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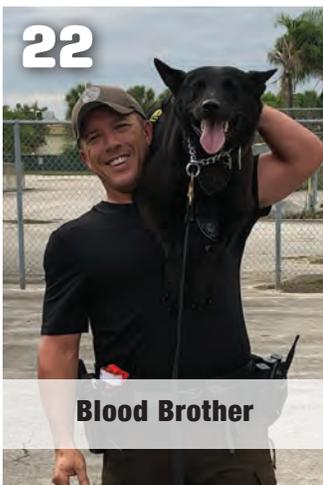
DROP It

More than 30 years ago, a group of Florida PBA leaders discovered a program that could give law enforcement officers an option to live a wonderful life after leaving the job. This retirement plan also provides such a huge benefit to the state's municipalities and counties that it was eventually offered to all public employees. A look at the Deferred Retirement Option Program, affectionately known as the DROP, will give members vital information about the security plan that awaits them at the end of their careers and rewards them for longtime service.

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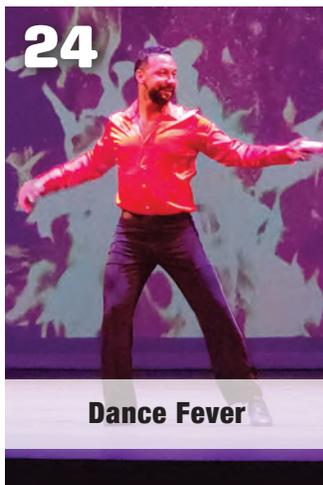
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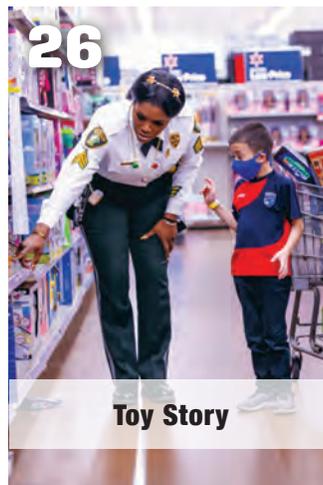
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Putting 2021 in the rearview



**STEADMAN
STAHL**

Good riddance to 2021.

I know we made similar comments about 2020 and that the road ahead would have fewer barriers and potholes. But we actually have so many reasons to keep moving forward in 2022.

Listen, I think the mere fact that although COVID raged under this new variant, the death rate dropped dramatically is significant. And in the current Florida legislative session, the administration is trying to get legislation passed to give first responders who get COVID more coverage under workers' comp.

As we come into 2022, the legislative session started off positive. Public safety remains a top priority for the governor, his cabinet and all our legislative friends. Governor DeSantis said exactly that during his opening address on the first day of the 2022 session.

In case you missed it, he said that one of his top priorities is to keep public safety at the forefront. He's increasing the salaries for all the state law enforcement officers.

And there are a few bills in the works that address issues directly affecting the day-to-day life of law enforcement.

One of these is the Halo bill, the anti-law enforcement harassment bill. That was supposed to follow the anti-rioting bill that passed during the 2021 session, but it proved more productive to hold that until this year.

I don't want to get into the specifics of each and every bill, but it's clear that the legislative year started on a positive note with the governor coming right out in his opening remarks to up his stake in public safety. This is bell ringing to the legislative body that one of his top priorities is keeping law enforcement front and center.

What he's saying there, what he's saying to legislators, is that he's intent on funding the police. Although defunding is affecting other parts of the country, there's not going to be any of that happening here in the state under this governor and this legislative body.

And we're getting a better handle on COVID. We're keeping the focus on officers staying safe. The medical advancements are showing that, because even with the latest variant, fewer people are being hospitalized for it. Fewer people are dying from it.

It's still a dangerous, invisible virus that we must all stay vigilant about. It's affected our corrections officers dramatically. They had to go to Alpha-Bravo shifts. Their job is so much different because of the close-contact encounters, but this is another situation the PBA has responded to. We have a good working relationship on the police and corrections sides with all the different agencies we represent. We have been able to keep our officers safe and look out for their best interests.

I know you are feeling like we're all waiting for that other shoe to drop. If we go back to the last two or three years, you come out of a Super Bowl, which was absolutely one of the biggest security events that I've worked, and you go right into a pandemic. And in the midst of that, you have the post-George Floyd environment and the anti-police environment. And when that starts to calm down, you have Surfside, where the building collapse was probably one of the biggest disasters we've had to deal with since Hurricane Andrew.

But the way you all have responded only reaffirms my belief that the best of us comes out in the worst of times. I'm so proud of our members, how they handle themselves, how they step up. They don't back away from difficult situations.

It's been proven time and time again that no matter what situation comes our way, we will persevere. We adapt to whatever the future holds. And I look at the glass as half full, so no matter what challenges our members face, the PBA will be standing side by side with you and we'll get through it as we've done in the past. Our track record is clear, and as we move forward, our perseverance will continue.

One of my big concerns is fatigue. At some point, things start to wear down our members. But I think that we, as an organization, are keeping that dialogue going with our administrations in all departments that we represent. We are making sure we have a seat at the table to stay in front of it and make sure that whatever resources our members need, they get.

For a long time, the PBA didn't have that because we had an us-against-them mentality. But the past few years, we have learned that once you can sit everybody down, lower your swords and have good, productive, meaningful discussions, you can find a happy medium, which we have now with every municipality.

In the past four years, we've been able to settle two Miami-Dade County contracts. We just settled another contract with Monroe County. Nearly every single city or every municipality that we represent, we've settled the contract. I think bringing a different approach has enabled us to reach the end game we're all trying to get to.



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This is a great indicator for 2022. We have found that when we sit down with politicians, what they want is what we want. We want safe communities. We want people to be able to feel safe in their homes and going shopping. That's only accomplished when you make sure that you have a public that feels safe and appreciates the men and women who are out there day in and day out making sure that they stay safe.

They have to get that same message across to the politicians, so that when it comes time for budgets, buying equipment or where we're going to focus our priorities, they make sure it's public safety first. If you don't feel safe in your home or in your neighborhood, you're going to move away. And people are flocking to Florida because we have such a robust, positive commitment to public safety.

Our commitment is to maintain these lines of communications with our elected officials. Be engaged and keep our elected officials focused on what's important. Before I became president, it was very much an us-against-them mentality. It was antagonistic, and I never felt comfortable with that.

Like I said, when you sit down with people, talk to them, get them on the same page and we're all rowing in the same direction, that's what moves society forward. That's what moves organizations forward. That's what has pushed our organization to its highest membership that we've ever had and to be much more engaged in the community.

That is what we've been striving for, what we've been working for. And I want to keep maintaining that, maintaining those relationships. It's a game changer. It's been the game changer. And once again, I don't care if it's a municipality, an elected official or whoever we've been dealing with, just changing that us-against-them has made the difference. It's what's made contract negotiations go smoother and impacted the election processes and stuff like that, and that is rooted into our success.

We have even more reason to be optimistic about 2022 with our



With officers from North Miami PD.

new PBA board of directors. We have a board that is very well-rounded, very diverse. We have members who ran for the first time with just under two years on the job and were elected. And we have very senior people who were elected and reelected. It's a great balance of who we are and what we represent.

That is obviously a big reason we have so much momentum for 2022. You've got people who want to get in there and do good things. And that's what the PBA is. When I ran for president four years ago, I ran on the platform of putting the PBA back in the members' hands. And we have had to rebuild relationships that we didn't have and to have productive and positive dialogue.

These are all the reasons that we will always be able to endure, no matter what comes down the pike. And these are all the reasons I see the future is going to be bright. I am not going to sit here and say, "It's got to be better." Or that it can't get worse. But the way our members have handled the challenges, that they've worked hand in hand with the community, again, from building collapses to pandemics to protests, makes the road ahead in 2022 a great opportunity.

I look at life as a windshield, and the windshield is bigger than the rearview mirror for a reason.

So we are going forward. We are going to continue making progress. We're going to continue moving in a positive direction and improving the life, the working conditions and the benefits of our members.

That's been our path all along. Nothing has ever deterred us, whether it's a protest, a building collapse or a pandemic. So good riddance, 2021. You couldn't slow us down and now it's full speed ahead.

Steadman Stahl, President
steadman@sflpba.org

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Shining a light on black health and wellness



DAVID GREENWELL
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Each year, there is a theme designated for Black History Month. The 2022 theme of “Black Health and Wellness” takes a look at how American healthcare has impacted the African-American community.

This year’s theme has great significance to the Progressive Officers Club (POC), as the organization has long been involved in efforts to bring healthcare and medical professionals into somewhat underserved communities. The POC has hosted a number of health and wellness seminars within the community, giving residents access to medical professionals who could provide healthcare information, guidance and direction to living

a healthier lifestyle.

For the last 37 years, the POC has held an annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 5K Run and Walk. The start of the race takes place at the MLK Metrorail station, where many healthcare vendors and professionals set up their tables and tents and hand out valuable health and wellness information. Unfortunately, the 2022 5K Race has been canceled due to the impact of COVID-19; however, planning continues for the 2023 5K run.

In the case of the dynamic trio pictured top right — Ruth Ann Wallace (aka Mother Ruth), Courtney L. Barron (aka Mr. Inspiration) and Essie Pigatt (aka the Silver Fox) — the race provides a benchmark for their overall fitness lifestyles. At age 89, Mother Ruth dons her finest and most comfortable sneakers and sets out to walk the entire 3.1 miles through the Northside District. At age 79, retired county employee Mr. Barron is an avid runner who uses the MLK 5K as a warm-up for other races he competes in. At age 80, Ms. Pigatt relishes in memories of the days when the community she runs through once thrived. The three have participated in the MLK 5K since its inception and have benefitted from some of the information provided by healthcare professionals. Mr. Barron believes that he has been able to steer clear of diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure, which are more common in African-American communities, because of the healthy lifestyle that he pursues through diet and exer-



Congratulations to MDPD chaplains Ralph Gazitua and Eddie Rivera on their retirement.

At the age of 81, MDPD Retired Master Sergeant Henry Weatherspoon says your health and wellbeing are your most valuable assets.

“Making it 25 years into retirement in good health is no small feat, especially if you’re in law enforcement,” says Weatherspoon.

An avid motorcyclist, Weatherspoon attributes his wellbeing to hitting the gym daily, bowling every Monday, eating small meals and getting routine medical checkups and annual physicals. He believes that African Americans have to do a better job monitoring their health.

This year, the POC will hold its Black History Luncheon on Thursday, Feb. 17 at 11:30 a.m. at the North Shore Hospital Auditorium.

“We have a special guest lined up as the guest speaker, who will shine some light on the 2022 theme, ‘Black Health and Wellness,’” says POC President Evan Lee.

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New sheriff in town



NIZAM "ISH" ISHMAEL
VICE PRESIDENT

During the general election on Nov. 6, 2018, Floridian voters decided that Miami-Dade County (MDC) should have an elected sheriff. Elections for the top cop will be held no later than 2024 and will take effect on Jan. 7, 2025, which is in less than three years from now.

The Florida Sheriffs Association was at the helm of this piece of legislation and wanted to ensure that all constitutional offices in every county are elected (sheriff, tax collector, property appraiser, clerk of court and supervisor of elections). MDC was one of the counties that filed a lawsuit to stop this from being put on the ballot at that time. Their lawsuit went all the way

to the Florida Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court, where it was ordered to appear on the ballot.

According to the *Miami Herald* on Nov. 18, 2021, Doug Hanks held a Q&A with MDC Mayor Levine Cava and asked her, "The county will elect a sheriff in 2024. What do you think the county should do about its police force in the meantime? Should it have its own municipal police force, or should the sheriff be in charge of that?"

