, by law they will be obligated to disclose all fees and make recommendations that are in your best interest, never placing their interests above yours.

Small choices can have a meaningful impact on the long-term outcome of your money, savings and investments. Make sure you take the right steps by reviewing your plan with a qualified adviser who has your and your family’s best interests in mind.

Stay safe.

Nicolás Valdés-Fauli is the founder and CEO Thin Blue Line Financial (www.tblfinancial.com). Call or text 917-428-9629 or email nvf@tblfinancial.com. Nicolás has served the LEO community in South Florida for 20 years and is dedicated to helping his clients make sound decisions before and during retirement. He is an expert in all matters related to the FRS, deferred compensation and local municipal retirement plans.



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Spectrum Advisory Group has become a leader in providing insurance that supports law enforcement

■ BY KAREN JENKINS

The original objective when Alex Perez formed Spectrum Advisory Group was to build supplemental insurance products created by law enforcement for law enforcement. Perez has been doing that, plus much more, since 2010.

The organization protects law enforcement by providing financial security that is personalized for officers, first responders and their families.

Perez comes from a deep cultural understanding of what it takes to be in law enforcement, having observed his father serve as part of the San Antonio Police Department for 34 years.

"He became heavily involved in the union at the latter part of his career," serving as both president and vice president, Perez explained.



"I think there's a couple of things that I learned being around union business....Becoming so familiar with that type of culture has allowed me to create a special bond with my clients."

**Spectrum Advisory Group Founder
and President Alex Perez**

In 2006, the San Antonio Police Officers Association (SAPOA) went to bid on its supplemental insurance, and a company out of El Paso won the bid. That insurance company was looking for an agent of record, so it brought on Perez. However, during Perez's work selling an Allstate product to the officers, he noticed that the individuals he was serving needed more.

"What we found was an off-the-shelf product just does not fit for police," Perez relayed. "When [officers] get hurt, they can't work overtime or extra jobs, and there was no product out there that was designed to protect that. So in going through this, I saw a lot of officers getting frustrated because claims were not getting paid."

In response, Perez decided to build his own supplemental insurance product, tailored to the needs of law enforcement, from scratch. SAPOA was his first client.

"I think there's a couple of things that I learned being around union business: Obviously, it's a close-knit group, there's a lot of loyalty that comes along with it and they're out to do good for their members," Perez expressed. "Becoming so familiar with that type of culture has allowed me to create a special bond with my clients, but also with future clients, where I'm able to relate to the issues and to the challenges that they have on a day-to-day basis."

Spectrum Advisory Group's clients expanded to organizations within Texas, and in 2017, Perez was asked to speak at a NAPO convention in Las Vegas.

At the convention, he received an influx of inquiries about how to participate in the insurance products. One of those inquiries came from Michelle Jotz, a law enforcement officer who was chair of Las Vegas Metro Police Managers and Supervisors Association (PMSA). She has since retired and is now executive vice president for Spectrum.

Perez started going through the process of seeing if Spectrum Advisory Group could get licensed in multiple states.



"We did get PMSA Las Vegas as a client, and from there, word just started to spread about the benefits that these officers were getting," Perez shared. "My 10-year goal is just to be the largest insurance provider for law enforcement in the country."

With the benefits offered through Spectrum Advisory Group, which is approved in Florida, it's difficult to find products better suited for law enforcement. Spectrum provides an administrative duty policy, and it's the only company in the marketplace that offers that to police nationwide.


It also offers an accident and disability policy, and it's the only insurance provider that pays a light-duty disability benefit to law enforcement officers.

"If an officer gets hurt and they're not hurt enough to be completely out, they get put on a desk job or they're doing camera surveillance," Perez explained. "When they're on light duty, they can't work all that overtime and extra jobs. Our disability pays them until they go back to work full time."

In addition, Spectrum provides cancer, heart and stroke products, a brokerage platform for life insurance, and retirement planning.

Perez hopes to grow Spectrum quickly in the next few years and create a platform that is a one-stop shop for law enforcement officers nationwide.

