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## COVER STORY

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**We Got Your Sixty**

HOURLY WAGE COMPARISON	
TRUCK DRIVER	2.65
CARPENTER	3.45
ELECTRICIAN	3.80
PLUMBER	3.70
AIRLINE MECHANIC	2.63
POLICE OFFICER (START)	
6 MONTHS	1.77
1 1/2 YEARS	1.86
2 1/2	1.96
3 1/2	2.06
4 1/2	2.16
	2.26

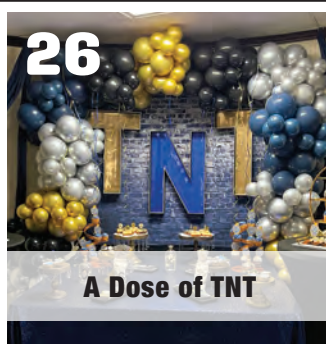
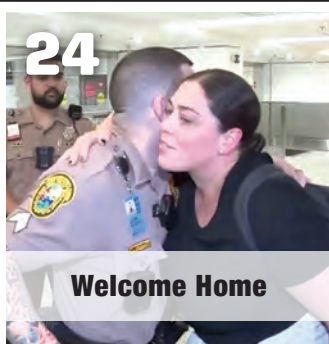
The South Florida PBA's 60th anniversary is more than a milestone. The PBA at 60 is a tribute to the way the union has improved working conditions for members, the way salaries and benefits have increased, the way legal representation has helped so many officers. Combine all that with the benevolence that brings members together for the cause, for their families and for their sisters and brothers on the job, and you have at least 60 reasons to celebrate. Or 600. So raise a glass and toast to the PBA and its members with this special report that showcases what makes this such a momentous occasion.

COVER DESIGN BY GINA CROTCHFELT

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## A picture that is worth 60 years



STEADMAN  
STAHL

As we celebrate the South Florida PBA hitting the big six-oh, check out the photos inside the big 6 and 0 on the cover of this issue. Follow around to the right side of the zero to see the picture of the officer who would become one of the first PBA members, holding up the sign with very telling numbers.

This is where it all started in 1963.

To understand the bigger picture, also look at the county commissioner sitting to the right of the sign. I am told that commissioner wore a hearing aid. He turned it off when the PBA stood up in front of him to make a presentation about wanting a pay increase.

Reportedly, he said, "I'm not going to listen to their presentation."

As we begin our 60th year, let's think about how far we've come.

The history lesson begins with confirming why labor unions came about in the first place. Unions are what gave us Saturdays and Sundays off. They are what made it so you didn't have to work from sunrise to sunset. There was a time in this profession when you had to buy your own guns. You had to buy your own bullets.

At the time of the birth of the PBA, there was no collective bargaining. There was no job security. If the sheriff, who ran the county department, didn't like you, you were out. Or banished to some faraway assignment in the county.

When I first came on with Homestead, officers in my department said you had to make sure you were a PBA member for the legal representation. I quickly learned they also were the ones who would negotiate contracts for pay and benefits. And two years later, I was a Homestead PBA rep. I ran because we had just settled a contract that I thought we could have done better with.

So that's what got me involved: the motivation to make the conditions better for me and the officers that I work with. I realized that if I wanted better wages and better working conditions, I could be the guy on the sidelines or I could be on the field. I wanted to get onto the field.

From there, I got appointed to the PBA Board of Directors. I liked it because I started seeing that the PBA had a lot of good resources. There were a lot of good things we got involved in. Just being a part of the system, you know how you can help people and make the PBA a better place.

I never thought I'd be getting involved in the PBA as much as I did, but I knew it was my insurance policy. And know this after 60 years: The days that you think you're going to go your whole career and never need the PBA are gone. The PBA is the one organization that has consistently made sure that in an officer's time of need — and time of need can mean a lot of different things — we are there.

Throughout the 60 years, there've been ups and downs. Some days are good. Some years are good. And some years are bad. But the core mission has always been to take care of the members, and I think the PBA has done that.

I'm proud that we've come this far, that it wasn't a flash in the pan. Here we are 60 years later. We've never been stronger. And the benefits that we get today? I can't believe that our forefathers in the PBA, the founding members of the PBA, would've ever thought that we would be getting the benefits and the pay that we're getting today.

But this is what they started 60 years ago, never wavering even when it was falling on deaf ears.

That goes back to the strength and unity that are being part of a team. It's part of making sure that we're looking out for the little guy, we're looking out for officers when they get into a jam or a bind or need us in any way. And we're always there for them.

One of our greatest learning events in 60 years is something you have heard me say again and again. Everything we do in life — everything about our jobs — is determined by politics. The success we've had in improving salary, benefits and working conditions for our members over the years is because of how politically engaged, active and connected the PBA has become.

That starts at the top of the state, which we confirmed again by being on the guest list for, and attending, Governor DeSantis' inauguration and ball on Jan. 4.

We were there four years ago when he first got elected, and it was great to be there again



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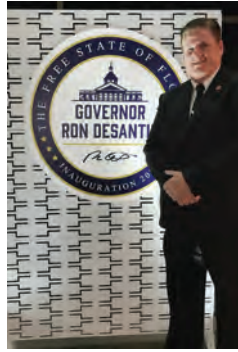
Richard "Smitty" Smith

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



# An inside look at Governor DeSantis' Inauguration



**STAHL** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

to get his personal assurance about continuing to support law enforcement throughout the state. He did everything he said he was going to do and more. He's been a great governor on many issues, but the one that I can't thank him enough for would be his stance on public safety.

We had a chance to tell him that when he took some pictures with us. I just told him, "Thank you for what you've been doing for us and what you continue to do for us." And he just smiled and said, "Of course." I said, "You've had our backs. We're going to have your back." And he said, "It's only going to get better." He was very humble and thanked us for being there at his event.

The inauguration itself was great. It was held on the steps of the old Capitol. Planes flying over and cannons going off. And then later that night, they had the inauguration dinner and dance, and we were able to talk to a lot of our great elected officials throughout the state. Then, getting to take a picture with the governor and his lovely wife and be part of congratulating him for what he's done and what he's going to continue to do was beyond words.

It was a good vibe. Thousands of people were there, and everybody was in a very upbeat, positive mood. Because there is so much to look forward to, which we are already seeing in the 2023 state legislative session.

Although the governor doesn't write the bills, he certainly has influence on what's going to be a priority and what's going to come forward. And because you have that strong vibe starting with him, it goes down through his administration to the legislature.

They already started this session off restoring benefits that were taken away from us years ago. Bills have been filed to correct some wrongs that have happened to us over the years. The biggest one is reducing the years of service needed to be eligible for your pension from 30 back to 25.

There are also a couple of mental health initiatives for first responders that they're filing right now. He's putting money in all the state agencies, from FDLE to Florida Highway Patrol to State Corrections. They're just reinvesting in us.

Now it's our job as PBA leaders to make sure that working

conditions are front and center for the governor and his administration, as well as the state legislature. Which they are. We have a voice and a seat at the table. We are not on the sidelines. The PBA is right on the field, and we will continue to stay on the field. We will be the organization that's going to push the issues that are affecting our members, keeping them front and center.

Perhaps the inauguration was a bit of a victory lap. That's the winner's circle. But leading up to that, there's been a lot of time taken away from your families to knock on doors, help people, stand on street corners holding campaign signs to make sure that the right people get elected.

And we have done that so that when they are elected into positions where they can make a difference and make change, we know we have the right people there. They're going to put our members front and center. And when we left Tallahassee after the inauguration, I think this is the strongest support we've seen from the many, many elected officials who have our backs.

I would like to take a lot of credit for that, but it's primarily because we have a devoted PBA board of directors that steps in and helps out. You've been to all the events. We have many more planned for this year.

A lot of these events are coming up from the members who want to engage in the union. From the pig roast we started with overwhelming success in November to a golf tournament to the fishing tournament and a 5K run, these are all different things that people want to do to keep the PBA moving forward and support our Love Fund, which in turn gives back to the members in their times of need.

You combine all of this, and it has created a PBA that nobody imagined 60 years ago how formidable we have become. As we celebrate this incredible milestone, you can be sure of this: They are listening to us now.

Thank you for making that happen.

**Steadman Stahl, President**  
steadman@sflpba.org



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# Resolve to make your health a priority in 2023



DAVID  
GREENWELL  
EXECUTIVE  
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As we say goodbye to 2022 and look ahead to the new year, it is only normal human behavior to think about the things we would like to do, change or improve. This is why so many people make the ever-popular New Year's resolutions. Unfortunately, these resolutions usually don't last very long. But I think this should be the year to try to succeed in making and keeping our resolutions. Some of the most common resolutions revolve around personal health: losing weight, eating better and exercising more.

What can you do to try to make sure that you will keep your resolutions? I think it is important not to get overwhelmed by making too many resolutions or choosing goals that are too big. If you choose one or two things that you would like to work on and break your goals into small steps, then you might have a better chance of succeeding. For example, instead of saying that you want to lose 30 pounds, start with smaller increments, such as five to 10 pounds at a time. If you want to start exercising more, you don't have to work out at the gym for two hours. Instead, maybe you can do a 30- to 45-minute workout. Or you can do something as simple as a walk with friends, family or your dog. Start small and build up from there. If you want to start running, start with short jogs and then increase your distance or speed. You get the idea.

Additionally, something that I think is so important is seeing your doctors regularly. The job that you do is already so mentally and physically demanding, which is why taking good care of yourself is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and your loved ones. I wish some of my friends would show themselves the same care they show their cars. For example, they never miss an oil change, tire rotation or regular wash and wax. However, they don't do regular annual checkups, bloodwork or procedures that are a part of the aging process, such as colonoscopies.