This was Mayor Levine Cava's response: "We're looking at all the possible variations. The sheriff's specific role could be very narrowly defined, or it could be very broadly defined. So, there are decisions to be made by the commission. I certainly plan to weigh in on what we should do. I do believe we've done an outstanding job with our police force under the purview of the mayor. My initial inclination is to maintain that same quality under the mayor's supervision ... I'll just use Surfside as an example. The way in which we managed that crisis, with our police and fire working so closely together, was a result of all of that being under the mayor's purview. I did think about that a lot during Surfside and wondered what it would be like if some of that would have been decentralized."

As you can see by putting the pieces together, MDC has been resistant to having an elected sheriff for a long time. A lawsuit was filed to stop it, and now comments are coming out: "role could be narrowly defined" and "maintain the same quality under the mayor's supervision." I do not think it was the voters' intent to narrowly define the sheriff's role.

The voters want to have a sheriff in MDC, just like all other counties in the state. So, speculation has already been coming out that MDC wants to incorporate the entire Unincorporated Municipal Service Area (UMSA). That means the Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD) would become an incorporated city and have its own police department, and the sheriff's office will have what is required by law and whatever MDC does not want. So, many of us could potentially be working for either the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office or the MDPD. They will also need to address whether the Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation Department will be absorbed by the sheriff's office.

All of this boils down to MDC not wanting to give up the power and authority of the police department. They want someone that they have oversight on so they can continue to meddle in the day-to-day operations. They will not be able to do this when the sheriff is elected, as that person would also be an elected official and answer to the people, not another elected official.

Demographic Reports – MDPD & MCSO

Since I am on the topic of the sheriff's office, I wanted to share some reports with you that I requested from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). These statistics were current as of Sept. 9, 2021.

Miami-Dade Police Department – 3,062 sworn

Race		
Asian	34	1.1%
Black	666	21.8%
Hispanic	1,899	62.0%
Other	17	0.6%
White	441	14.4%
Unknown	5	0.2%
Gender		
Female	755	24.7%
Male	2,307	75.3%
Experience in years		
0–1	82	2.7%
1–3	257	8.4%
3–5	227	7.4%
5–10	515	16.8%
10–15	499	16.3%
15–20	593	19.4%
20–25	449	14.7%
25-plus	440	14.4%
Education		
HS	1667	54.4%
A.A.	351	11.5%
Bachelor's	996	32.5%
Master's	42	1.4%
Ph.D.	3	0.1%

Monroe County Sheriff's Office – 346 sworn

Race		
Asian	1	0.3%
Black	64	18.5%
Hispanic	82	23.7%
Other	2	0.6%
White	196	56.6%
Unknown	1	0.3%
Gender		
Female	80	23.1%
Male	266	76.9%
Experience in years		
0-1	20	5.8%
1-3	37	10.7%
3-5	53	15.3%
5-10	78	22.5%
10-15	43	12.4%
15-20	46	13.3%
20-25	30	8.7%
25-plus	39	11.3%
Education		
HS	232	67.1%
A.A.	44	12.7%
Bachelor's	62	17.9%
Master's	7	2.0%
Ph.D.	1	0.3%

As you can see, the creation of the sheriff's office in Miami-Dade will impact those of us under the 25-year mark, which is 85.6 percent of the sworn officers. Many of those over 25 years have timed the arrival of the sheriff with their retirement. Of MDPD's sworn workforce, 51.6 percent have fewer than 15 years of experience. We have become a very junior department over the years, as many senior staff have moved on to their well-deserved retirement. Over the years, MDPD has also become more educated, as 45.5 percent hold an A.A. degree or higher. We are still a male-dominated profession, as 75.3 percent are males. We definitely need to do better at hiring more women.

Monroe County Sheriff's Office has 168 who hold a corrections certification, 230 with a law enforcement certification and 52 who hold concurrent certifications. Of MCSO's sworn workforce, 66.7 percent have less than 15 years of experience; similar to MDPD, 76.9 percent are males. A.A. degrees or higher are held by 32.9 percent.

Keep yourselves posted and stay informed on this issue as it continues to develop. Your PBA will be at the forefront of the creation of the sheriff's office, and I am sure the Florida Sheriffs Association will be leaning in on this issue. I am hoping that our elected officials make the best decision to benefit the citizens of MDC when crafting the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office. Please feel free to contact me at ish@sflpba.org or at 305-593-0044.

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Facing yet another tough start to the year



**JERMAINE LAWSON
TREASURER**

Here we are at the beginning of another new year. I am glad that 2021 is behind us. Without a doubt, 2021 was one of the most challenging and strange years for our members. For the second year, the COVID-19 virus decimated our department in ways no one could have imagined. To make matters worse, we lost five of our members last year, which was extremely hard for us to take.

Even though it is customary to say happy new year, the year has not started so well for our members, due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus throughout our facilities. This has left our department

depleted to the point where the implementation of the Alpha/Bravo shift has not been able to cover for those absences created by officers out recovering from virus. This has pushed our department into uncharted territory where the new reality is now mandatory 12-hour shifts. I have never experienced anything close to this magnitude. Even though it is only temporary, the reality of going to work knowing that you are going to be there for 12 hours is hard to accept.

In a situation like this, you cannot blame the higher-ups for initiating the Alpha/Bravo (12-hour) shift, because our de-



Pre-Trial Detention Center (PTDC) team at a fundraising event for Officer R. Smith.

partment is at an all-time low with regard to staffing. The rapid spread of the virus has left our ranks thin. This is a safety concern for our staff and the inmate population if our facilities are inadequately staffed. Without the proper number of staff available, human life is at risk, and the consequence of running a facility understaffed can lead to assaults and other safety concerns.

On the other hand, our members' efforts should not be taken lightly, because this was a big sacrifice on their part. Christmas is one of the most important holidays to a majority of people in this country, and our members are no different. Most of our members were not able to stay home with their families and children on Christmas morning to open gifts like the rest of us. I want to use this opportunity to applaud every member for their contributions and efforts to keep our facilities running at the optimum level throughout this difficult period.

I am hoping that we will get back to normalcy as soon as possible, because working under these conditions for a long duration has placed fatigue and stress on our members. I am hoping there are plans in the works by management to incentivize all the officers who reported to work during the emergency. Our members have been through a lot for the past two years. The COVID-19 pandemic's first wave required considerable adaptation efforts on the part of our members. They are now confronted with another complex situation that requires greater flexibility on their part.

Our members are the lifeblood of this department, and they stand immediate to the affected areas of change. For this reason, in addition to compensation, they should be given administrative time as a way of saying thank you for their continued efforts to rise to the occasion when called upon.

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

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When you receive a subpoena requesting you to appear for trial, deposition or another legal matter, if you fail to appear, a rule to show cause may be issued against you. A rule to show cause is an order issued by a judge mandating the officer to appear in court to explain (give cause) why he/she should not be held in contempt. A finding of contempt can result in the imposition of criminal penalties ranging from probation up to a maximum of six months incarceration.

Rules to show cause are usually discharged (dismissed or quashed) once a reasonable explanation is provided. However, do not always assume this will be the case. If a rule is not discharged, a contempt hearing will be held. If you

are found guilty, penalties will follow that can negatively impact your job and potentially your FDLE certification.

If you get served and/or receive a rule to show cause, what do you do? If the failure to appear was due to an inadvertent mishap or scheduling conflict, which is usually the case, the first thing to do is to immediately contact the attorney who issued the subpoena and explain the reason(s) for the nonappearance. If the communication occurs prior to the hearing and there is time to reschedule the matter, the attorney will usually agree to reschedule and recommend the judge discharge the rule at the hearing.

An attorney may tell you that you do not have to appear at the hearing because he/she will be requesting the rule be discharged. Though this may be well intended to save you a trip to court or a Zoom appearance, we recommend you still make the appearance. Why? Because the rule is issued by the judge, so the attorney does not have the legal authority to excuse you from appearing; only the judge can excuse you. So for the sake of caution, and in the unlikely event the judge does not adhere to the attorney's request of discharging the rule, which could happen, it is always recommended you follow the judge's order to appear in court.

When you appear in court to address the rule, your name will be called and your presence announced. If the attorney announces that the matter has been worked out and requests that the rule be discharged, it will usually be discharged. If a rule is not discharged, you will be arraigned on the rule, and the matter will be scheduled for a contempt hearing. This will allow you to seek legal representation, which you are legally entitled to pursuant to Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure 3.840. Contempt hearings are evidentiary hearings that are adversarial in nature, and a guilty verdict for contempt can result in serious sanctions with detrimental effects. Therefore, do not proceed without legal representation. Contact the PBA legal department as soon as possible so we can ensure you are properly represented.

In conclusion, rules to show cause should not be taken lightly. If you are ever in receipt of one and have any concerns and/or questions, we encourage you to contact the PBA legal department as soon as possible. I represented two officers who had to go through the contempt hearing ordeal. Thankfully and rightfully, the judge found the officers not guilty. But it could have sadly turned out otherwise.

Thank you all for that you do and stay safe!

2021 Pending Grievances

This list represents the pending grievances filed at the various departments represented by the South Florida Police Benevolent Association as of **Dec. 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
TGK(MHTC)	1
TOTAL	2
M-D POLICE	5
MIAMI GARDENS	3
MCSO (DEP SHERIFF)	1
NORTH BAY VILLAGE	2
NORTH MIAMI	1
OPA LOCKA	4
SWEETWATER	2
TOTAL GRIEVANCES	23



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Reunion registration: Put it on your to-do list



DENNIS
BAMBACH
RPOC
PRESIDENT

I, along with the board of directors, hope that your holidays were great. We wish all the RPOC family a healthy and happy new year. Looking back at last year's January newsletter, we were all hoping for a better year. Unfortunately, the past year has had its difficulties and been almost as difficult as 2020. It was a hard year, with many of us still unable to be with family and friends, but things are slowly looking up.

I would like to again thank the members of the board and their spouses for their support and hard work during the past year. The success of this organization happens only with the cooperation and teamwork provided by our great board.

Ed Spisak, Treasurer: Hope this fresh new year brings all good health, safety, peace and happiness. Welcome to the new members who joined in 2021. We reach out to all who might want to become more active by volunteering to help the board. You can contact us through the website, RPOCPBA.org, or by email at RPOCPBA@bellsouth.net. A board member will be in contact with you.

A big part of our growth is due to the help of Margarita Vasquez of the PBA, who makes sure the new retirees receive our RPOC application forms. Thank you, Margarita!

You should have received your 2022 dues invoice, which was mailed on Jan. 11. Membership information forms, reunion and river boat information letters and reunion registration forms are included in the mail-out. When completing the forms, please be sure to include any changes in phone numbers, addresses or email information on your dues notices and/or senior, life and honorary member update forms. We would appreciate timely responses so that there is no lapse in your membership status.

Once again, our annual reunion will be at the Lake Mary Marriott from April 21 to April 24. We were able to retain last year's special rate of \$100 per night, plus tax. Please see your mail-out packet and make your reservations. Be sure to mention that you are with the Retired Police Officers Council to secure the above-mentioned rate. Do not delay in making your reservations, as there are only so many rooms blocked off for us. Reservations must be made no later than March 30.

Late reservations will be subject to price increases and be based on availability. The festivities will begin on Thursday and Friday with our ever-popular dinner buffets. Saturday night, we will have a plated dinner with your choice of meat, chicken or fish. (Fill out your choice of meal on the registration form and return it to us.) As usual, we'll be having our annual RPOC golf tournament. Your reunion registration form contains sign-up information. Should you have any questions about the golf before or after submitting your form, please feel free to contact John Fraley, golf coordinator, by phone or email (see his contact information in the next paragraph). Saturday night is our dinner dance. Event times will be published in the future. Sunday morning is our goodbye breakfast with a short business meeting. We are looking forward to a really great event, and we hope to see you there.