"It's a fulfilling feeling, and it's something that I consider a passion of mine," Perez emphasized. "One of the things that I try to do is make people aware that no matter what their image is on the television or in the media, 99.9 percent of these guys are normal people, doing a job that no one else is willing to do. And so it's very easy for me to do my job and to motivate the people around me to carry the torch and do the same thing."



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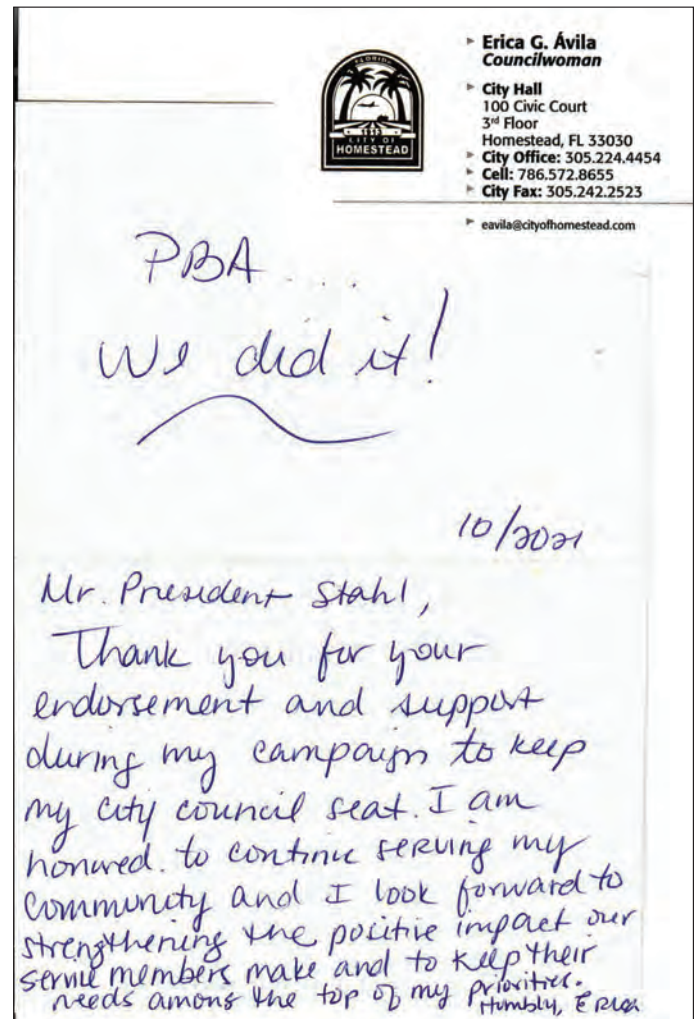
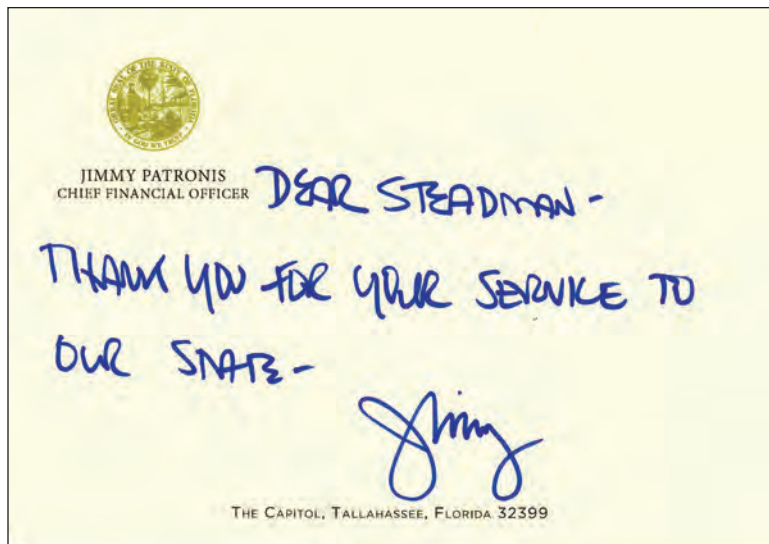
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