Your job can be very mentally demanding. It is crucial to take care of your mental and emotional health as well. Make sure you get sleep, give yourself some time to decompress and relax, and if at any time you feel that you need assistance, get some. Ignoring or suppressing your feelings isn't healthy. If necessary, talk to someone, whether that is a loved one, friend or counselor. You've got to remember that it is okay to not be okay. FYI, we have one of the best health and welfare units in the country. The number is 305-591-1106.

So let's make 2023 the year that we truly make our physical and mental health a priority. Not only will your body and mind thank you, but your loved ones will be thankful as well.

As always, please stay safe out there and back each other up. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at 305-593-0044 or [dg@sflpba.org](mailto:dg@sflpba.org).

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A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and sunglasses stands on a concrete dock. To his right is a white Miami-Dade Police boat with "MIAMI-DADE POLICE" and a police badge logo on its side. The background features palm trees and a clear blue sky.

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# The Burnout Effect



NIZAM "ISH"  
ISHMAEL  
VICE  
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I know I have felt it. That feeling that nothing I do at work matters. This feeling doesn't come overnight — it's a gradual storm of highs and lows, boredom and excitement, and the daily grind that changes us.

If you have ever listened to an expert on law enforcement wellness, you have heard the lecture on our standard stress level. While most of the population goes about their jobs and personal lives, their baseline for stress is considered to be lower than that of a law enforcement professional (LEP). It has become

common knowledge that a constant state of heightened awareness, adrenaline-dumping incidents and dealing with uncooperative citizens is not good for our health. Increased stress has been linked to depression, memory loss, sleep problems, alcohol abuse, weakened immune systems and cardiovascular disease.

Day-to-day stress is normal. The difference between just a stressful day and hitting a new low of ongoing anxiety is when we hit our "burnout." Burnout is a sense of exhaustion that doesn't go away with a good night's rest or an annual vacation. Burnout is that feeling that nothing you do makes a difference, and your purpose is meaningless.

## Understanding burnout

Understanding the difference between stress and burnout is key. Everyone has aspects of stress in their job. Burnout is the result of decades of accumulated stress with no end in sight. Burning out is burning all the way out. Burnout is not necessarily about how hard you work; it is a feeling of all the joyful things, all the things in life, flattened into one long list of things to do. Fortunately, burnout is not inevitable, and it can be reversed.

To better understand burnout, the first thing to do is take away the burden of blaming yourself. Literally, books have been written about the role of your agency and the burnout effect. Your agency probably has ways to encourage burnout. The agency is likely responsible for the burnout and should take responsibility for addressing it.

How your agency is responsible for your own daily stresses and sense of burnout may feel unique, but it is not. The faults of our agencies are the same across all professions. How an agency responds to their failures is how they could become unique.

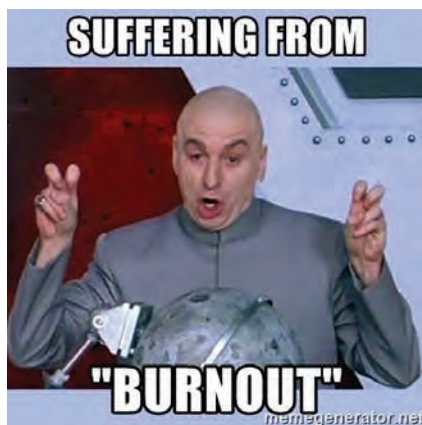
Ways in which an agency inadvertently encourages employees to burnout are a lack of efficacy, ambient sense of job security and digital technology.

Lack of efficacy is when the daily grind of work has no meaningful impact on the world around you. Lack of efficacy is like a hamster in its wheel — lots of work with no results. Not all roles in law enforcement can witness immediate cause and effect that prove that what we do is making a difference. Most officers do not see the fruits of their labor until much later, if at all.

Your sense of job security may have been compromised in the last two years when there was an economic downturn and a mandate that threatened employees who chose not to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. For many LEPs, the fear of losing one's livelihood was a real threat. Job security matters when it comes to the employee/employer relationship, and this is an avenue the department can always improve upon.

Digital technology is often abused by agencies offering their employees the ability to communicate 24/7. On paper and in policy, the response from management may be that you are only expected to check your emails once a workday. But let's be real — that expectation is much higher. Any command level officer in a leadership position and supervision is checking and responding to emails during their off time and days off.

Digital demands cause burnout. Checking emails at home, answering and phone calls and text messages and writing reports are an administrative burden that is far removed from police work. The agency should work to reduce these time-consuming duties and provide technology that is user friendly.



## Reducing the burn

Agencies can reduce burnout by changing their structure and culture. Burnout must be tackled at scale by using demand, control and support. Imagine if your agency addressed these three areas:

**Reduce the demands of the job.** There must be hundreds of ways that the demands of the job can be reduced by abolishing unnecessary paperwork, having less duplicate work, working with the courts to place officers on call more often than staffing their shifts with enough officers to reduce an individual's workload. The department needs to seek out their rank and file's feedback and start reducing the demands of the job.

**Give people more control.** LEPs should have priority to use their accrued time. Management should accommodate their schedule and work toward a more predictable schedule. Officers deserve the opportunity to work the shifts and areas they prefer.

**Provide more support to help people cope.** LEPs are more in need than ever before of wellness days, time off during their shift for exercise, mediation and overall care for their wellbeing. Keeping our people emotionally centered will have a ripple effect on those around them.

Agencies should work toward reducing stress and burnout for their employees. When one person becomes burned out, it affects the others around them. When people burn out, they are prone to depression, stress, anxiety and self-harm. From a strictly management standpoint, employees who suffer the consequences of burnout are less productive and may have to be removed from the field.

You, too, should care about our stress and potential burnout. Most of us did not come into law enforcement to fizzle out and



stop being effective. We came on because we wanted to help people. We cannot effectively show empathy or sympathize with victims and members of the public when we hit burnout. It is important to recognize when we hit this emotional level and make an effort to change.

Whether you are feeling the burnout or not, there are proven methods for better health:

**Engage with friends and family** as often as you can.

**Choose good friends to surround yourself with.** Negative people cause negative feelings and don't contribute to your staying positive.

**Train your mind like you do tactics.** Mindfulness and resiliency training help to avoid spiked and prolonged anxiety. Taking care of your wellness is as important as maintaining your duty equipment.

**Exercising and drinking less alcohol** go a long way to improve mental health as well, as does learning new hobbies.

**Find ways to see the small wins of your hard work.** While you may not have a chance to pull a person out of a burning car, there are small things you do every day to make a positive impact on your community.

All our goals should be aimed towards a healthy and long life in retirement. As we are well into 2023, we all need to take a moment to rebalance our priorities. We all must do a better job at taking care of our health. I personally want to enjoy healthy golden years and want the same for all of you.

I want to thank Director Joe Massie from the Los Angeles Police Protective League for contributing to this article. Please feel free to contact me at [ish@sflpba.org](mailto:ish@sflpba.org) or 305-593-0044.



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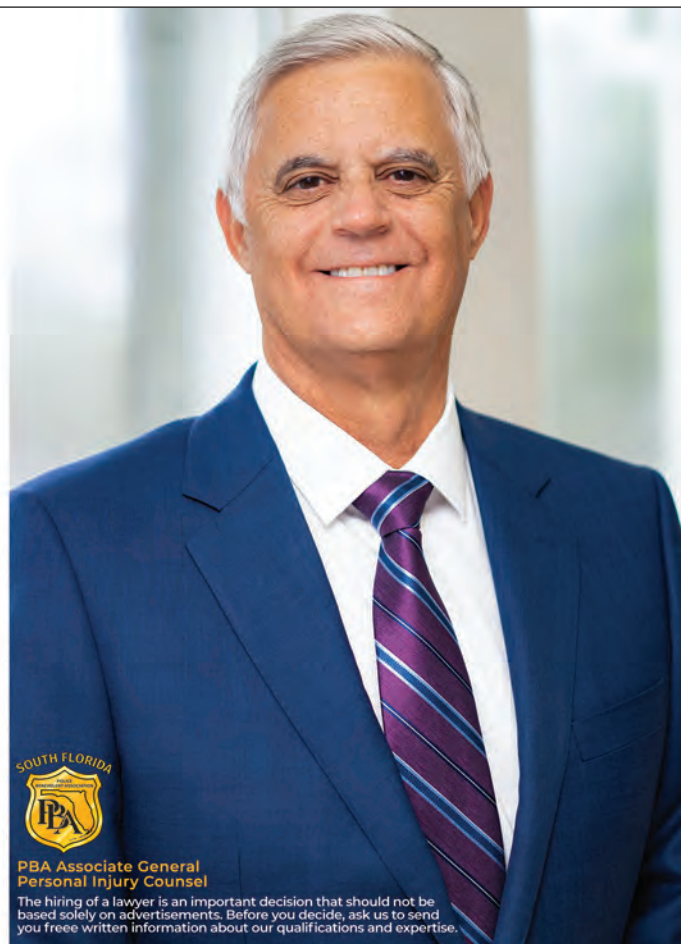
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# A hopeful note for the new year



JERMAINE  
LAWSON  
TREASURER

One thing the new year always brings forth is hope. It's a hopeful time when we celebrate the end of one year and the beginning of another and, on that note, I would like to wish all of our members a very happy new year. May your invaluable contributions bring forth excellence to you as well as your departments.

And while 2022 was another challenging one for our members, we must look back on 2022 with the knowledge that better days are ahead of us. For the past few years, the department has been hit with various challenges. From the effects of the pandemic, massive staff shortages, members being subjected to working long hours (as a result of the overtime mandate being implemented) and the emotional grief that some of our members had to tackle due to the loss of loved ones.