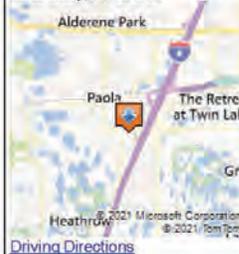
Retired Police Officers Council, Inc. 2022 Reunion

When

Thursday, April 21, 2022 at 1:00 PM EDT
-to-
Sunday, April 24, 2022 at 11:00 AM EDT
[Add to Calendar](#)

Where

The Orlando Marriott Lake Mary Hotel
1501 International Parkway
Lake Mary, FL 32746



Dear Gerald,

Retired Police Officers Council (RPOC) 2022 Reunion

Our annual reunion is back! Please make your reservation (s), **[SEE REGISTER NOW LINK BELOW]**, as quickly as possible because we expect a large turnout. The reunion dates are April 21 -24, 2022 and the location is The Orlando Marriott Lake Mary Hotel, 1500 International Parkway, Lake Mary, FL 32746. Reservations phone number: 1-800-380-7724 or local 1-407-995-1100. **You MUST make hotel reservations yourself directly and tell them it is for the RPOC reunion to receive our special rates.** As we've missed the last couple of reunions, we are expecting a sellout crowd and will be providing you all a festive event full of fun, dancing, great food, exciting raffle prizes and most of all seeing and spending time with long time friends. We guarantee one hell of a party!

PLEASE click on the link below for RPOC registration or RSVP and don't forget to click the box to receive our email notices. You can also register directly from our website at www.rocpba.org or www.rpocpba.org

[Get more information](#)

[Register Now!](#)

[I can't make it](#)

If you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to reach out to us at our website, www.rpocpba.org or

Dennis Bambach, President
rpocpba@bellsouth.net
1-866-594-2848

Thank you all for sticking with us and for your attention and response. We look forward to seeing each and every one at our 2022 reunion.

John Fraley, Vice President, Scholarship Chairman, Golf Coordinator: Our reunion is fast approaching. I would like to get some responses regarding the golf tournament. Our last event took place at the Mayfair Golf Club in Sanford in 2019. I plan to have a 7 or 8 a.m. shotgun start on Friday, April 22. The rules will be the same: closest to the pin on the par 3s, and one score card will be turned in for each group. Since I am dealing with a broken right hand, I will drive a beer and soda cart. Hopefully, David Alvarez will be available to take photographs. The fee will be \$50; half will go to the prize pool and half will cover the greens fees. Please note that the fees may change. Please call me at 954-651-0451 or email me at jfraley885@bellsouth.net and set up your foursomes. We can match up individuals, as well. The rain date will be Saturday, April 23.

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.



Mark E. Belile
MCSO Detention Deputy

After serving since Aug. 28, 1989, Belile, right, is set to retire on Jan. 31.



Soneta Brazel-Bethel, left,
and Tammie Anderson
Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation



Dennis Alvarez
Miami-Dade Police Department

Lastly, please help with our Otis Chambers Scholarship Fund. We have made changes allowing applicants to receive additional awards for subsequent years of education. Please give what you can to this successful and rewarding program.

Reba Miller, Chaplain: Dear members aka friends and family — a prayer for the new year: “As we embark on the New Year, fill our hearts and souls with New Life that you give to those who ask, Precious Lord.”

We offer our sincere and heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the warriors who have passed from our presence:

- Dorothy “Dolly” Ballard, December 2021
- Michael P. Krutulius Jr., December 2021
- Steve Rothlein, November 2021
- John H. Striegel, December 2021

We are all extending get-well wishes to Barry and Patty Savage, Ed Spisak and Harry Wright. Unfortunately, Harry is still in the hospital dealing with extended wound care. His spirits are good, but his extended time in the hospital (12 weeks) is rough. You can reach out to him or Bette at 305-761-8329. Cards can be mailed to 39601 Greenbrier St., Eustis, FL 32736.

Here’s an Irish blessing for one and all: “May you always have work for your hands to do. May your pockets hold a coin or two. May the sun shine bright on your windowpane. May the rainbow be certain to follow the rain. May the hand of a friend al-

ways be near you. And may God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.”

Remembering each and every one of you and your families. In the midst of the chaos, Peace and Provision for this new year!

Jerry Rudolf, Sergeant-at-Arms, Information Officer: 2022 Retired Police Officers Council Reunion. IT’S ON!! Date: April 21–24. Place: Orlando Marriott Lake Mary Hotel, 1501 International Parkway, Lake Mary, FL 32746; 800-380-7724 or 407-995-1100. Be sure to advise that you are part of the Retired Police Officers Council Reunion April 2022 for our special rate. Put it on your calendar now! Reunion mail-out packets were prepared and mailed to current members. If you are not a current RPOC member and would like to attend the reunion, you can join at the website: www.rocpba.org or www.rpocpba.org. Check it out. Additionally, you can now go to the RPOC website to register for the reunion by clicking on the yellow box located at the bottom of the first page that is appropriately labeled. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly at presr43@ipa-usa.org.

Welcome, new members: Andy Dixon, MDPD; Angelo Figueras, MDC; Jennifer Parker, MDC; Kale Benton, MDC; George Hubbard, MDC; James Montgomery, MDPD; Darlene Montgomery, MDPD. Reinstated: Connie Cooper, MDPD.

Ball games and barbecues benefit great causes



SERGEANT
KENNETH
HORGAN
POAT
ASSISTANCE
COMMITTEE
CHAIRPERSON

Are you ready for some kickball?! Who would have thought that an idea to raise funds for POAT 11 years ago by playing kickball would turn into what it is today?

Miami-Dade Police Department Midwest District Major Thamy Gonzalez is the originator of this now-major fundraiser that we count on every year, the Homeruns for Heroes tournament that was held Jan. 14-15. What started out as a silly day with a few cops kicking a ball around is now a 43-team, highly competitive event that raises over \$20K every year.

Major Gonzalez does not do it alone! She has a large contingent of volunteers who help her put this together every year. The event has expanded to having barbecue pit masters, raffle drawings, referees and many others. The things I enjoy most are spending time with friends I have not seen in far too long and the steak sandwich with MDPD Lieutenant Jorge Audino's world-famous homemade chimichurri sauce! Thank you, Major Gonzalez and your wonderful team, for all that you do for the POAT!

There is nothing better than working together for a great

cause. On Dec. 16, 2021, the PBA, HPOA and POAT hosted a barbecue fundraiser at Miami-Dade Police Department headquarters to raise funds for MDPD K-9 Officer Francisco "Frank" Sangineto.

Officer Sangineto was diagnosed with COVID-19 in early August 2021, after working a detail. He was admitted to the hospital shortly thereafter and has been waging a fierce battle with the virus since. He appears to be winning the battle and was transferred via LifeFlight to Shands Hospital in Gainesville, where he was blessed to be the transplant recipient of the lungs and kidneys of a loving, caring, generous and healthy person.

The barbecue raised over \$12,000. These funds will be utilized for housing and expenses for his family while in Gainesville. It is anticipated that Officer Sangineto and his family will be there for approximately three months. Thank you to the organ donor for the gift of life. Also, thank you to all those who volunteered. Teamwork makes the dream work!

Upcoming POAT events

The 41st Annual Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Ceremony will be held at Tropical Park on Thursday, May 5. The sunset service is at 6:30 p.m. The park is at 7900 SW 40th Street.



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Alex Alvarez

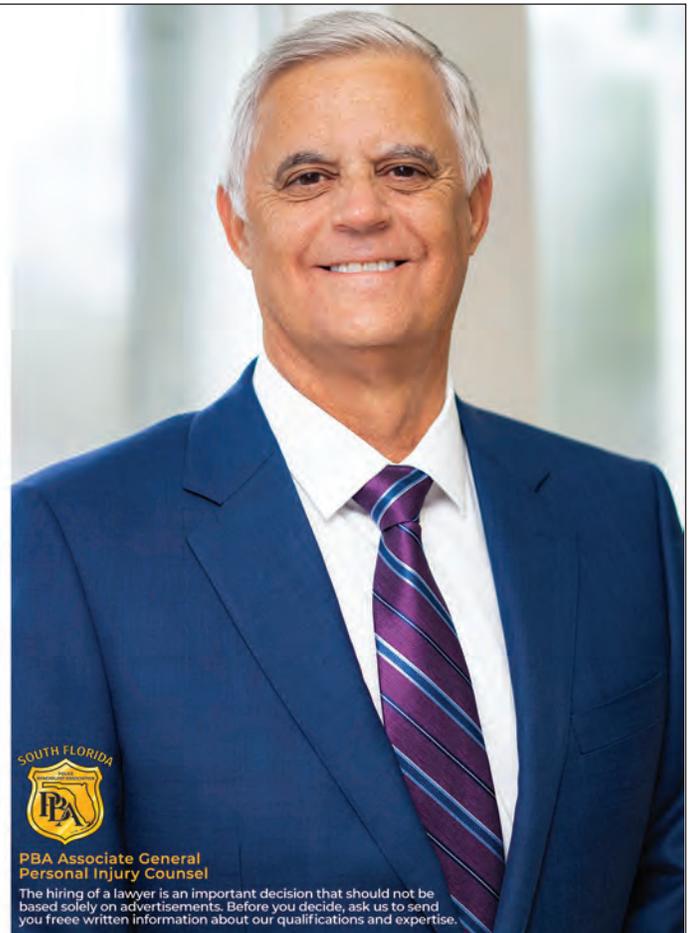
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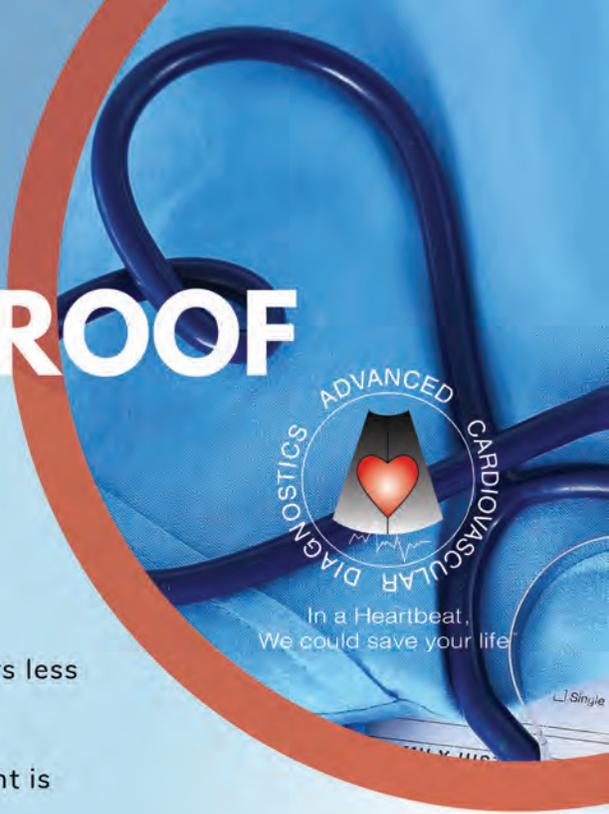


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COP till you DROP

The deferred retirement plan allows law enforcement officers to maximize their careers in a way they truly deserve

By Mitchell Krugel



On Jan. 20, Miami-Dade Sergeant James Dixon stood at a threshold all Florida law enforcement officers deserve and have more than earned. Dixon had hit 30 years on the job and had the nirvana of retirement 11 days away.

The door about to open would enable Dixon to, by his own reckoning, create a financial security blanket for his grandchildren. Other officers at this threshold can entertain plans to pay

PENSION PLAN

Deferred Retirement Option Program

off mortgages, pay college tuition for their children or perhaps even enjoy a vacation home.

Dedicating 30 years to the cop business merits a pot of gold from being part of Florida's Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP). As most members know, the DROP is an opportunity that comes after reaching 25 years on and planning the last five years of your career to have your pension accumulate in a fund and earn interest while still drawing full salary.