Our department has seen a great deal of changes over the last year. I thought I could look back and say that 2022 was an improvement on 2021. While I do think that's true in some ways, new efforts by the mayor and the Personnel Management Bureau to increase the hiring of more correctional staff have resulted in an increase in the number of new hires in various Correction Officer Training (COT) classes, which helped to a certain degree. However, the attrition rate, in addition to the hiring process, has caused a delay in filling the ranks with qualified staff.



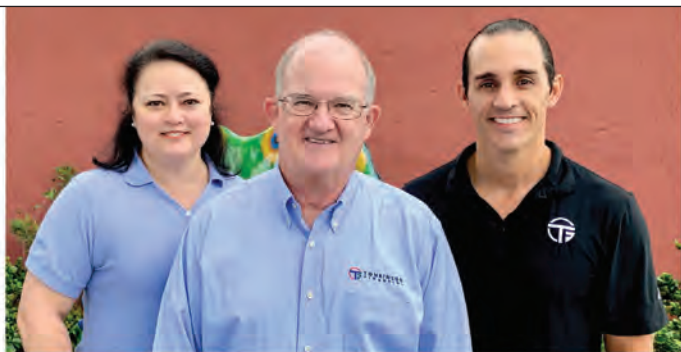
Kedson Julmiste with the PTDC Midnight Shift team. From left: Officer N. Diaz, Corporal D. McKnight, Officer V. Marc, and Officer W. McConico.

With all of this said, I am hoping that the department will implement the right strategies to successfully identify, attract and hire the best candidates to fill our thinning ranks.

I am hoping that management will entertain the idea of coming up with a more consistent way to incentivize staff to boost engagement. In a time when attendance is a big issue for the department, offering incentives might be a high priority. An example of this would be to grant AD time to employees who have zero call-ins over a six-month period. Employee engagement is not about the financial rewards you provide; it's about the intrinsic motivators that drive people. Interestingly, Gallup found that 64 percent of millennials who are engaged at work stated they would not leave their job, even if the job market improves. This could be the key to retaining top talent: driving performance and motivation to keep the department one step ahead. I am also hoping that management will continue to support the line staff in their efforts to enforce rules, to manage and to control the behavior of inmates in our custody.

To our new director, congratulations on becoming the director of our department. Welcome aboard. I am excited to see the changes you are going to make for the betterment of the department. A team's structure, attitude and ability all start at the top. A wolf pack can only survive with a strong leader. The same can be said about our department. With good guidance, I know we will achieve great things. I hope that when you lead the team, your direction and advice will contribute to improving the team's productivity. I have a hunch that you will set the perfect example on which the department can build. I don't think you will be disappointed with our members' eagerness to improve themselves.

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



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# Thoughts for 2023



**SIMONE  
LOPEZ, ESQ.  
PBA CHIEF  
ASSISTANT  
GENERAL  
COUNSEL**

As we begin a new year, I am reflecting. I have spent the past 24 years at the PBA, both teaching you and learning from you. There is nowhere I would rather be. My colleagues often refer to me as a “true believer.” I am exactly that. I truly believe that you perform one of the most difficult jobs on the planet. It is often a thankless job for which you neither require nor receive thanks or adoration, though you are all that stands between the citizens of this great nation and utter chaos. And while you are so very good at protecting others, you are often incapable of protecting yourselves. So, I do what I do because I truly believe in the inherent goodness in you and what you do every day.

Every January, I reflect on the loss of Miami-Dade Officers Amanda Haworth and Roger Castillo, who were brutally murdered in 2011 while serving a warrant. In doing so, I contemplate the challenges of the coming year. Their loss really hit home for me because I had a family member in Warrants Bureau at the time. Personal and professional challenges occur on a regular basis, and we struggle to make sense of the losses and the unending sacrifices you make. It is human to want answers. It is also human to feel anger and frustration, and to feel you are fighting a battle against evil.

I often recall the words of a wise friend, former Miami-Dade Police Director James Loftus, who admitted to those present at Amanda and Roger’s memorial service that he could not wrap his brain around the idea that they “were in a better place.” He said that in spite of his abiding faith in God, he struggled with why this would be allowed to happen, stating that his faith was still a work in progress. This made him human, and it also made him a leader and a mentor. So, I offer some advice that is not necessarily “legal” advice. Always be introspective, as he was. Look inside and always remember why you do what you do.

Director Loftus understood that evil does exist in this world. He also understood how difficult it can be for any man or woman to avoid becoming bitter and impatient, desiring justice on their own timetable, rather than God’s. There are dark forces that you have sworn to fight against every day. As human beings and as officers, you want answers, and you want to be the ones to provide solutions and justice. Often, the answers elude us. Comfort and solace must come from our faith. Faith means believing without answers, without proof — often a difficult task in our profession. Revenge is not our job. Holding hands with the darkness makes us no better than the evil lost souls who have done us wrong.

It is your job, personally and professionally, to stay the course. To do no harm. To use all of your strength to do good

## 2022 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, 2022**. The PBA legal staff receives numerous other complaints that are resolved by other means.

### DEPARTMENT/DISTRICT

<b>AVENTURA PD</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>HOMESTEAD - CORRECTIONS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>KEY WEST PD</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>MIAMI, CITY OF PD</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>MIAMI-DADE CORRECTIONS</b>	
ASSOCIATION	1
MWDC	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>MIAMI-DADE POLICE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>MIAMI GARDENS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>MCSO (DETENTION)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>NORTH MIAMI</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>SWEETWATER</b>	<b>3</b>
<hr/>	
<b>TOTAL GRIEVANCES</b>	<b>20</b>

and treat even the worst of humankind with dignity and respect. Seek them out and hand them over to someone else to be judged. That is real strength. In the process of apprehending them, you must avoid becoming like them. Reject resentment and hate, not an easy task. So you must teach one another, lean on one another and advise one another, even if your brother or sister is in the wrong. That’s when they need your support the most. To stick together in your profession is to survive. I feel this cohesiveness and caring for fellow officers has been lacking in recent years, until there is a tragedy.

Some things are just about right and wrong. And you don’t have to be religious to know the difference. Remember. It is not us against them. It is us against ourselves in the fight to always do right. Choose to walk in the light and not succumb to the darkness. That is what our enemies want. If we become hateful, then they win. Stay the course, my friends. Learn from one another. Share your experience as well as your grief. Cling to what is good, and cling to one another. I believe in you, and I am here to help.



# How POAT has expanded over the years



SERGEANT  
KENNETH  
HORGAN  
POAT  
COMMITTEE  
CHAIR

There are not enough words to thank all of you who support POAT. This support has allowed the POAT to expand over the years in different ways to assist all law enforcement officers who are assigned and work in Miami-Dade County. While it started as assistance to those killed in the line of duty, we now do so much more.

If an illness or catastrophic incident occurs and treatment causes travel out of state, the POAT can assist with travel, room and board and other expenses. Taking that burden of expenses away from a family is invaluable. The family only has to worry about taking care of their loved ones.

You know that POAT provides holiday and birthday gifts to children of officers killed in the line of duty. What you probably didn't know is that we also provide gifts to children of officers who die of natural causes and illnesses but were still working at the time of their death. This past Christmas, POAT gave holiday gifts to 80 children of 15 different law enforcement agencies.

The POAT provides seven scholarships of \$2,000 annually. That is \$14,000 available to the children of law enforcement of-

ficers who work in Miami-Dade County.

There is so much that POAT does because of all the officers who support it. Over the years, our local community has become big supporters of the POAT as well. If you know of an officer who is struggling or in need, please contact us at 305-594-6662. If you want to know everything that POAT does, please visit our website at [poat.org](http://poat.org).

Please join us for upcoming POAT events:

## **K9 Law Enforcement Memorial Ceremony**

Tropical Park

Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2023

4 p.m.

## **42nd Annual Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Ceremony**

Tropical Park

Thursday, May 4, 2023

Sunset service at 6:30 p.m.

Thanks for your support, and stay safe.



**Ignacio Alvarez**

Former MDPD Major, honorably retired  
15-plus years practicing law



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# Let's continue to protect one another as we did on the job



**JOHN FRALEY**  
RPOC  
PRESIDENT

I am sure we can all be happy that 2022 is behind us. We lost colleagues along the way, so keep your friends and your fellow members in your thoughts and prayers.

Our RPOC Christmas lunch was a huge success. We had 77 members attend the event. The lunches provide a place to go to meet and greet your friends and coworkers. We held the lunch at the Ocean One Sports bar in Davie. The food and drinks were exceptional, as were Chef David and his staff. We are looking at finding similar venues. Please contact me if anyone can up with a location near the Dade/Broward line. My email is jfraley885@gmail.com.

Special thanks to Lynne (Wolcott) Brooks for bringing in a DJ for our listening pleasure during lunch. Special thanks to Ray and Joan Tersigni, who brought in the many door prizes that were won by members. Thanks to the members who attended; your feedback was appreciated. Going forward, I will set up additional lunches. Please note that I plan to attend other lunches in the state. Meeting old friends, promoting the RPOC and the Otis Chambers Scholarship Fund (OCSF) are a way of life to me, so think about the many children and grandchildren who have been awarded scholarships so far. Please consider donating when you receive your 2023 renewals, which can be done on our website, [www.rpocpba.org](http://www.rpocpba.org). The RPOC Love Fund and the OCSF are programs that I am proud to be a part of. We as members are what's important to the success of the RPOC. The members make the organization, and your board guides its direction. Jerry Rudoff prepared the follow information, and I reviewed it. We think the information is essential, and by using the website, you can navigate through without the paperwork.