If you pension out at \$75,000 per year, that could be \$375,000 waiting for you when you finally walk out. And so as he entered those final days, Dixon felt – and enjoyed – the achievement and reward that the Florida PBA's most illustrious leaders intended when they lobbied and bargained to have the DROP implemented.

"I never thought a program such as this would allow me to do the things that I was not able to do early on in my career," confirmed Dixon, who ended his career working warrants and as a supervisor of the fugitive task force. "I would have never thought that a program such as this would allow me to defer my

money up to five years. And then you're still getting a pension every month. So it's a beautiful thing."

In the mid-1990s, Florida PBA President Ernie George, also the Palm Beach County PBA president, and Vice President Dick Brickman, also the Broward County PBA president, heard about a deferred pension payment program offered to law enforcement officers in Texas. George immediately started to negotiate a similar program into a new contract in West Palm Beach, where he was on the job. Brickman did likewise with a contract pending in Hollywood.

"We were in a race to see who could get it first. Dick beat me by a couple of months," George recalled. "I think about how it makes a lot of things possible at the end of your career. It seems like a great way to transition into life beyond law enforcement."

Following the initial infiltration into West Palm and Hollywood, the PBA pursued a path to get the DROP into the Florida Retirement System (FRS). That paved the way for many municipalities in Miami-Dade to implement the DROP.

And it has made such an impact that George characterizes its value very succinctly.

"The PBA has been able to do a lot of good things for members," he explained. "But the DROP has been the best one."

DROP in

The DROP forged one of the great win-win scenarios in public employee collective bargaining. For municipalities, it is actually multiple wins.

When a member decides to go into the DROP, the town no longer has to make pension payments for that officer. In some

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

cases, that is up to 20 percent of salary. So if an officer earned \$80,000 per year, well, do the math.

And it all adds up. A municipality with 10 officers in the DROP could save more than \$150,000 a year to put back into salary and benefits. For a county, the accumulation could be astronomically higher.

Plus, a department gets to hold on to an officer for an additional five years. Keeping that experience and expertise no doubt positively impacts public safety. And it also impacts retention, of course, creating a savings in not having to recruit and train officers as frequently.

Members in the DROP not only accumulate their pension payout plus salary, but also earn interest on the DROP money. And it's a win for officers to accrue additional pension payouts while they are still on the job, because a pension alone might not be enough to live on in retirement.

"You can live on the pension, but you can live a lot better with the DROP," George commented. "And say you start on the job at 21. Well, you retire at 51 with your pension and the DROP money to draw interest on, and you're still young enough to do something else if you want to."

David Murrell worked alongside George and Brickman and other State PBA board members to make the DROP. Murrell served with the Jacksonville PD for 13 years before leaving to become executive director of the Florida PBA.

The DROP is near and dear to Murrell, perhaps because he has seen how it has made so many lives better. He, too, believes the DROP is the best achievement the PBA has authored, and with serving as Florida PBA executive director for 29 years, he is certainly the authority.

"I'm glad officers were helped out by it," Murrell shared. "They're happy as hell to have it, and most of them don't know how it came about."

DROP everything

Murrell, with assistance from George, is happy to relate the details of how the PBA got the DROP on the state. After George and Brickman had their initial success, Murrell went to work on getting a DROP in Jacksonville. Another board member questioned whether the PBA could bring it to all special-risk employees and eventually all public safety employees through the FRS.

"It sounded too good to be true, so it took a lot of education and a lot of work with legislators and the governor," Murrell explained.

The PBA enlisted Representative Tom Feeney, who eventually became Speaker of the House and was elected to Congress, to sponsor the bill.

"I told him, 'Tom, if you do this, people throughout Florida are going to love you forever when they realize what you did,'" Murrell added. "And they did."

They started with getting legislation passed to implement the DROP for state and county law enforcement and state corrections officers. Then, the PBA struck gold by suggesting all public employees be offered the plan. That included teachers, judges, prosecutors, even the governor and state reps and senators. Sheriffs and chiefs, too, along with university professors and even the head of the state's Division of Retirement.

"No. 1, they understood the financing when Ernie and I

walked them through it," Murrell noted. "They understood that we are in a really tough profession, and the need of it for law enforcement officers and their families who deserved to be financially secure."

The PBA did some additional lobbying at the county level to show elected officials that the cost would not even amount to a drop in the bucket.

"We did a lot of explaining to the county and city commissioners, because they were the ones who had to approve it in collective bargaining," George added. "Once we explained it, they were all for it, because they were saving money and the city didn't have to pay for it."

DROP a hint

Perhaps the lead is buried a bit here, so addressing some of the questions rolling around your head right now would be timely. Many of those questions would probably be answered with "It depends."



Consequently, the most productive guidance about "your" DROP would probably be best coming from a licensed and credible financial planner. Of course, questions can also be directed to a PBA representative. And should be.

The FRS issues pages and pages of data about how the DROP works. Here are a few noteworthy points:

- You begin accumulating your retirement benefits while delaying your termination for up to 60 months from the date you first reach your normal retirement date or your eligible deferral date.
- Before you participate in DROP, you earn one month of retirement service credit for each month you have compensation reported for work performed. When you enter DROP, you are considered to be retired and you stop earning retirement service credit.
- While participating in DROP, your monthly retirement benefits accumulate in the FRS trust fund, earning tax-deferred interest while you continue to work for an FRS employer. Tax-deferred interest means that you pay any taxes owed when you receive the interest instead of when the interest is earned.
- You may apply up to six months before reaching your normal retirement date or DROP deferral date. To maximize your time in DROP, the division must receive your DROP application and election forms no later than the last working day of the month you intend to begin DROP participation.
- If your DROP begin date is before July 1, 2011, your DROP accumulation earns compounded monthly interest at an effective annual rate of 6.5 percent.
- If your DROP begin date is on or after July 1, 2011, your DROP accumulation earns compounded monthly interest at an effective annual rate of 1.3 percent.
- If your DROP begin date is before Aug. 1, 2011, the monthly retirement benefit credited to your DROP account increases by a 3 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) each July.
- If your DROP begin date is on or after Aug. 1, 2011, your individual COLA each July is the sum of the pre-July 2011 service credit divided by the total service credit at retirement multiplied by 3 percent.

- At the end of your DROP participation, if you elect to have your DROP accumulation rolled over to another eligible retirement plan as defined in section 402(c)(8)(b) of the Internal Revenue Code, you owe no taxes on your DROP accumulation until you begin to withdraw these funds from the eligible retirement plan.
- Your DROP accumulation is paid in one of three ways: as a lump-sum payment with 20 percent withheld for federal income taxes; as a direct rollover to an eligible retirement plan; or as a combined partial lump-sum payment and direct rollover.

DROP by

Noted Miami-Dade labor attorney Donald Slesnick can verify the power of the DROP. Because it is part of the pension and because pension matters can be collectively bargained, Slesnick has been able to bring the DROP into many PBA-unit contracts he has helped negotiate. The first was in Miami Shores not long after the Florida PBA began its efforts to take the DROP statewide, and from there it blossomed into other cities.

Sometimes, a little political pressure helped push deferred retirement programs through, but Slesnick reports that many cities realized a DROP could remedy getting into expensive guaranteed benefits programs that would have to be paid off down the road. So, in effect, the presence of the DROP has enabled municipalities to maintain the pension support they promise officers when they are hired.

“For the city, one of the largest expenses of any police officer is the contribution to the pension plan,” Slesnick confirmed. “Over the years, it blossomed into larger and larger contributions to keep the plans afloat. With the DROP, there’s no longer any requirement to make pension contributions, so if the cost of an officer is X for salary plus Y for pension, all of the sudden



the Y goes away.”

From his experiences, Slesnick has seen why the DROP has such great value for cities, members and everybody involved.

“It’s a self-proliferating situation,” he expressed. “Once the union bought into it and we started to sell it to the state legislature, other cities decided, ‘Hey, we like what you’re doing there, and we’d like it, too.’ People started demanding that we spread the benefit to them and make it part of the contract.”

Some might call the DROP a just reward for 30 years of service. Some might call it a dream come true. Some might call it a vehicle to make dreams possible.

Miami-Dade’s Dixon called the DROP the mechanism that opened the door to law enforcement afterlife and allows members to enjoy that life.

“You know, we can’t do this forever. I knew it was coming and I was prepared for it coming,” he confided. “And the DROP really enables you to do that.”

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He's a Fighter

Miami-Dade officers continue to support K-9 officer battling gut punch from COVID

■ BY ROSEMARY AN

Any time Miami-Dade K-9 Officer Frank Sangineto saw a bloodmobile, he would take his colleague Isabel McDonald to donate blood.

"He would always tell me, 'It doesn't matter what blood type you are,'" McDonald recalled. "It's just the fact that you're helping somebody."

Sangineto became one of the people who would benefit from the blood drives after being hospitalized for respiratory failure due to COVID in August 2021. He needed to be put on an ECMO machine — similar to a heart-lung bypass machine — requiring a great deal of blood.

McDonald thought there was no better way to help Sangineto than to give back in the same way that he had for years. She learned that she was type A-positive, the same blood type he needed.

Along with Miami-Dade Special Projects Administrator Annette McCully, McDonald helped coordinate a blood drive through OneBlood at the Miami-Dade Police Department headquarters Sept. 22–23. Banners that read, "Heroes Don't Wear Capes" and "Fill the Bank for Frank," as well as a photo of Sangineto with his K-9, Yarri, were posted prominently at the entrance.

McDonald wanted donors to recognize that Sangineto is not only a law enforcement officer, but also a father, a son and a brother.

"I didn't want somebody going into a [donation] bus without knowing who Frank was," she shared. "Sometimes when you don't see the person, I think it kind of does a disservice. Now, when you walk in, this is who you're doing it for."

All donors, whether community residents or officers from agencies throughout Miami-Dade County, had the chance to sign the banner for Sangineto. Seaport Major Jose Aragu added that seeing the amount of support for Sangineto was humbling and special.

"It gives us hope and perspective that there's still people out there that care," Aragu noted. "And they are willing to be there for us as not only a law enforcement community, but as a community in general."

It was the most successful blood drive



Miami-Dade K-9 Officer Frank Sangineto, who was hospitalized for respiratory failure due to COVID in August 2021, with his K-9, Yarri.

that OneBlood has ever seen, with more than 200 units collected in two days.

"Anybody that was A-positive was actually able to make sure that blood went to Frank only," McDonald explained. "Of course, whatever other blood we collected went to whoever needs it."

Sangineto was a trooper with the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) for 17 years and lateraled to Miami-Dade seven years ago.

He and McDonald became close through working the K-9 unit at the Seaport for six years.

McDonald visited Sangineto at Jackson Memorial Hospital every day for 103 days. Every morning, she urged him to keep fighting because his loved ones were waiting for him.

"You're still in the fight," she told him. "You can do this. Everything's going to be

OK. Your mom's waiting for you."

Sangineto's lungs and kidneys never recovered. On Dec. 10, a motorcade of numerous agencies and K-9 units escorted him from Jackson Memorial Hospital to the tarmac of the plane that transported him to Shands Hospital in Gainesville for a double lung and kidney transplant.

McDonald and colleagues, including Sangineto's best friend, Joel Valdez, a Miami-Dade officer who worked with him at the FHP, wanted to help the family with expenses related to his hospitalization. They came up with a barbecue fundraiser at the department headquarters on Dec. 16. The PBA and the Hispanic Police Officers Association (HPOA) donated hamburgers and hot dogs, while retired Miami-Dade Officer Joe Edreira, who owns Smokin' Pig BBQ, donated grills and his time to cook for the event.