Your RPOC board works very hard to make your experience seamless and create an atmosphere of fun for physical activities, as well as providing you with an internet platform such as our private social media and very user-friendly website. The only thing we ask is that you use it. Our organization is only as good as you, our members. Even though many of us are spread around the county, we can maintain contact with each other via our online activity and our ability for effective communication. If you have not been to our website at [www.rpocpba.org](http://www.rpocpba.org), encourage you to do so, even if it to just look around. For those of you who have a business outside your law enforcement experience, please send your business card to Jerry Rudoff, our VP, and it will be posted on our website in the business card section free of charge (jrudoff1@gmail.com). If you have a non-member who'd like to post their card, we'll do that as well for a very nominal fee that goes to our scholarship fund. Also, we're happy to announce that our online registration form for your 2023 Reunion is now up and running from the home page of the website. Please feel free to register now, as that will be one less thing to worry about later.

Lastly, we invite you to use our private Facebook group. One must be a current member for access. Others are turned away, as are third-party requests to enter friends, etc. If you are a spouse of a member wishing access, all you need do is follow the directions and answer the questions. For those of you who are afraid of using Facebook due to privacy issues, all you need do is to create an anonymous Facebook account using another name. Let us know who you are, and access will be granted. This is where we post

## Congrats

The South Florida PBA honors retired member



**Robert Rembisz**  
Miami-Dade Police Department

many articles of interest to our retired community, as well as pictures of members engaged in a myriad of fun activities. We also have a couple of experts there who field your questions regarding Medicare and other health-insurance questions. We must continue to protect one another like we did on the job and ensure we all stay healthy and prosperous going into this New Year.

### Chaplain Reba Miller offers her report

Happy new year and blessings to all our LEOs, friends, families and associates. This is a new year and a new start. Remember to be good to your body, soul and spirit. "You will never do anything in the world without courage. It is the greatest quality in the mind next to honor." – Aristotle

It is with our deepest respect and condolences that we share the following names of the warriors who have passed:

- Victor Wayne (Cherokee Vic) McEachin, December 2022
- Timothy (Tim) Judge, December 2022
- Frederick (Fred) Joseph Fauvell Jr., December 2022

Special regards to their family members... Sean McEachin, Barbara Judge and Barbara Marie Fauvell and their respective families.

Special wishes for healing and recovery from our entire LEO family to the following brothers and sisters: Karin Montejo, Sandy and Cindy Guttman, Jerry Rudoff and Rob (Bubba) Miller.

Thanks to everyone who helped to put together the 2023 membership envelopes for the main out. Talk about teamwork.

Finally, if you know of any of our members who are ailing, recovering or just need a special shout-out or reach-up, please let me know. We are large and spread out, and your help and information would help immensely. Contact 954-448-0939.

Remember, when the world says, "Give up," hope whispers, "Try it one more time." Peace and provision.





*Participation deadline extended to April 30th!*

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## MIAMI-DADE POLICE DEPARTMENT 2023 COMMEMORATIVE YEARBOOK

*Available to all Members — Sworn & Civilian, Active & Retired*

The South Florida PBA is proud to announce that we are developing an all new 2023 Commemorative Yearbook to celebrate the men and women of the Miami-Dade Police Department, past and present. This hardbound commemorative "coffee-table" book will include hundreds of photographs and memories that fully illustrates what it means to be a member of the MDPD family.

Many of you participated in our last yearbook that was produced in 2015-16. Since then, many of our members have retired with hundreds of new faces brought on board, and with so many changes having occurred over the last decade, we decided the time was right for a new yearbook.

Hundreds of you have already responded to this new book by submitting your photographs, stories, and book orders. ***For those of you who have yet to participate... Good News! You still have time!***

The publisher and the yearbook committee are committed to making our album a comprehensive and professional publication of which all our members, sworn and civilian, active and retired, will be proud to own.

This 9x12-inch, hardbound book will be printed in full-color and contain hundreds of historic and modern photos of civilian and uniformed personnel. It will also include professional portraits of department members, as well as candid and action photos.

### **We Need Your Help**

This is your yearbook! Our goal is to commemorate the many accomplishments and services that you provide to our organization and community. To make it as comprehensive as possible, we are asking you to contribute by sending in stories for consideration.

You can also submit photos from your time with the department – action shots and group photos will be reviewed. Send any stories and photos for consideration to [mdpd23book@acclaimpress.com](mailto:mdpd23book@acclaimpress.com). Watch for additional information on when individual portrait photographs will be scheduled.

### **Special Book Offer**

This book is being sold to MDPD employees, their families and retirees. Since this will be a limited edition publication, the number of books printed will be based upon the number of copies ordered in advance. Therefore, you are encouraged to place your order by April 30th!

### **Sponsored by the South Florida Police Benevolent Association, Inc.**

Our commemorative yearbook is being coordinated by the South Florida Police Benevolent Association, Inc., and a portion of proceeds will benefit the PBA's Love Fund to assist our members at times of great need.



Please be a part of this historic project and order your copies today!

## MIAMI-DADE POLICE DEPARTMENT



### *2023 Commemorative Yearbook*

**SAMPLE  
COVER**

*Pictured is the proposed cover for the Miami-Dade Police 2023 Commemorative Yearbook. Note: the actual cover has not been finalized and will feature the MDPD badge(s) stamped in gold or silver foil.*

**Questions? Contact the publisher at  
[mdpd23book@acclaimpress.com](mailto:mdpd23book@acclaimpress.com), call  
Acclaim Press at (573) 472-9800 or visit on  
the web: [www.acclaimpress.com](http://www.acclaimpress.com)**

**EXTENDED DEADLINE: APRIL 30, 2023**





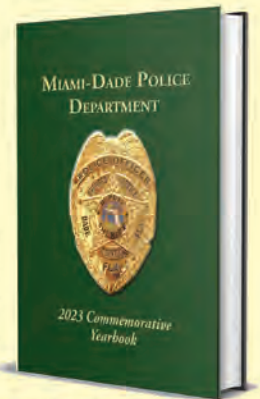


## ***Miami-Dade Police Department 2023 Commemorative Yearbook*** — A Quality Book! —

Acclaim Press has published commemorative history books for a wide variety of law enforcement agencies across the country, with nearly a century of combined experience in the publishing industry. Each book is painstakingly researched and documented, containing scores of superior, historic photographs and personal experience stories that capture the spirit of each department.

Your book will be printed on number one grade, acid-free, double coated glossy paper to ensure the highest caliber photo reproduction and Smyth-sewn binding for longevity. Your choice of full-color books includes the hardbound Deluxe Edition, bound in a classic leatherette displaying the MDPD badge(s) for \$59.95, or the Leather Collector's Edition, bound in genuine bonded leather with the agency's badge embossed in gold or silver leaf for only \$89.95. Either version may be personalized with your name, or that of a friend or loved one, stamped in silver or gold for an additional \$6.00.

NOTE: This full-color, hardbound 9x12-inch commemorative book will be a limited edition publication and you must order in advance to be assured of receiving a copy. **RESERVE YOUR COPIES TODAY!**



### **Table of Contents**

- Historical overview of the Miami-Dade Police Department from 1836-2023, tools of the trade, and other highlights
- Full-color portraits of current agency personnel, sworn, civilian, & retired
- In Memoriam tribute to Fallen Officers
- Hundreds of photographs showcasing the men and women of MDPD
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- Special stories from agency members, past & present, plus retiree bios
- Agency Rosters, plus much more!



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# 60 and Counting...

...Counting on the PBA, which has been there to give members a voice and better their lives in a number of ways

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

To commemorate the South Florida PBA's prodigious milestone as one of the most successful and groundbreaking labor unions in the state and perhaps the country, let's break open this 60-pack:

Charlie Maddox...Winning collective bargaining rights...Paid overtime...Self-help organization...Jimmy Duckworth...Working conditions...Political action...Signing membership cards out of the trunk of a police car...Strength in numbers...Pride in the profession...24/7 legal assistance...Due process...Nelson Perry.

Seven presidents...Take-home cars...Whitey Clifton...Mike Clifton...Insurance policy...Unrivaled benefits for all members...Love Fund...Ability to fight back...Salary increases...Law

enforcement officers' rights...Healthy pensions...Political endorsements...Leave time...Taking care of members' families...Steadman Stahl.

Hurricane Andrew relief...Working for optimal healthcare benefits...Officer Awards Gala...Standing up for the troops...Heart Bill...Disability retirement...Don Slesnick, Mike Braverman and Andrew Axelrad...Challenging discipline...National Guard sleepover at PBA headquarters...Political presence...Promote social, charitable and educational activities...Death benefits...The Voice of Law Enforcement...Contract negotiations...Community outreach...Surfside response support.

Legislating change...The spirit of benevolence...Officer-involved shootings and critical incident response...Camaraderie...Representing members in more than 40 agencies...





Training and education for on the job and after the job...Scholarships...Fishing tournament...Respect from management...Domino Night...Bringing together community-based organizations...Car and motorcycle show...Hometown Heroes...Who you gonna call when you're in trouble...Pig Roast Bowl Series...Representing those brave enough, strong enough and proud enough to wear the badge.

These 60 references to PBA prowess only begin to detail how the association has bettered lives for law enforcement officers in South Florida since 1963. There could be 600 — even 6,000 — examples of what the PBA has done in 60 years to fulfill the commitment displayed on the cover of every issue of this magazine, right under the *Heat* nameplate:

"The Voice of Law Enforcement."

"Representing those brave enough, strong enough and proud enough to wear the badge."

The PBA turning 60 could merit Stephen Hawking writing the brief history of how the association got from there in '63 to here. But reading that would probably take a year.

So for now, the celebration focuses on confirming why the PBA has become so integral to members and their departments, examining some of the great moments in union history (history lessons, if you will), and offering some toasts to a soaring 60 years.

Starting with a salute from South Florida PBA President Steadman Stahl, the seventh to hold that office...

"When I came on the job 32 years ago, everybody told me that the PBA was going to be there in your time of your need," he stated. "The PBA would be the ones fighting for our contracts, benefits, working conditions. I didn't know that I'd be getting as much involved in the PBA as I did, but I knew it was my insurance policy."