The barbecue raised more than \$12,000 for the Sangineto family, but there was another surprise. Sangineto's son, Mikey, a 12-year-old who collects challenge coins, had a collection of more than 100 coins. Wanting to add to his collection, McCully and Administrative Officer Diana Garcia reached out to every agency in South Florida to send a coin.

"[Mikey] was presented with a bucket of probably another 100-plus coins of every agency from Key West to West Palm Beach," McDonald added. "And an officer in the department handmade a wooden coin holder. [But] he probably needs four or five other holders now for all his coins."

On Christmas Day, Sangineto woke up to see the banner from the blood drive filled with heartfelt messages and signatures of donors throughout the county. The words of affirmation provided the extra strength he needed for his double lung and kidney transplants on Jan. 4 and Jan. 5, respectively.

After Sangineto's successful surgeries, he is working toward recovery. McDonald hopes that he'll be able to continue his rehabilitation with his family in Miami.

"The fight's not over," she declared. "God willing, these organs will continue to work in his favor."

Aragu confirms that sentiment, knowing that Sangineto has never been one to back down and he certainly won't do so now.

"Frank has been a miracle from God," he proclaimed. "It's humbling to see everything he's gone through and how far he's gotten. He's still fighting. He's a fighter."



Mikey, Sangineto's 12-year-old son, at the blood drive for his father in September 2021 that collected more than 200 units of blood.



Sangineto and his family after his successful double lung and kidney transplants on Jan. 4 and Jan. 5.



A motorcade of numerous agencies and K-9 units escorted Sangineto from Jackson Memorial Hospital to the tarmac of the plane that transported him to Shands Hospital on Dec. 10, 2021.

Dancing the Night Away

South Florida PBA sergeant-at-arms shines on stage at the Dancing Like the Stars fundraiser

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

As he prepared to leave his house, South Florida PBA Sergeant-at-Arms Alex Muñoz glanced behind him to see his three sons with wide eyes. They wanted to know, “Dad, where are you going?” He never thought he would say these words:

“I’m going to dance practice.”

It was really happening. Muñoz endured 10 days of dance practice in preparation to perform the samba at the First Annual Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Dancing Like the Stars fundraiser at the South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center on Jan. 15.

When PBA President Steadman Stahl first asked Muñoz to participate in the fundraiser, his initial response was a firm “No.” Even though he loved music and loved to DJ for fun, he was convinced if he danced in public, he would only embarrass himself. But when Elizabeth Whitney, an ICU nurse and the owner of the Fred Astaire Dance Studio that hosted the event, explained the purpose for the fundraiser, Muñoz couldn’t help but change his mind.

Whitney related how Miami-Dade Firefighter Alberto Aleman inspired the fundraiser. As she was administering care for him in the ICU, she formed a close connection with him, his wife, Madeline, and Miami-Dade Fire Rescue (MDFR) Division Chief Willie Williams, who visited him often.

“He was one of those people that makes you want to be a better person and changes your life,” Whitney reminisced. “He was a kind, incredible person. And his whole family joked that I was his third daughter.”

When he passed away on April 8, 2021, more than 300 people gathered to pay respects. Whitney was overwhelmed to see the kind of legacy he left behind and wanted to find a way to honor that memory.

With help from Chief Williams, Whitney decided the perfect fundraiser would be a dance competition with first responders partnering with professional dancers and being judged like on the TV show “Dancing with the Stars.” All proceeds benefited the Metro-Dade Firefighters Local 1403 Resiliency Foundation, which provides mental health resources and PTSD treatment for first responders.

“Laugh at me, but if it’s going to benefit other people, let’s do it,” declared Muñoz



South Florida PBA Sergeant-at-Arms Alex Muñoz and professional dancer Elizabeth Whitney participate in the Dancing Like the Stars fundraiser, dancing to Pitbull’s “Fireball.”



Miami-Dade Division Chief Rosie Cordero-Stutz competes with a dance to “Heart on Fire.”

as he agreed to dance with Whitney.

The day of the event arrived. It was the moment Muñoz had been training for tirelessly.

“You tell your kids, ‘Work hard, be focused, be dedicated, be humble and things are going to work out at the end.’ And I showed them that,” Muñoz explained. “I put in the work, I was a team player, I was humble and it paid off at the end for me.”

The lights dimmed and a hush fell over



Muñoz was awarded the trophy as the first-place winner of the First Annual Dancing Like the Stars fundraiser.

the audience. The stage glowed with a purple light when Muñoz joined Whitney at center stage. It was his time to shine. As the upbeat music of Pitbull's "Fireball" played, a smile beamed across his face. He hit every beat and danced effortlessly.

"Deep down inside, I knew I was doing it for a good reason," Muñoz reflected. "You leave with a sense of accomplishment, not because you learned to dance, but because you're doing it for somebody else and you are hoping to raise awareness. Even if I would've messed up, it would've been a great laugh at my expense for somebody else to benefit from it, and I'm OK with that."

The evening ended with "Rise Up," an emotional number led by Whitney and Chief Williams. As the words "We'll rise up and we'll do it a thousand times again" played, every first responder joined them on the stage. The crowd rose to offer a standing ovation.

Tears then filled the stage when judges stood to announce the results. Muñoz was one of the three finalists, alongside Williams and MDPD Division Chief Rosie Cordero-Stutz.

Suddenly, Muñoz felt someone shaking him, shouting, "You won!"

He was so overwhelmed by the cheering that he didn't realize his name had been called as the winner. Glancing at the



Muñoz was supported by his three sons and his wife, who were overjoyed when he won.

crowd, Muñoz saw his sons jumping up and down and his wife cheering for him. It finally sunk in. He had won first place.

To honor her late husband, Muñoz and the other contestants gave the trophy to Madeline, who gratefully accepted it with tears.

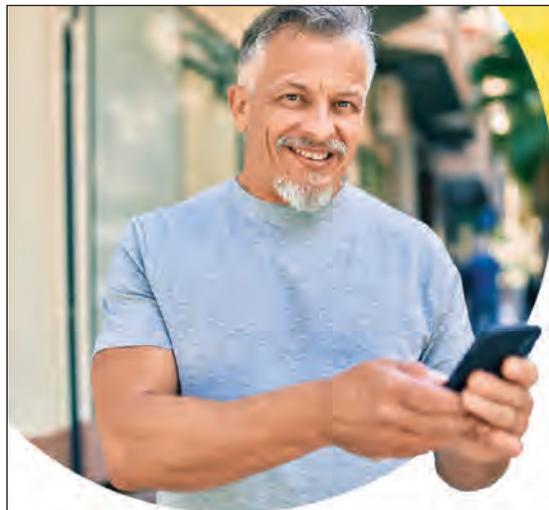
"They were all crying. It was beautiful," Whitney recalled. "We wanted to take the audience on that emotional journey. And I couldn't be more proud of how everybody danced. Muñoz did amazing. He was really a joy to work with. He really did crush it."



Muñoz shows some of the moves he learned for the event.

The Dancing Like the Stars fundraiser will make a return next year to continue its support for first responders. It was an evening that paid tribute to a beloved member of the community and honored first responders for their brave efforts. It was a fun way to raise awareness around such a great cause, something Muñoz can attest to.

"I never thought that I was going to enjoy this as much as I did," Muñoz declared. "It kind of sparked something in me. Life is too short to sit down and hate each other when we have so much to live for."



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The MDCR Christmas Miracle

Shop with a Correctional Officer event gives foster kids an unforgettable holiday

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

Officer Gina Mobley was overwhelmed by the response from the children. She had just participated in her first Shop with a Correctional Officer event on Dec. 2.

Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation (MDCR) sponsored the third annual event at Walmart in Miami Gardens. Santa and Mrs. Claus, along with MDCR's K-9 unit dressed as reindeer, welcomed 15 foster children and correctional officers with a smile as they arrived.

In partnership with Walmart, each child received a \$100 gift card to buy any items of their choice and fulfill the mission of making this a memorable holiday.

"My heart was just smiling," Mobley declared. "It made me feel really good to put the same smile that was inside of my heart on the child's face."

Before she became a corrections officer 15 years ago, Mobley worked as a bus driver and as a counselor for foster kids. She has always had a desire to help children, because she knows how it feels to grow up in a tough situation, and her main goal is to give back.

And once she began forming relationships with the kids at the Shop with a Correctional Officer event, Mobley could see the impact it made on them and on her. One child who stuck out to her the most was 10-year-old Jeremiah.

Mobley watched as he hesitantly checked the price of each gift. Her heart sank. She repeatedly told him not to worry about the prices and to choose whatever toy he wanted. And as the minutes

passed, he eventually gave in and picked out the toy that made him feel like every kid at Christmas.

MDCR officers take pride in this event because it enables them to continue building relationships with the local community.

"These kids are running around the store, and they're picking out everything they want, from bicycles to different Barbie dolls to different clothes. They're just so happy and so grateful," MDCR Public Affairs Manager Juan Diasgranados explained. "And they really bond with the officer. By the end of the evening, they're hugging or high-fiving. Sometimes they even stay in touch, because it was just such a positive experience."

At the end of the event, Santa and Mrs. Claus held a raffle to give away tickets and gift cards. Each child won a raffle item and walked away with tickets to the Seaquarium or the Miami Zoo or gift cards to restaurants in the community.

"You can see the smiles, and you can see their eyes get big," Diasgranados confirmed. "And that's when we know how important it is to be out with the community, interacting with the kids and letting them know that there is a positive, bright future, and we're here to help them."

The annual Shop with a Correctional Officer event is just as meaningful for the officers as it is for the children. The connections they formed brought a spark of joy to their lives this holiday season.

"Just seeing those smiles on the kids' faces just makes it more worthwhile," Diasgranados added. "The way we look at it is that we want to make the holidays a little bit merrier for these kids."





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Keep Kids Pedaling

The Monroe County Sheriff's Office wrapped up a bicycle drive in partnership with Leadership Monroe County Class XX in January.



MCSO continues to lead the initiative to give every child a new bicycle

BY ROSEMARY AN

The Monroe County Sheriff's Office has spearheaded a bicycle drive to support children throughout the county for 13 years. In January, MCSO partnered with Leadership Monroe County Class XX to donate more than 130 new bikes to the Wesley House Family Services.

"It's very important to keep the children active," said MCSO Captain Jon Crane, who oversees the bike drive. "But the most important thing is that we help those that need a little more assistance."

The Wesley House Family Services is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and nurturing children, particularly foster children, as well as strengthening families with services in Monroe County. The organization also assists other nonprofits during the holidays to make sure children, either in foster care or with a family, can receive a new bike.

"We know that the holidays can be tough on individuals," Crane added. "They can't go on and supply to their families what they want. Some of us have been there before, too."

In 2009, the nonprofit approached MCSO to lead the bike drive, and Crane immediately accepted. Several MCSO officers, who were also in Leadership Monroe County Class XX, which teaches various legislative and governmental areas of the county, agreed to participate as well.

"Leadership Monroe adopted that in partnership with MCSO as our class project," Crane shared. "We donate bikes to assure that children can go outside and be active instead of being at home on a computer."

While MCSO deputies worked to drive donations from residents, Sergeant Candida Rodriguez reached out to local businesses and hotels to donate bicycles or funds. Crane said these businesses largely contributed to the 107 bicycles and \$3,500 collected for the drive.

The monetary donations, including \$1,000 from the South Florida PBA, were crucial for purchasing new bikes and meeting their annual goal of donating 130 bicycles. Many times, this is for older children, because those bikes are more expensive and most bicycle donations are for younger children. MCSO Sergeant Alvarez Rice and Detention Deputy Gladimir Prinnton coordinated to make sure bikes were mailed after being purchased online.

"We don't have much in KeyWest," Crane explained. "Our last Kmart is closing down. We don't have Sears, Target or Walmart. So the funds are a big deal when it comes to making sure that we buy the bikes that we're short on, or else the kids won't get them."