## 60 of the best

The prodigious presence of the PBA during the past 60 years rises most palpably in circumstances like longtime board member Jorge Interian faced early in his career. Interian is now the third-longest-sitting PBA board member.

When his now-grown-up son was a year old, he was diagnosed with leukemia. Jorge had to move him to Gainesville for a transplant and treatment. While there for five months, he heard from the PBA almost daily. What did he need, they asked. Food for the family? Help with paying the mortgage?

"I was in a whirlwind. My son was close to death. I was at the hospital the first week with my son, and a couple men in suits and a police officer came to our room," Interian recalls. "He was from Alachua County, and he said, 'These two gentlemen are attorneys for the PBA, and we're here to give you our business

card. The PBA down in Miami-Dade County told us what you're going through. We're here to tell you to let us know anything you or your family need. If you need us to go pick up something from Publix, we're here for you and your family.'"

His son came through it, thank God. The PBA support had escorted him along the path of life, as it has so many members. You've gotten married, had children, own a house, have some investments and a pension waiting. And then you start to worry that if you do this, that happens, or you can't believe you got into this situation.

"It's great, when you lay your head down at night to sleep, that you feel, 'Well, at least I have the PBA that's going to be there,'" Interian relates. "They're going to be there for you, and I think that's great comfort to have. The biggest thing I learned is that they really are out there fighting for police officers' rights."

The list of benefits the PBA has provided could take 60 years to fully recap. Off the top of his head, Stahl recites medical care, family support, defending criminal charges that might result from a work incident, shootings and, of course, never forgetting those lost in the line of duty or their family members.

Few people have seen how the PBA has battled for members like noted Florida attorney Don Slesnick has. He actually worked for Miami-Dade County, negotiating benefits and managing labor relations for all public employees, and he eventually became the first PBA in-house counsel.

When the association formed in 1963, Slesnick saw the immediate impact of the PBA enabling members to bring home more bacon. And he saw that evolve into additional virtues for members.

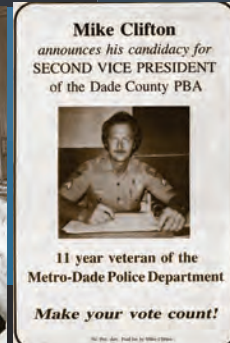
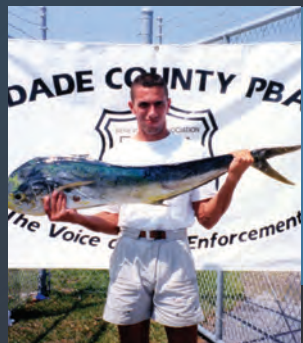
"Certainly, the PBA has led the way in fighting for better pay, better benefits, better leave policies, better sick policies, better policies for assignments, challenging bad assignments and ability to take time off," Slesnick confirms. "And then, of course, I can't overestimate the grievance arbitration procedure for challenging discipline."

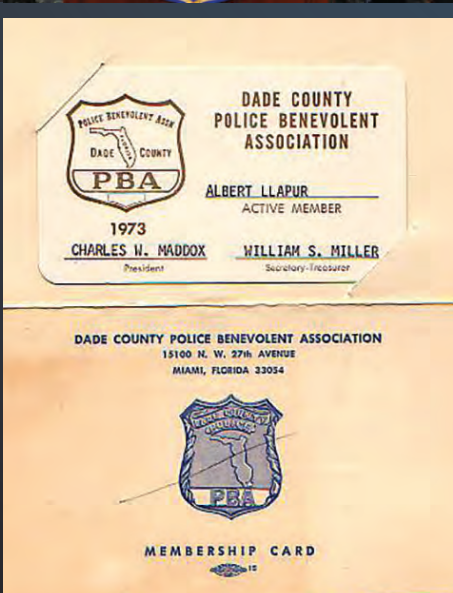
For the past 25-plus years, Andrew Axelrad has served as in-house counsel and currently serves as PBA general counsel, now leading a team of six in-house attorneys as the union has made great strides in advancing officers' rights. He has observed how much of that has resulted from the association's ability to get politically active and forge relationships with elected officials who enact with law enforcement in mind.

Axelrad asserts how that attribute has become especially robust the past five years, under the PBA's current administration.

"It's really almost night and day from 25 years ago," he explains. "It's not about the power, because it really comes from respect. We have the respect of the elected officials

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20





## COUNTING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

because we're coming to them with real issues and real solutions. We're not just saying, 'It's not fair. Treat us better.' We're saying, 'This is the problem. These are examples of how it's gone sideways. Here's the solution, if we just change this law in this way, change how it's applied or change a policy.' We've established a reputation to be able to pick up the phone and have meetings at the highest level and know that we're not going to be wasting anybody's time."

### Coming of age: Part One

Channeling Hawking, this history report hits just some key points in the PBA continuum. Mike Clifton can deliver most of those. Not just because he served as PBA president in the 1980s and into the early '90s, but also because he grew up with the PBA.

Clifton recalls as a 5-year-old seeing his dad, Frank "Whitey" Clifton, join Charlie Maddox, who became the first president, Jimmy Duckworth, the second president, and the other founding fathers accepting the initial documents of the association in a shoebox and pushing for officers' rights and the right to collectively bargain. Nobody knows the evolution of the union quite like Mike.

"They figured it was time to try to, I guess, help themselves. That's the term that people used quite a bit way back then," reports Clifton, who became a member in 1974. "They started out saying that we're not a union, but more of a self-help organization, which actually evolved into a police union and, I think, one of the strongest not just in Florida, but the eastern part of the U.S."

Five years before the PBA was ordained, Dade County Sheriff's Department employees were members of one of two FOP Lodges that Clifton, Slesnick and others referred to as social organizations and a clubhouse. There was also a Dade County Sheriff's Employee Association, and all three organizations tried to influence county commission budget hearings in the early 1960s.

How did that work out? Well, at the 1963 budget hearing, a county commissioner stated that police officers should be paid the same as garbage collectors. According to historical information, the FOP did not have enough resources to fight back, so in June 1963, the sheriff's association leadership drafted paperwork to create the Dade County Police Benevolent Association.

"When they saw the effectiveness of how the PBA started speaking out and getting contracts, it just sort of spread," Slesnick remarks. "It was definitely about justice for the troops, the ability to fight back when they were disciplined. One of the main goals was trying to get some due process in discipline procedures, but also fighting for overtime. In those days, they were not required to pay overtime."

### Coming of age: Part Two

The loudest voice of law enforcement in the early days was Maddox, who went on to become Florida PBA president. Even before becoming an outspoken leader of the troops, Maddox suffered through the whims of a sheriff who did not like him and exiled him to work patrol on midnights in the rural fields of South Dade.

Maddox realized the FOP was not an effective vehicle to be a real labor union, so he led the way to start the PBA.

"Charlie was Mr. PBA, a lightning rod. He galvanized the Dade County employees," Slesnick adds. "Charlie and his successors stood up for the troops. I don't think that they're looked at as revolutionaries. I think that they're looked at as leaders, as spokespeople and as people that didn't back down too easily."

Some of the stories about the PBA standing up would be as good for Stephen King as Stephen Hawking. There was the time when the county commission dissed PBA members by giving firefighters a better salary than law enforcement officers. So hundreds of PBA members responded by lining up at the personnel office to apply to become firefighters. The commission got the point. The officers got a raise.

Another good one tells about asserting political presence by getting boots on the ground to help more PBA-endorsed candidates get



elected than local-newspaper-endorsed candidates in the mid-'60s, paving the way to get groundbreaking legislation passed in the state. That included getting a death benefit for the family of any officer killed in the line of duty and disability retirement.

And as legendary as anything the PBA accomplished was the response during Hurricane Andrew in 1992. The preamble to that story details the presence of the current PBA building in Doral, which was built when Nelson Perry was president and Clifton served as vice president.

During Andrew, the building became a hub, an oasis, a mess hall and a residence. Hundreds of military personnel and National Guardsmen deployed to Dade County to assist relief efforts actually set up their cots in the building, sleeping there for up to three weeks after Andrew hit.

The building had a restaurant at the time, and Clifton recalls feeding up to 200 people a day. They also packaged hundreds of meals in white Styrofoam containers and sent them out to members who couldn't even find their houses after the storm swept through. (The Andrew support certainly became a blueprint for the way the PBA aided first responders at the Surfside Condo collapse site.)

During the past couple of years, the PBA building has become a hub where community-based organizations — groups that used to be anti-police — come to meet. The community outreach has become the latest chapter in the PBA's unparalleled presence.

"I think what Steadman's done is to enhance it, to say, 'Look, we're going to have a community that understands what police are supposed to be doing, what we shouldn't be doing and why we need certain things done a certain way,'" Axelrad recaps. "We've really been met with open arms, and vice versa. I think in South Florida, we don't have a lot of the issues that the rest of the country has, largely because of our efforts at outreach."

## Cheers

Any great celebration culminates with the toasts. So raise a glass.

Here's to...

"The common thread is that the members always have to come first," Stahl announces. "Taking care of the members from the day they start to the day they retire. And even after they retire."

And here's to...

"I'll go back to the slogan 'Strength in numbers,'" Interian exclaims. "Sometimes, members feel that they're just giving their dues to the PBA and wasting their money because most of them won't need that help. But the day you need it, you're glad you have it."

And here's to...

"If you go through the contract, you'll find that there's a thousand issues that are covered that give officers the confidence they have," Slesnick emphasizes. "The PBA has given members an effective voice in speaking out on issues. It's given them rights to challenge discipline when they are disciplined, and it's given them a due process procedure that they can use to get what they believe will be justice for themselves. It gives them a place at the table to fight for what they believe is right."

And here's to...

"I think we should be celebrating public service, law enforcement, corrections officers and support personnel," Axelrad reiterates. "The PBA has lasted for 60 years because of those people that are out there doing the job. The PBA's success over 60 years is because of our members. We are celebrating them because without them, we're nothing."



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# God Answers The Call

How MDPD RID Detective Ricaurte Lugo survived taking a bullet to the head

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

A carjacker's fire left MDPD Robbery Intervention Detail Detective Ricaurte Lugo's right eye filled with glass and blinking like he had been pepper-sprayed. His left eye went blurry, which in a few seconds Lugo would realize resulted from the blood.

He had been hit in the face when the carjacker burst from the car and opened up on him. Lugo radioed information to ID the shooter. Then he told dispatch he had been hit in the face. He didn't know where the bullet had gone, but he raked himself and found no exit wound.

"I was like, 'I got to get up and fight. I cannot let this guy take somebody else,'" Lugo described. "Even if I have one last breath left, I'm going to stand there and fight, so that guy can't take nobody else out."

He requested paramedics, all the while sticking to the letter of his training. Lugo checked himself at five-minute intervals. When he passed 15 minutes, he called out to say, "I need a trauma center. I need a fighting chance. I'm hit in the face. I don't know where the bullet's at."

Seconds later, he made another call. To his wife, Jennifer.

"I told her, 'I've been shot in the face. I don't know what the outcome's going to be. I love you and I love my boys. I've got to go now.'"

Working the Robbery Intervention Detail (RID) in Northside, Lugo had seen a lot of victims alert and conscious 15, 20, even 30 minutes after being hit. Then, they would run a block or two and collapse.

"I'm like, 'If I do collapse, I want to let them know that I love them,'" he added.

Three weeks after that Dec. 5, 2022, afternoon, Lugo attended Christmas Mass and offered a prayer of thanks. The swelling he described as feeling like he had a softball in his face had subsided to the point of finally being able to eat and speak again.

Lugo was still recovering from an orbital fracture. The round hit near the top teeth on the left side of his mouth. All of that was peppered with the shrapnel. He still has a little piece left in there.

"I know that God has my back, and I know God's going to protect me," Lugo related about his prayers at that Mass and on that day. "I was praying to him, 'Please don't let me die. Let me continue to be with my family and let me continue to fight this fight that I love to fight through you.' And I just felt like this inner peace, like, 'I've got you, buddy. You have to go through this, but I got you.'"

When you've seen life flash before your eyes, you unconditionally count your blessings. Taking cover in that shopping center parking lot where he took the bullet, Lugo unconditionally counted on his training.

As an instructor for the RID school, he stays up to date on the latest. Everything he learned, everything he taught, he now needed to apply to himself.

How to apply first aid. How to do the raking. How to stop the bleeding. Relaying information on the bad guy. And all the while, maintaining the priority of safety to the community, the safety of the people in the crowded parking lot starting their holiday shopping. It all kicked in.

And on the other side of all that, here was the blessing: After the holidays, Lugo turned 35 on Jan. 17. His oldest boy, Noel,



MDPD RID Detective Ricaurte Lugo with sons, Noel, left, and Noah.

turned 10 two days later. Jennifer's birthday also is in January.

"I just thank God so much for keeping me alive," he confided. "It strengthened me in the sense of it gave me power, internal power and the willpower to focus on that he prepares my hand for battle when I need it and I will be that barrier."

Lugo came to RID in 2018 because he wanted to be part of a proactive policing detail patrolling areas trending with high crime. On this day, the detail worked information that carjackers had been hitting multiple locations within Miami-Dade. They had triangulated a Volkswagen Jetta the shooter drove on 202nd Street near 57th Avenue.

In an unmarked vehicle, Lugo conducted a very, very loose tail as additional RID units moved into the area. When the shooter pulled into the shopping center, Lugo maintained distance, waiting for more RID units to arrive.

"Suddenly, he pulls out again and just starts shooting at me," Lugo detailed. "I believe he told one of the detectives that he knew there was a detective behind him, so he opened up. My worry was everybody else in the shopping center. My only issue was, if this guy's going to become an active shooter, going for broke and taking someone else's life? I'm thinking, 'I stay in this fight. I got to stop him.'"

When Lugo had provided enough intel so RID could mobilize additional units to pursue the shooter, and when he realized he didn't have a shot at him, he finally looked in his rearview mirror. He was bleeding. Badly.

He applied pressure to the wound. The burning that anybody who has been shot knows is debilitating left Lugo's face on fire.





Officers in the MDPD Robbery Intervention Detail.

Eventually, his radio relays of the shooter fleeing gave way to questions of whether Miami-Dade Fire Rescue could land a helicopter in the field next to the shopping mall and airlift him to the trauma center at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

"I was alert and conscious the entire time. And when I saw Miami-Dade Fire Rescue, I know I'm in good hands. They told me, 'Hey, you're with us now, my brother. We got you,'" Lugo recalled. "And once I arrived at trauma, I knew for a fact that, God willing, I'm going to be OK, because from past experiences I knew those doctors over there are just phenomenal."

The bullet lodged in the area of the back molar on the left side. Doctors asked if Lugo wanted to wait a day or two for the swelling to go down and maybe it would be less painful to remove the bullet.

No way. This was all part of the fight. So right there in the emergency room, doctors performed the surgery. They went in between the teeth, the gums and his cheek to remove a big chunk of the projectile. Enough of it was left, though, that Lugo would still be spitting out pieces weeks later.

All the while, RID officers, MDPD officers, county commissioners, officers from other agencies he knew and officers he didn't know gathered at Jackson Trauma. He heard about the show of support from Noel.

"He said, 'Wow, you guys love my dad. My dad is loved. I see the support,'" Lugo explained. "That felt amazing. Officers that I never spoke to were talking to my son, and he was dancing. He was enjoying himself while I'm in the hospital. I felt good because I'm like, 'There goes my brothers and sisters taking care of my family while I'm hurt.' I cannot put a price on that. That was amazing."

Lugo won this fight. Victory began with him coming home that night.

That's when the PBA stepped in to escort him down victory lane. PBA Executive Vice President David Greenwell led the association's detail in visiting Lugo at home constantly. MDPD Director Freddy Ramirez and Mayor Danielle Levine Cava also visited. The school community at Miami Springs Elementary, where Jennifer serves as assistant principal, also came out with its support for the family.

For a few weeks, Lugo couldn't really move. He couldn't really talk or eat. At times, he would spit out small pieces of shrapnel. And try to sleep on his good side.

On Christmas Day, the PBA and RID officers came to his house with gifts for Noel and 1-year-old Noah. The check-ups



Ricarte Lugo with wife, Jennifer, and sons, Noel, 10, and Noah, 1.

from visitors continued until early January, when Lugo was cleared to go back on light duty. In late January, he was back on the road. Back in the fight.

Lugo confirms that God kept his promise of bringing him home to his family. Understandably, now the calls to Jennifer will come often to let her know he's good.

"She says, 'I want to track your phone to make sure you're good,'" Lugo quipped.

In the wake of it all, he is even more motivated to go out there to achieve what he signed up for with RID. And even more full of confirmation of the unit's mission.

"I'm ready to continue to protect my community that I was sworn to protect, and I'll do it with pride," he stated. "We continue to know the evil is out there and evil exists, but there's good guys out there like us who are willing to continue to fight and be that barrier between evil and our community."



# Leading Munoz Home

The South Florida PBA helps rescue MDPD Sergeant Jessenia Munoz from civil unrest in Peru

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

Swarming in by the busload, Amazon Basin natives arrived in Cusco, Peru, carrying bows, arrows and spears. Peaceful protests quickly turned violent when President Pedro Castillo was removed from office on Dec. 7, 2022.

In a matter of hours, rioting and looting erupted across the country. Protestors blockaded roads in Cusco and surrounding areas. Railways and airports ground to a halt. Peru's new president, Dina Boluarte, declared a national emergency.

Having arrived in Peru three days earlier for a last-minute vacation, Miami-Dade PD Sergeant Jessenia Munoz was trapped.

"I was fearful because I didn't know how long this was going to be happening," Munoz explained. "And then I was worried because even though my trip was longer, I didn't feel like there was any purpose in me staying if I didn't feel safe or if I couldn't move from where I was. But unfortunately, knowing that you can't go anywhere makes you want to leave even more, and it's a scary feeling."

South Florida PBA members received news that one of their own was trapped in Peru, in imminent danger amid the violent protests breaking out. After securing safe travel for Munoz, they brought her home.

With travel at the airports suspended, Munoz desperately searched for a way to return to Florida. She contacted MDPD command staff to alert them. Then she contacted the U.S. Embassy. They told her to shelter in place and monitor the news.

But with every moment that passed, the news reports remained the same: airport and road closures. No way out.

"There was really no way of getting back to Lima to be able to fly home or even drive to Lima, which was a 15-hour drive," Munoz related. "The protestors closed the road, which collected a lot of debris, trees, rocks. And watching the news, you would see the taxis hit with rocks and [protestors] attack drivers and ambulances. It was just out of control."

South Florida PBA Vice President David Greenwell received a call about Munoz being trapped. Immediately, Greenwell reached out to Robert Jenkins, an associate, longtime friend and vice president of Global Guardian, a Tysons Corner, Virginia-based risk management company that



MDPD members welcome home MDPD Sergeant Jessenia Munoz, who was trapped in Peru during violent protests.



MDPD Sergeant Jessenia Munoz was vacationing in Peru in December 2022 when violent protests sparked across the country. With airports shut down, Munoz was trapped. provides emergency evacuation.

"Do you have anybody down there?" Greenwell recalled asking Jenkins. "He says, 'Let me make a phone call to Virginia, and I'll find out.' I said, 'I have a sergeant stuck.' So with that, he calls me back and says, 'David, we have people there on the ground.' And I go, 'Well, I want you to get my sergeant out.'"