Crane did not anticipate the bicycle drive to see the turnout that it did. When he saw the array of bikes in every color of the rainbow and every size outside the MCSO headquarters to be delivered to the Wesley House Family Services, he couldn't hide his excitement.

"We expected to have a small drop-off due to COVID," he admitted. "But we actually exceeded those expectations and met our yearly goal."

Children receive new helmets with their new bikes. MCSO deputies also teach bicycle safety as they deem necessary. The



MCSO deputies loaded up new bikes in every color and delivered them to the Wesley House Family Services to be distributed to children throughout Monroe County.

multifaceted bike drive includes an added benefit for adults, too. The maintenance division teaches inmates how to assemble and maintain bicycles.

"It provides the inmates with an additional tool to hopefully help them when they reenter society," Crane suggested. "They will have additional skills and can possibly get into that industry or learn new techniques."

The bicycle drive hits all the markers of a noteworthy cause. Not only is it a chance for officers to work together and inmates to learn new skills, but the bike collection is also a means of giving back to children in the community who may not receive a gift otherwise.

"We want to help organizations that reach out to the underprivileged," Crane affirmed. "If we can give them a glimmer of hope for the holidays, I think we're achieving our goal."



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Riding High

South Florida PBA/HPOA Cigar Social strengthens members' unbreakable bond

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

Retired Miami-Dade Sergeant Tony Rodriguez arrived on his motorcycle at the South Florida PBA Hall for the Cigar Social on Dec. 16 with a smile. It was his second time attending the event, and he was eager to see members again to recount stories and share laughs. Although he had recently been diagnosed with cancer, a night with his PBA sisters and brothers would be the best remedy to lift his spirits.

PBA Sergeant-at-Arms Alex Muñoz, who is close with Rodriguez, was touched by the fact that he was so determined to show up and be part of this night of unconditional love.

"It was quite emotional," Muñoz declared. "This is a guy that found out he has stage 4 cancer. And through all these officers supporting him and calling him, he made it to the social riding a motorcycle. Nobody ever expected that he was going to show up, let alone on a motorcycle."

It was the highlight of a night that was filled with the rich aroma of cigars lingering in the air.

The South Florida PBA Cigar Social was hosted in partnership with the Hispanic Police Officers Association (HPOA), along with businesses in the community. All proceeds went to benefit the PBA Love Fund, dedicated to fallen officers and their families.

During the event, members lounged on chairs with beverages in hand, laughing and talking with old friends. For Muñoz, simply enjoying one another's camaraderie was a showcase of family.

"The atmosphere was eclectic. It was a positive turnout, just having people together and showing not just our members, but the community, that we're a big family," Muñoz explained. "Despite what people may say or look at, at the end of the day, we're all first responders. And just putting aside who you're affiliated with to just talk and hang out, that shows a community. We are a big family. We need to look out for each other."

As an organizer of the event, Muñoz hoped that members would leave the evening reminded that as their law enforcement family, the PBA is always there for them. And evenings like the Cigar So-



cial are only one way to highlight deep gratitude toward members.

"We do these little things as our token of appreciation to our members," Muñoz expressed. "We are here for them. We care about them. We want to make our members and officers feel that they're not forgotten."

By the end of the evening, retired and current members had exchanged stories and shared laughs. Many were ready to

mark their calendars for the next event. But Muñoz knew he would never forget this social where he saw Rodriguez riding off into the night.

"Seeing him riding his motorcycle was my highlight of the night," Muñoz added. "You could have had a good cigar, a good drink, hang out with friends or say some jokes. But looking at this man, riding on his motorcycle, was excellent."

REFLECTIONS

Catching up with a renowned South Florida PBA Member

Learning Experiences

Retired Miami-Dade lieutenant will never give up his passion for teaching officers

Raul “Chewy” Martinez will never forget the nightmare that ensued on Sept. 13, 2007.

Martinez, a now-retired Miami-Dade lieutenant, was the commander on the morning shift when a traffic stop by Officer Jose Somohano led to an exchange of gunfire with a suspect.

Immediately, Martinez drove to the scene while trying to get on the police radio. He was only able to get on the air twice.

“There was so much clutter on the air,” he recalled. “That’s unacceptable. I blew that scene. [Somohano] was killed under my command.”

Although Martinez bent over backward to manage the scene, he felt wracked with guilt that an officer was lost in the line of duty.

“As the boss, I put it all on myself,” he admitted. “People did their job. As the commander, you’ve got to lead from the front of that spear, and I couldn’t do it because I couldn’t get control of the air.”

He was called in to see MDPD Director Robert Parker at the end of that day. Martinez already knew the reason.

“He says, ‘I’m tired of not you, but of hearing on the radio of our department falling behind on this,’” Martinez explained. “We should be the tip of that spear leading everybody in this county.”

So Parker tasked Martinez with creating a course for supervisors to better learn how to take command and handle certain highly stressful situations. Martinez added that while rookie officers are disciplined for every misstep, superior officers are not given any instruction.

“When you get promoted to sergeant or to a lieutenant, nobody teaches you how to take command,” he confided. “You’ve got to learn that on your own through your experience.”

Martinez, who came on the job in 1984, used his decades of law enforcement experience to create the Critical Incident Management course taught yearly to first-line supervisors. He brought in instructors — like-minded officers like himself, including his son Raul Jose, who is currently a Miami-Dade lieutenant, and Arnold Palmer, who is now a major for the Special Patrol Bureau — to teach the course.

“They still teach it today,” he confirmed. “This course is being passed down. That’s my legacy, so I’m proud of that.”

This is just one of many instances of Martinez paving the way for the next generation of law enforcement officers. By his second year on the job, he had already applied to become a field training officer (FTO) to mentor younger officers. He’s taught investigative, search warrant and critical response courses. And as he moved up the ranks, he never believed in the old saying, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

“I’ve always been a game-changer,” he declared. “My philosophy is, if I can make it better, I’m going to try to make it even better for the [officer] that comes behind me.”

In his 30 years on the job, Martinez became one of the department’s most renowned and revered officers. Everybody knows Chewy by the nickname his sergeant gave him early in his career because, when making an arrest, he unknowingly sent up some



Raul “Chewy” Martinez came on the job with the Miami-Dade Police Department in 1984 and retired as a lieutenant in 2014.

Raul “Chewy” Martinez’s Record



- Served the Miami-Dade Police Department from 1984 to 2014
- Certified police instructor since the early 1990s
- Worked in CSI, Homeland Security, robbery, narcotics and counterterrorism

- Created the H.E.R.O. Consultant Group to give back to first responders
- Adjunct professor at Louisiana State University for the National Center for Biomedical Research and Training Academy of Counterterrorism Education (NCBRT)

sound effects resembling the famed “Star Wars” character.

Since retiring from the department in July 2014, Martinez hasn’t let go of his passion for teaching the tricks of the trade. He became an adjunct professor at Louisiana State University to instruct for the National Center for Biomedical Research and Training Academy of Counterterrorism Education (NCBRT). He asserted that his hands-on teaching method is the best way for officers to learn.

“I don’t like to lecture from a podium, I teach at the ground level,” he related. “I’ve been there, I know what you’re thinking and feeling. I teach from that angle, and it resonates with the students.”

Martinez not only has more than enough experience on the job, but he also has law enforcement in his blood — his grandfather and uncle were both officers — and has generations’ worth of knowledge of the field. He gives his students the same advice he gives to his son.

“Do your job, train and prepare yourself all the time,” he insisted. “Save lives and influence a couple of people along the way.”

MDPD Officer Kenson Dordor promoted to major in the U.S. Army

BY ESTHER GONZALES

Major Kenson Dordor remembers the first moment he wanted to become an officer. He was a junior in high school, sitting in his biology class as he watched in shock the events of 9/11 unfold on the television screen. When he saw first responders enter the burning buildings without hesitation, it ignited a spark in him. In that moment, he decided he wanted to become an officer in the United States Army Reserve.

On Sept. 16, 2021, Dordor was honored to be promoted to major of the 436th Civil Affairs Battalion, something that he didn't believe was possible. His family was overwhelmed by surprise because he is the first military officer in his family to reach such a high rank.

It was his proudest moment.

"I didn't think I would still be in the Army today, dealing with being a police officer and all the busy schedule that it takes juggling both being in the Army and a police officer, but I'm blessed to have that opportunity," Dordor recounted.

When Dordor first joined the Army Reserve in 2009, he knew it was a stepping stone in a journey of achieving his goals. In January 2019, he was sworn as a police officer. He began his career at the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office and now works with the South District of the Miami-Dade Police Department. His determination and perseverance have enabled him to balance wearing both uniforms.

As a soldier in uniform, Dordor receives support from civilians, but as an officer there is always a chance of backlash. Both experiences have encouraged him to continue fighting for freedom and protecting civilians daily.

After receiving an opportunity to attend an advanced officer leadership school, Dordor further developed his leadership skills, which enabled him to achieve this promotion. His time there provided him with the necessary tools to lead by example, as both a soldier and an officer.

"Usually, it takes a lot to be a leader and to have others follow you," Dordor explained. "On the officer side, I continue to use the tools that I've learned in the Army to show others that I'm able to guide them the right way. And if they ever need anything, I'm able to listen."



The younger generations inspire Dordor to continue leading and paving the way for future leaders. Dordor recalled a time when high school students asked him about his career and what it takes to be an officer.

"A number of times, I get asked questions on how I enjoyed my military career. And if all the benefits that it offered me are still available," he added. "So that motivates me when I see the younger generation that are inspired to join the military as well as becoming an officer."

Dordor reflected that he has seen many captains not pursue the next rank, of major. But through much discipline and focus, he was motivated to achieve it.

"I didn't think it was possible. So I'm very proud of that moment. And I'm looking forward to the opportunity to making the rank of lieutenant colonel," he added.



If you're looking to take a promotional exam, get in the foxhole

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

Any South Florida PBA members testing for promotion face a formidable challenge. The Miami-Dade Police Department sergeant's exam, for example, might attract more than 500 candidates. Of those, maybe 15 percent will score high enough to earn a promotion.

When you work midnights, have a family and need to endure all the mandatory training, well, there's precious little time to prepare for the exam. Factor in having to read through and memorize information from up to 4,000 pages of material, and it's enough for officers to actually fear promotion.

But there is a way to cut through all the barriers to promotion. South Florida PBA members on the prowl for promotion can follow the Ridge Fox.

Retired MDPD Lieutenant Robert McGrath is the Ridge Fox. He is wise and sly like his favorite animal. And when he first came on the job, he was assigned to Cutler Ridge. Hence the moniker.

He also has started the Ridgefox Academy to offer promotional test preparation. He is hosting one-day classes at the South Florida PBA Hall on March 19 and 20 to help members start on the test prep journey.

"The idea of a promotion sometimes seems so far out of reach that it's an overwhelming task. It's like going back to college on top of everything else you have to do," explains McGrath, who retired after 13 years to focus on preparing officers for promotional exams. "I've broken it down to give everybody a road map about when to study, how to know what is important and all the things I call fundamentals. That's the name of the course, "The Fundamentals of Police Testing."

McGrath was in a room with more than 500 officers testing for sergeant and scored high enough to be promoted. He later achieved the fourth-highest score on the lieutenant's exam as part of ascending two ranks in 3 1/2 years.

To achieve that success, McGrath followed the plan his father established. Mark McGrath served with MDPD for 25 years, eventually retiring as a senior bureau commander. He provided test prep to colleagues in the late 1990s.

Mark passed away suddenly in 2020. Robert had used his ways and means to help his mates when in the academy, and he wanted to honor his father's legacy by continuing to prep officers not just for the test, but to perform at the highest level once they are promoted.

The one-day classes he is offering in March for a discounted rate gear to all candidates, whether they test for sergeant in November, lieutenant a few weeks after that or captain in February 2023. McGrath is also providing an online academy to follow up the one-day class and help members navigate every detailed step of the path to promotion.