Within an hour after speaking with Greenwell, Jenkins activated Global Guardian's Security Operations Center to create a proposal to escort Munoz out of the country.

Global Guardian caters to high-net-



MDPD Sergeant Jessenia Munoz's mom embraces her.

worth individuals and large companies by providing emergency evacuation. Jenkins noted the company also provides executive protection, intelligence and emergency aviation. It has an excellent track record of safeguarding and evacuating people out of sensitive areas like Ukraine and Afghanistan during civil unrest or major disasters.

Jenkins added that Global Guardian works in minutes and hours, and in this situation, time was imperative. He also already had a relationship with the PBA, as his father was an MDPD officer. Every year, Jenkins is a benefactor at the PBA gala.

So when he heard that the PBA was in



need, he didn't hesitate.

"They're out there protecting society, protecting our rights, and their families are involved with it as well," Jenkins remarked. "But there are times where we need to protect our officers as well. And whenever anyone travels around the world or anywhere domestically, we can help them do that. That's the least we could do."

Munoz isolated in her hotel room and continued to watch the news. In Lima, more than 400 protestors had gathered at the airport and attempted to attack. Munoz related that she began feeling uncertain whether the protestors would let anyone in or if she would even have transportation to Lima.

Once the proposed plan to rescue Munoz was approved, Jenkins contacted her to provide extra intel on the geopolitical situation unfolding and to confirm that agents from Global Guardian were working to secure transportation to the airport. A security guard was posted near Munoz's hotel to travel with her to Lima.

"That made me feel secure, because they secured the transportation for me and provided me all the details and security to get there safely," Munoz related. "And the guard stayed with me until I passed the checkpoint for security at the



airport."

Within 48 hours after Jenkins contacted Munoz, she was safely on a plane home.

"It was really scary on that Wednesday and Thursday," Greenwell commented. "The first time Robert and I were talking, I said, 'Get her out of there. They're rioting. The streets are blocked.'"

When Munoz's plane landed at Miami International Airport on Dec. 19, 2021, a crowd of MDPD officers, along with Jenkins, Greenwell and PBA President Steadman Stahl, waited to greet her. Munoz's

mother rushed to her side with a handful of red, heart-shaped balloons and embraced her.

"I never imagined that the PBA would help me in a situation like that, especially being out of the country," Munoz conveyed. "It was nice to see that no matter what, they're very supportive. It just reminded me, honestly, that the brotherhood does exist, and it's there. Sometimes we forget about it, but it's in moments that you're in need that you really see it come through."



## 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, 2022, may apply)
3. Applicant must include an essay on the following topic: You are responsible for recruitment for a large, diverse, metropolitan police department. What minimal hiring standards would you implement to ensure that your organization accurately represents the community it serves. 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.

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







# Drug Wars Stories

Miami-Dade narcotics officers recall their glorious days during reunion at PBA Hall

■ BY DAN CAMPANA

Gather a group of narcotics officers together in a room and you know the war stories will flow.

The multimillion-dollar busts. The multitude of guns and bad guys taken off the streets. The countless lives saved. The difference made in the fight against drugs in South Florida.

"I feel like it's the root of all evil. The root of bad things happening when kids get ahold of it at a young age, to the addiction part of it, to the sales that bring violent crime," Miami-Dade Narcotics K-9 Sergeant Sam Machado declared. "What [we do] makes such an impact. It may just be a tip of the spear, a tiny bit, but it's something."

Machado helped organize a reunion of sorts for more than 115 members of Miami-Dade's narcotics family, past and present, on Dec. 2, 2022, a gathering that featured plenty of reminiscing about a not-too-long ago, but perhaps bygone, era of proactive police work. The event also brought back together

members of the department's tactical narcotics team (TNT), a difference-making bunch led by the team's leader, Lieutenant Steve Czyzewski.

"There was no doubt in my mind that we saved lives, innocent lives and young lives, because of the guns we took off the street that were never able to be fired at innocent people," submitted Czyzewski, who has spent 31 years with Miami-Dade, including a five-year stint with the now-disbanded TNT. "That, to me, was the most rewarding part. Every gun we took off the street saved a life."

He and Machado described the story-swapping reunion at the South Florida PBA Hall as a great way to rally narcotics section members — from retirees to current officers — to reflect on the uniquely impactful work involved.

"It makes you feel like, 'Wow, this is what it's all about,'" Machado shared. "You hope you've developed relationships where you can get together at a later time and just pick up





right where you left off, and I think that's what happened on that night."

That certainly was the impression Czyzewski walked away with after seeing and talking with his TNT brethren. Why this get-together was meaningful goes back to what made the team successful in its heyday — a "melting pot" of men and women from different backgrounds who worked well together in one of the most challenging areas of policing. Czyzewski served as TNT's lieutenant in the early to mid-2000s, crediting everyone from his boss to the more than three dozen officers for success that started with the people and extended into the work.

"These guys had to ride as partners in pairs every single day, so thank god they bought into my system," he said. "I believe in good character first and good cops second, because I can't teach you to be a good person, but I can teach you how to be a good cop. That system worked because ... of the unity and camaraderie."

TNT's design was multifaceted. Two-person "eyeball" teams would identify buyers and sellers in areas deemed "drug holes," with a focus on where sellers stashed their drugs and where buyers put them after a purchase. With a very strategic approach, "jump" teams would apprehend buyers well outside the hole so as to not tip off sellers. After nabbing several buyers, TNT would move on to taking down the seller.

"It was a pretty well-oiled machine, and it worked well," Czyzewski explained, adding that this approach had a positive ripple effect across the spectrum of crime.

Buyers typically commit other crimes to help support their drug habit. Sellers also were engaged in more serious criminal activity. Buyers and sellers were armed. The cycle was disrupt-

ed by TNT's commitment to hitting the key players, but Czyzewski is left to wonder how much is being missed now without such an approach.

"I don't remember how many thousands of guns, [but] the amount of firearms we took off the streets was staggering back in the day," he added.

The narcotics reunion, particularly among TNT alums, brought with it plenty of memorable moments, both highs and lows. For Czyzewski, the shooting of two detectives in Opa-locka illustrated the true danger of the work.

"They actually tried to rip my guys, not knowing they were cops, and they shot two of my detectives," he said, calling it a miracle that one detective shot seven times survived the shootout with drug dealers. "I would tell my guys ... be professionally aggressive. They're criminals. They're bad guys. Their job is to run from us. If they want to turn around and fight, we're going to whoop their ass. Resistance was met with resistance, basically. I was not afraid to preach that to my guys because, at the end of the day, we have families to go home to."

Food, drink and cigars provided the backdrop for a memorable night that, like many of the people and stories, won't fade anytime soon.

"We reminisced about the quality of the police work, the good times and how we miss it. It was the best time of everybody's careers," Czyzewski noted.

The good vibes and positive feedback have Machado and others thinking of a reunion reprise in the future.

"Everybody picked up right where they left off," Machado described. "We had a great time, got to toast and break some bread together — just all around a great event."





# Class Actor

To honor MDPD officer who worked on 'Miami Vice,' family donates royalties to PBA Love Fund

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

"Hey, that's my dad," Robert Hoelscher II exclaimed as he pointed to the TV.

It was a Friday night in 1986. Hoelscher was surrounded by the other members of his U.S. Army unit stationed in Germany. They were watching the newest episode of "Miami Vice," which had become a tradition. Looking for his father on the screen was one of the few opportunities Hoelscher had to see him while serving overseas.

Looking back now, Hoelscher notes he never would have imagined his father, Bob Hoelscher, a Miami-Dade PD officer of 50 years and a U.S. Air Force veteran, would work in television. You could bet on his father to win a shooting competition or something like the Police Olympics. But working in TV? No way.

When the opportunity arose, Bob became a liaison for "Miami Vice," as well as appearing in several episodes alongside Don Johnson, Philip Michael Thomas and Edward James Olmos. And it soon became the highlight of his law enforcement career.

After Bob passed away in April of 2021 following a battle with cancer, Hoelscher and his mother decided to honor his legacy. They donated all the royalties he earned from the show over the past 30 years to the South Florida PBA Love Fund.

"My dad loved being a police officer," Hoelscher says. "That was his calling in life. It wasn't a job; it was a vocation. Anytime an officer was injured, or God forbid, killed, he always wanted to make sure they were taken care of. He would go out of his way to help, financially or otherwise. And so it just seemed like this is a dad thing. He would do this."

"Miami Vice" first aired in 1984. The executive producers were looking for someone to serve as a liaison between MDPD. The MDPD sheriff at the time knew the ideal candidate.

According to Robert, the sheriff told his father, "I know you really look out for the department and that we can trust you to make really sound decisions."

Bob served on the Metro-Dade Response Team at the time. The sheriff asked him to go meet with the people from the show, Robert says.



From left, Don Johnson, MDPD Officer Bob Hoelscher and Philip Michael Thomas.

In his role as technical advisor, Bob handled security details like closing down streets for filming. He served as the technical expert in the use of firearms, training actors in the correct techniques to use them.

Before any actors could handle a prop firearm for a scene, Hoelscher notes that his father sought to make the scenes look as authentic as possible. He led actors through the same training that MDPD officers underwent to qualify on their duty weapons. Then, he would walk them through different scenarios to help actors envision how officers would handle various situations.

Serving in this role, Bob unintentionally fell into acting, often standing in as an extra. During one episode, the producers weren't satisfied with whoever was playing the role of a SWAT commander, Hoelscher recalled. So they brought in Bob.