To succeed on the 40-questions-in-50-minutes exam, candidates need to maximize their time-management abilities on test day and every day leading up to it. McGrath wants to be there to lead the way and help officers outfox their competition to get that promotion.

"We have officers who would be amazing assets to their departments if they just had the time," McGrath confirms. "This prep course gives everybody such an incredible edge to get over the hurdle and walk into that test feeling really confident."

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

MDCR takes care of its own after a fire destroys officer's home

After tragedy struck one of its own only a week before Christmas, the members of the Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation Department (MDCR) banded together to help in any way they could. News spread quickly that MDCR Pretrial Detention Officer Royann Smith and her three children were left devastated when a fire destroyed their home and everything in it. And support flooded in.

Corporal Kimberly Hepburn, who has worked with Smith for several years, immediately began planning a fundraiser and sought out ways to help. Hepburn is no stranger to raising funds for various events, and members were eager to donate, especially when someone close to them personally needed their help. Together they raised \$1,400.

Smith and her family were presented with the funds, as well as Christmas presents, on Dec. 24. They were overwhelmed with thankfulness and filled with gratitude. It reflected how MDCR takes care of its own.

"That's just something that Miami-Dade County Corrections does as a whole when one of our fellow officers runs into any type of hardship or when something happens where they need us," Hepburn reflected.

Hepburn recounted seeing Smith's children so excited and happy to see the MDCR officers at the hotel where they were staying and to receive their gifts, even though they were aware they had lost everything.

"It was very touching," Hepburn remarked. "They felt special and were very appreciative. They were very excited, especially because we took toys to them and they didn't have any toys at the time."

Weeks later, Hepburn reached out to Smith again to reassure her that they were still there for her. In an ongoing effort to help Smith and her family, Hepburn raised another \$1,400 and presented it to her. Smith was in tears.

"Every time, she was very grateful," Hepburn noted. "With any tragedy, when things first happen, people are there and they lend their hand for support. But a lot of times, once things go down and time passes, people forget about it. So we gave her a call to let her know that we are still



here collecting for her, praying for her and doing what we can."

When word of the events reached the MDCR Hospital Service Unit, Sergeant Leviticus Gilliard felt compelled to do all he could. And when he asked his officers to give as much as they could spare, he saw an amazing response. In only 24 hours, they raised \$4,000 for Smith and her family to also present to her on Dec. 24.

"I felt her pain. We are our brother's keeper. It is not for us to say, but it's for us to mean it," Gilliard declared. "Most of us, including myself, don't even know the officer, but if one of us is hurting, we all are hurting. Their joys are our joys, and their sorrows are our sorrows."

It was an emotional moment when Gilliard presented the funds on behalf of his unit to Smith and her family. She was taken by surprise, and tears flooded her eyes.

"She had a lot of tears of joy, tears of compassion, and she was very thankful," Gilliard recounted. "It seemed like it uplifted her spirit, and she was very overjoyed. She couldn't stop the tears from falling."

Moments like this strengthen the bond within the department and remind officers how important it is to help someone in



their time of need.

"I'm happy that we were able to assist her," Gilliard added. "And as our brothers' keepers, we will always do what we can and what we should, because today it's them; tomorrow it could be us. We should always answer the call for one another and always pay it forward."

It's moments like this that remind officers what it means to be a law enforcement family.

"Our department has taken a huge loss, and we've just been trying to pull together," Hepburn submitted. "Everybody is trying to have each other's back and be there for one another, just be the family more. This is a reminder of why we do this."



Straight out of a movie

Sunny Isles Beach officers save mayor's husband's life after cardiac arrest

Sunny Isles Beach Sergeant Brian Schnell, Sergeant Javier Estevez and Officer Mark Quinlan were recognized at the commission meeting on Dec. 16 for saving the life of Michael Gates, the husband of Mayor Dana Goldman, after he suffered a cardiac arrest.

"A movie could be scripted like that," Schnell relayed. "It happened the day after the election in the middle of the day with kids and parents walking by. Just crazy."

Estevez and Quinlan ran into Gates on Nov. 17 near a school crossing post at 2:15 p.m. It was the day after Goldman was elected as mayor. Gates engaged the officers in friendly conversation while retrieving campaign signs when suddenly, his eyes rolled back and he collapsed.

"I thought he stepped in a hole and fell, so I reached out to grab him," Quinlan recalled. "Then Estevez and I immediately realized what was going on. There was no thought. We jumped into what we had to do."

Estevez quickly announced the cardiac arrest on the police radio. He was on a motorcycle, so he requested that any unit with a defibrillator respond. He began rescue breathing while Quinlan performed chest compressions.

Sergeant Brian Schnell took less than one minute to arrive on scene with an AED machine. They tore Gates's shirt off.

"We put the defibrillator on him, and it said, 'Shock advised,' which is very rare," Schnell recalled. "Normally at this point, the person's gone. I mean, he's completely lifeless."

Schnell shocked Gates once. By the time the fire department and ambulance arrived, Gates was conscious and talking to the

officers as if nothing had happened.

"We watched him take his last breath," Schnell shared. "And once he was shocked, it was a matter of minutes before being brought completely back to life."

Gates told the officers that he remembered bending over to pick up a sign and feeling lightheaded. The next thing he remembered was opening his eyes.

The officers noted that the incident would have turned out very differently had it not been for being at the right place at the right time.

"Imagine how long it takes for an officer to come screaming over the radio for rescue," Schnell remarked. "And for rescue to actually get there in the middle of the day."

Fire rescue agreed that if it wasn't for early CPR and early AED shocks, Gates would not have made it. For Schnell and Quinlan, who have a combined 52 years of experience on the job, this is the first time that a cardiac arrest victim lived.

"If those stars didn't align that day the way they did for him, he's not with us right now," Schnell admitted. "No doubt in my mind. I've shocked someone before, but they died the next day or hours later."

Five days after the incident, Schnell bumped into the mayor and her husband while working detail at a holiday show. As it turned out, Gates had a major blockage and had a stent put in. Schnell reiterated to Gates how lucky he was.

"He hit the lottery," Schnell affirmed. "It's that rare. It had to play out the way it did to be successful."

MDPD members run to honor fallen officer Jermaine Brown

Miami-Dade officers joined family and friends of Sergeant Jermaine Brown, who served the department for 15 years, for a remembrance run and reflection service on Dec. 12, the third anniversary of his end of watch.

Brown was conducting an enforcement detail due to community complaints of illegal activity along a canal path on Dec. 12,

2018. He was responding to assist officers on the detail when he suffered an ATV crash after the vehicle struck a tree on the Black Creek Trail.

After the remembrance run, officers and loved ones stopped to reflect and reminisce over cherished memories of Brown. They also laid white roses to honor the fallen officer.



Miami-Dade Animal Services saves a day for Charlie



Puppies and dogs of every kind happily welcomed the crowd that gathered on Dec. 15 at the Miami-Dade Animal Services Pet Adoption and Protection Center. Laughter drifted through the air as members of the community were introduced to puppies and kittens in celebration of Mayor Daniella Cava officially declaring it Save Charlie Day.

“No matter your situation, a pet is a great addition to your family,” Mayor Cava declared.

Save Charlie Day, named after one of the most popular dogs from the shelter, has two main purposes. It was established in hopes of raising awareness about animal adoption, and it also



aims to educate people on the no-kill status that Miami-Dade Animal Services holds.

Save Charlie Day is also a day for members of the community to seek out cats and dogs to adopt from the shelter. Dogs lying in their fluffy beds watched intently, wagging their tails, as many people stopped by to pet them and learn more about their stories.

It was a moment that Miami-Dade Animal Services will be proud of forever. After advocating for this event since April, they were finally seeing their hard work become a reality.



Miami Heat honors Miami-Dade officers as heroes

Officers of the Miami-Dade Police Department were honored as heroes by the NBA's Miami Heat in a series of pre-game ceremonies.

Before every game, the Miami Heat team honors individuals through its Hero Appreciation program, a ceremony that recognizes first responders, veterans and community members who go above and beyond to support members of society.

Sergeant Reuben McCoy, who came on the job more than 17 years ago and served more than 34 years in the U.S. Army, was honored for his service to the county and country at the pre-game ceremony on Nov. 6. McCoy retired as a colonel in 2021.

Homicide Bureau Detectives Nick Franzosa and Josh

Wendling were recognized on Nov. 18 for their continued response to the devastation from the Surfside building collapse. Miami-Dade PIO Argemis "AC" Colome received the same honor at the Nov. 17 ceremony.

Sergeant Manuel Gonzalez, who has faced multiple weapons being fired at him in the line of duty, was honored at the Dec. 8 Hero Appreciation ceremony.

"The [officers] merit recognition and honor for their sacrifices and commitment to our wonderful community," praised Miami-Dade PD Director Alfredo "Freddy" Ramirez. "I thank the Miami Heat organization for acknowledging their bravery and dedication during their pre-game hero recognition ceremony."

Meet the Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Miami Gardens



Miami Gardens officers assumed the role of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, or mentors, to high school students at a meet-and-greet on Nov. 18, 2021. Officers and City Hall mentors gave hands-on presentations to the mentees, including how to increase their physical fitness. The students then had the chance to practice push-ups in front of the officers.

The event was through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami, a nonprofit organization that aims to support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth.



Dec. 1 proclaimed Miami-Dade Police Department Day

At a special ceremony on Dec. 1, the Board of County Commissioners honored Miami-Dade police, fire and urban rescue for their courageous responses when Champlain Towers South in Surfside collapsed on June 24, 2021.

To recognize and celebrate first responders, commissioners declared Dec. 1 to be Miami-Dade Police Department Day. Firefighters and police officers will also receive commemorative plaques for their heroic and admirable actions during the collapse.



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North Miami PD brings white Christmas to Florida

All eyes turned toward the sky as the Miami-Dade helicopter flew overhead, signifying the moment everyone was waiting for at the North Miami PD Let It Snow event on Dec. 18. Santa Claus was coming to town. There on the roof of a tall building where the helicopter was flying overhead, a large cloud of smoke filled the air as Santa appeared. Two children in the front of the crowd glanced at each other in excitement, then back toward the scene of Santa, cheering loudly, "It's Santa!"

"I was so excited for them that they were so excited," declared North Miami Chief Larry Juriga, as he thought back to witnessing that significant moment between the two kids.

The Let It Snow Event brought a crowd of hundreds of people from around South Florida to share the unique experience of snow. Members brought in 15 tons of falling snow, with help from organizations in the local community like the Community Police Relations Foundation and Ace Construction.

"The kids were just amazed that you could pick it up and make snowballs," Juriga explained. "Many of them threw it



up in the air just to look at it. And a lot of the younger ones were really fascinated because it was something many of them had never experienced. The kids certainly loved it. But don't get me wrong, a lot of the adults loved it too, including many of our officers."

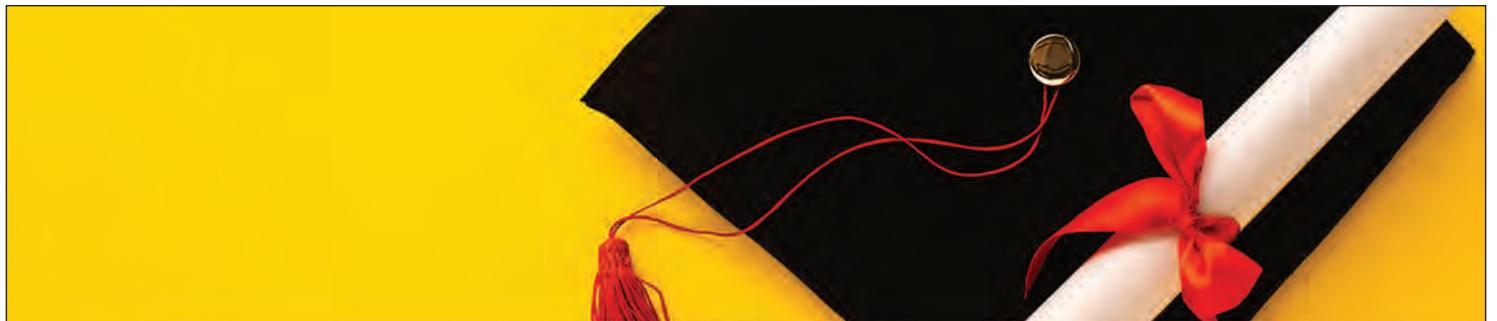
Children of all ages gathered at the petting zoo to see the llamas and pigs and ride the ponies, which was also a new experience for most of them. And North Miami officers used the special day to continue forming relationships with families in the community and across the state.

"It was absolutely heartwarming to see the smiles and to see our officers being able to engage with the children and with their parents," Juriga explained.



The Let It Snow event gave everyone an opportunity to experience the winter-time holiday together in a special way.

"It was really a great event, just to have so many people from all different areas of the community, all different ages, all different walks of life coming out to celebrate together," he added.



Now Accepting Applications for PBA Scholarships!

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

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

1. Applicant must be a child of a South Florida PBA member with a minimum of one-year membership or have prior Board approval. Children of retirees are not eligible to apply.
2. Applicant must be or plan to be, a part-time or full-time student at an accredited trade school or a two-year or four-year college. Graduate students are not eligible to apply. Maximum age for applicant is 24 years of age (applicants who are under 24 as of December 31, 2021, may apply)
3. Applicant must include an essay on, how can law enforcement leader's bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community. Minimum of 400 words, maximum of 750 words. The essay must be typed, double-spaced, using 12-point Arial or Times New Roman font only. Please include a header or footer with name and page number.
4. Send application, essay, Letter of Acceptance (first-time applicants only) and an official transcript with GPA in one package to: South Florida PBA Scholarship Committee, 10680 PBA Memorial Blvd. (NW 25th Street), Doral, FL 33172.

DO NOT submit resumes and letters of recommendation. DO NOT bind in any way.

To download the application, visit www.flpba.org/scholarship-award or, if additional information is needed, contact Kim Gregson at (305) 593-0044 or e-mail: kim@sflpba.org.



Thankful for delicious meals

'Tis the season to express gratitude while stuffing your face with everyone's Thanksgiving favorites. As Nora Ephron once said, "The turkey. The sweet potatoes. The stuffing. The pumpkin pie. Is there anything else we all can agree so vehemently about? I don't think so."

There is something else South Florida officers and PBA members can agree on: Everyone deserves a Thanksgiving meal.

From packaging baskets with Thanksgiving essentials to distributing meals with the Miami Heat to delivering turkeys, officers worked tirelessly to make sure residents would have a warm meal on Thanksgiving. And they were rewarded in return with meals from the community.

Here is a look at giving thanks with the South Florida PBA:



Bal Harbour



Bal Harbour officers and volunteers packaged more than 100 Thanksgiving baskets on Nov. 15 to be delivered to families in Miami-Dade County. Officers and more than 30 volunteers arrived at the Police Legacy Foundation's annual Thanksgiving Drive packaging event to lend a hand.



Homestead officers enjoyed a spread of Thanksgiving-themed food and dessert courtesy of The Palace Gardens on Nov. 24.



Miami Gardens

Miami Gardens officers who worked on Thanksgiving Day received hot meals including turkey, vegetables and potatoes provided by the Calvary Chapel North Miami.



Florida International University

FIU Officer Felisha McKnight participated in the City of North Miami annual Thanksgiving Day parade on Nov. 25. McKnight, crowned as a Royal Homecoming Staff member, stopped for a photo with FIU President Mark Rosenberg, Dean Michael Cheng and Roary, the mascot of the FIU Panthers.



Hialeah Gardens

Hialeah Gardens officers worked with city personnel to load and distribute turkeys and Thanksgiving meal essentials to community residents on Nov. 20.



Miami-Dade

Miami-Dade officers participated in the 30th Annual Miami Heat Thanksgiving Celebration on Nov. 23. Nearly 600 families, pre-selected by local government and community-based organizations, received an entire Thanksgiving meal with all the trimmings at the drive-thru distribution event.

Sunny Isles Beach

Sunny Isles Beach officers supported the Miami-Dade County League of Cities' Annual Turkey Drive on Nov. 20 by helping to deliver turkeys and food to St. Vincent de Paul, which were then distributed to families in need of a Thanksgiving meal.



South Florida members spark joy during holiday season

As South Florida members entered the holiday season, they participated in various holiday events to help spread light and cheer to residents of all ages. From their annual Shop with a Cop event to partnering with charities and other organizations for toy drives, South Florida PD undoubtedly sparked joy in the lives of many.



Aventura

Partnering with the Chief Press Foundation, the Aventura Police Department distributed more than 250 gifts to children of all ages during its 17th Annual Toy Drive on Dec. 18.

Children of all ages received presents beautifully wrapped in colorful paper, and officers dressed up in bright red Christmas hats and elves' ears, bringing laughter to all. South Florida members reminded residents about the joy of giving, and that is what this holiday season was all about.



Doral

Doral brought Christmas a little early this year, on Dec. 20, for its annual Shop with a Cop event for children and youth in the community, in partnership with Walmart. Doral PD Explorers helped Santa spread holiday joy this Christmas.



Bal Harbour

Bal Harbour welcomed the many volunteers from the community who joined them on Dec. 13 in their annual Gift Wrapping Event to bring cheer to the children of Phillis Wheatley and Martin Luther King elementary schools. Together, they wrapped more than 300 donated presents.



On Dec. 18, the Bal Harbour Police Legacy Foundation presented more than 300 gifts to the children of Phillis Wheatley and Martin Luther King elementary schools, including a surprise visit from Santa. The smiles and joy Bal Harbour received reflected their mission to reach every child in Miami-Dade County.



MCSO

In partnership with the nonprofit Kids Come First, MCSOPD delivered presents of every kind on Dec. 18 to three locations: Florida Keys Children's Shelter, Plantation Key School and Key Largo School.



Opa-locka

On Dec. 19, Opa-locka PD celebrated Christmas festivities with the community at the Glorieta Gardens Apartments. Residents and officers enjoyed listening to Christmas music, passing out presents and celebrating the joy of the season.



North Miami

Local children joined North Miami officers on Dec. 11 at TJ Maxx for their annual Shop with a Cop event. Together, they celebrated the joy of the season.



In partnership with Chief Press Foundation, North Miami officers received hundreds of donated toys and presents on Dec. 20 to bring to children in the community. With help from Santa, officers spread holiday light and cheer to many families this holiday season.



Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation

MDCR partnered with the Salvation Army this Christmas to give away hundreds of toys to families in need on Dec. 23. For MDCR, this holiday season was all about the joy of giving.



Hialeah Gardens

In partnership with Walmart, on Dec. 22, Hialeah Gardens held its annual Shop with a Cop event for children and youth in the local community. Santa made a surprise appearance to help the kids choose their favorite presents.



Homestead

Homestead officers gathered on Dec. 10 with 50 families from around the community to treat them for their annual Shop with a Cop event, which sparked joy and laughter. Children excitedly picked out their presents, ranging from giant, colorful teddy bears to brand-new bicycles.



Miami-Dade

MDPD brought the joy of giving to children and youth of the community throughout the month of December through various events, such as its annual Shop with a Cop event and visits to local elementary schools to bring donated toys. Officers happily gave away bicycles and stuffed animals and included visits from Santa and his elves. Even Spider-Man and Batman made an appearance.



Medley

Medley PD brought holiday cheer to many children in the community as they gathered at Target on Dec. 17 to celebrate the annual Shop with a Cop event. The day was filled with laughter, smiles and holiday cheer.



South Miami

South Miami teamed up with the South Miami Hospital nursing staff on Dec. 26 to hand out backpacks to the unsheltered population in the community. The bags were filled with self-care items and other necessities. Officers greeted each individual and presented them with a bag, bringing the warmth of light and joy.

What's the payoff to paying off your mortgage?



NICOLÁS VALDÉS-FAULI
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Clients often ask me as they approach retirement if they should pay off their mortgage. It's common sense to want to free yourself from debt, but it requires a bit more consideration, and each situation is different.

I often express the importance of the "pillow factor" (how well you sleep at night) when it comes to all big decisions with financial planning and investments. However, it's important to consider the balance between accomplishing your goals and making sound financial choices.

More than meets the eye

If you are finishing DROP or in the Investment Plan, you will have a considerable amount of money when you separate from service. Let's say your mortgage balance is \$300,000 and your income tax bracket is 22 percent. This means you'll have to take a distribution of more than \$380,000 to pay off your mortgage balance. For some people, that could be the majority of their DROP balances.

It's important to also consider that the distribution will be added to your taxable income, so your income for that year will be the distribution you take plus all other pension benefits (dis-

tributions and monthly payments). It's very likely you will be kicked into a higher tax bracket all together.

Peace of mind vs. the right choice

An additional point to consider is that interest rates are at historic lows (although not for much longer), which means borrowing costs are very low. If your mortgage interest rate is around 3 percent, please note that the S&P 500 performed over 20 percent last year. This means that your money could have worked harder for you earning in the stock market versus paying down low-interest debt.

Each person's situation is unique, so make sure you speak with a qualified tax professional like a certified public accountant or a qualified investment professional who is a certified financial planner.

Nicolás Valdés-Fauli is the founder and CEO of 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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Thank-You Notes TO THE PBA



Senator René García
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 13

Steadman Stahl
President
South Florida Police Benevolent Association
10680 NW 25th Street
Doral, FL 33172

Dear President Stahl,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for sending me your 2022 calendar. I appreciate the well wishes and hope for a joyous and prosperous year for the South Florida Police Benevolent Association.

Again, thank you for your thoughtfulness this holiday season. Wishing you, your family, and your team a very Happy New Year! Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or my staff if we can ever be of assistance to you.

Sincerely,

Senator René García
Commissioner - District 13
Miami- Dade Board of County Commissioners

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Ronald McDonald House Charities
South Florida
1145 NW 14 Terrace • Miami, FL 33136
Office 305-324-5883
info@rmhcsouthflorida.org

www.rmhcsouthflorida.org

November 19, 2021

South Florida PBA
Attn: Steadman Stahl
10680 NW 25th ST
Doral, FL 33172

Dear Mr. Steadman Stahl,

On behalf of the families and staff of Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida, I want to thank you for supporting the 28th Annual Twelve Good Men Luncheon held on November 4, 2021, at the Coral Gables Country Club.

We hope you had a wonderful time at the luncheon. We are thrilled to share that after having to postpone the event due to an unprecedented year, more than 250 people attended the luncheon and more than \$90,000.00 was raised to benefit children and families at "The House that Love Built". As you know the Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida is a place where families of seriously ill children who are being treated at local hospitals can stay in a safe and loving environment during their time of need. Our mission and focus of keeping families together never stopped amid the pandemic, therefore we thank you for your continued support.

On behalf of the Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida, the Twelve Good Men Luncheon committee members, and most importantly, the children and families who truly benefit from the RMHC of South Florida services, we truly appreciate your support. We look forward to seeing you next year at the luncheon.

Sincerely,

Soraya Rivera-Moya
Executive Director

Twelve Good Men Co-Chairs

Linda Levy Goldberg

Jim Murphy

Sonia Gibson

The Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida received a donation of \$3,000.00 on 03/13/2021 from the Miami-Dade County Police Benevolent of which \$2,480.00 is tax-deductible. Our Tax ID number is 59-1899866. (Listed under "Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida") and can be used to claim your donation.

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