"Dad had a lot of integrity," Hoelscher says. "When he put on that Metro-Dade uniform, he was all those values. So, when he showed up on a scene or he showed up on the set, he represented the whole group of police officers. He wasn't going to let anybody down, and he was



As a technical advisor for "Miami Vice," Bob Hoelscher trained actors in the correct techniques when handling firearms.



Miami-Dade Officer Bob Hoelscher (green jacket) offers some pointers to Don Johnson while serving as the department liaison for "Miami Vice."

going to make the best impression he possibly could."

Hoelscher remembers his father telling him many times that this was the best part of his career, because he was able to showcase what he loved most: his county, his job and the brotherhood.

Although Bob was never one to take credit for his accomplishments, Hoelscher says he is sure his dad would simply be glad that his royalties from "Miami Vice" are going to support the brotherhood that he loved so deeply.

"He was a police officer first and foremost," Hoelscher adds. "So we thought this would be an appropriate way for him to continue his legacy as a police officer, by helping other police officers. Even though we're hoping that not another officer is killed in the line of duty, we understand that it very possibly can happen. And we want to make sure that those families are taken care of."



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# Award-Winning Artwork

## PBA honors student for designing association's holiday card

■ BY BRITTANY KRUGEL

The holiday card sent out by the South Florida PBA no doubt made Christmas bright for members and their families. How could you not feel the cheer when seeing a snowman smiling and waving while driving a truck with the PBA logo?

If you kept that card, good thinking. It might be worth something someday.

The card is original artwork by Destiny Olmedo, a student at New World School of the Arts, a public magnet high school in downtown Miami. When considering what to do for a holiday card, the PBA commissioned the New World School of the Arts and specifically, teacher John Soto's graphic design class.

"The PBA asked if his class would be interested in coming up with designs for the card, with one student ultimately coming up with the winning design," Soto said.

That student was Olmedo, a senior. But before she came up with the winning design, she had to look for inspiration.

"They told us the card had to have a holiday theme, not necessarily a Christmas theme, so that's why I went with the snow," Olmedo said. "I had seen a truck ornament somewhere, so that's where the inspiration for that came from."

Soto had his class do some detailed work to get to the end result.

"Before we chose a design, each student had to draw a design by hand before they created it digitally," he explained.

When Olmedo found out she was the student with the winning design, she was surprised and shocked.

The New World School of the Arts accepts students solely based on their talent. Students like Olmedo earn National Merit and leadership-based scholarships for their work. So it comes as no surprise that she went above and beyond in this project.

Olmedo wasn't expecting to win awards, but rather to make sure that members of the PBA are appreciated during the holiday season.

"It's really nice to do something for police officers, because they deserve to have something nice for Christmas," she added. Soto echoed such sentiments.

"I think whatever we can do to honor public service members is important," he noted.

Soto says the PBA has yet to reach out to New World School of the Arts about next year's holiday card campaign. But if the association does, he says students will be more than happy to help create a merry holiday for members.




With fellow students in John Soto's graphic design class, Destiny Olmedo shows her artwork, which was selected as the 2022 PBA holiday card.



South Florida PBA Vice President Nizam Ishmael presents a certificate to recognize Destiny Olmedo for creating the association's holiday card. Alongside Olmedo is her teacher, John Soto.





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# REFLECTIONS

Catching up with a renowned South Florida PBA Member

## Life is for Service

Theodore 'Teddy' Peterson continues to support South Florida PBA members long after retirement

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

Not many people can say they know Santa Claus. But retired Miami-Dade Officer Theodore 'Teddy' Peterson was Santa Claus.

During the holiday season, Peterson would throw on a bright red suit, strap into an MDPD helicopter and fly over the city into the South Florida PBA parking lot, where a crowd would be waiting to greet him. Other times, his grand entrance involved arriving in a SWAT truck or a fire truck.

As a member of the MDPD Community Policing Unit, Peterson also took on the role of Santa for large holiday events. Hundreds of children would wait in line to take a picture with him.

But nothing seemed to capture what Peterson said was one of the greatest highlights of his law enforcement career more than these moments.

"It makes you realize that a police officer is not just catching criminals," Peterson related. "It's also preparing the citizen to protect themselves, taking care of them when they're hurt and making them happy when they're sad. That's a job that that's not for everybody. But there's so much joy in doing the job and there is so much joy in helping people and being a part of the community."

Peterson started his law enforcement career in 1975 and was on the job for 32 years. In his early years, Peterson served in the Crime Prevention Unit in the Mid Central District neighborhoods. Then, he worked in the General Investigative Unit. From there, Peterson fell in love with community policing when one of his good friends asked him to work in community affairs.

And Peterson found many ways to serve.

When MDPD members were searching for the perfect Santa Claus, they looked at Peterson. He seemed like a big, jolly guy who could be up for the task. At the time, Peterson asked the PBA to purchase the costume for him, and of course they agreed, but only if he could play Santa for their holiday events, too.



Being Santa became a way for Peterson to connect with South Florida PBA members and their families.

"It was a joy to give them a little laughter and fun," Peterson recalled. "And it was a great feeling because when I saw my fellow coworkers, they knew it was me underneath the Santa suit. Then I would give them a little harder trouble about being a good dad and making sure they're good to their kids."

Two years before Peterson retired, an officer approached him with an idea to bring together wounded veterans. He knew someone who wanted to host a bike ride from a hospital in Washington, D.C. where vets recover and bring them to Florida to show support and appreciation.

Immediately, Peterson agreed and helped to organize the ride to Miami Beach.

Now 18 years later, the Soldier Ride, led by the Wounded Warrior Project, has become a renowned event in which veterans ride from town to town throughout Florida, and even across the country, alongside law enforcement agencies. Even after retiring, Peterson still finds a way to participate, from cooking breakfast for participants before they begin



### Teddy Peterson's Record:

- Served 32 years with the Miami-Dade Police Department
- Became a PBA member in 1975
- Worked in the Crime Prevention Unit, the General Investigative Unit and Community Policing Unit
- Active participant and coordinator for the Soldier Ride

their first leg of the ride to witnessing support from families in the community who gather on the side of the road to wave American flags.

"It's an unbelievable feeling to see these soldiers and how they feel, whether they're missing legs, arms, eyes, or they're just mentally sad," Peterson noted. "When I first started and talked to some of these warriors, it just made me cry. And I said, 'I've got to help out with this every year.' So, when I retired, I just kept doing it."

As a huge Miami Dolphins fan, several years ago Peterson began tailgating at games. During every game, Peterson would offer breakfast to law enforcement officers and other first responders on duty. He noted that he often looked forward to these games to serve food alongside other retired officers.

On the job, he always found joy in giving back. Even now, he still does.

"That's what it's all about, having each other's back and supporting each other through the PBA, which does a great job of supporting us and giving us great benefits," Peterson added. "I'm so blessed to have a great retirement and be able to give to and support [fellow officers]."



# 2023



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**February 25** Car Show

**March 17** Golf Tournament

**May 20** 30th Annual PBA  
Law Enforcement Awards Gala

**June 10** Fishing Tournament

**Sept 1-30** Fallen Officer Tribute

**Sept 28** Feast Day Celebration of  
St. Michael

**Nov 11** Pig Roast Bowl Series

**Dec 9** 5K Run

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# Members Only Section

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

## Ride Along

South Florida PBA members support veterans in the 2023 Soldier Ride

■ BY ESTHER GONZALES

Cheering and applause resounded from the crowd of hundreds of South Florida residents lined on U.S. 1 on Jan. 6. Banners, posters and American flags flew in support of the wounded veterans and law enforcement officers, making the 2023 Soldier Ride an extraordinary event.

"It's great seeing the public out there, recognizing them and cheering them on as they ride," said retired Miami-Dade Sergeant and U.S. Army veteran Joseph Bermudez. "You have a lot of these warriors who are riding with modified bikes, including amputees with prosthetics. It's amazing seeing them out there doing this and getting past their disabilities. And just bringing it to light to the public so that what they did is not forgotten."

The Wounded Warrior Project began the Soldier Ride 18 years ago in honor of wounded veterans. It began as one man's vision to bring together veterans and display support for them. Since then, the Soldier Ride has become a renowned annual event. The two-day journey has expanded nationally to include mountain biking, skiing, snowboarding and even virtual events.

This year, veterans were joined by more than a dozen law enforcement agencies throughout South Florida — including MCSO, Miami-Dade PD and Doral PD — to ride more than 100 miles.

After a hearty breakfast for all riders, the first leg of the Soldier Ride began in Key Largo to Islamorada and ended at the Veterans Memorial Beach in Big Pine Key. On Jan. 7, participants rode from the Boca Chica Naval Base to a welcome ceremony in Bayview Park.

Along the way, riders stopped at Coral Shores High School, where hundreds of students awaited the veterans and officers.



South Florida PBA members ride along to support veterans.



"All the kids were outside, waving their little American flags, and it was just a great feeling," said retired MDPD member Theodore "Teddy" Peterson. "You get goosebumps."

During the first Soldier Ride, Peterson played an influential role in coordinating the event from a veteran's hospital in



Hundreds of supporters line the side of the road to cheer on veterans and law enforcement officers during the 2023 Soldier Ride.

Washington, D.C. to Miami Beach. Working closely with Bermudez in community affairs, Peterson asked him to join the effort. Bermudez readily accepted.

After helping organize the event for the past 18 years, Bermudez has witnessed the exponential growth of riders and supporters.

And he noted just how much of an impact the Soldier Ride has had on his own life.

"I did it for so long, it's near and dear to me and it's something that I hold close to my heart," Bermudez added. "It's the ability to bring veterans together to let them continue working with their brothers and sisters who they served with. And having these bystanders see their accomplishments after what they've been through. It's fulfilling to be able to make this happen."



# Special Retirement Party

## Students surprise MCSO officer to thank him for his service

Protecting and serving is a part of an officer's everyday life, but protecting children comes with additional responsibility. It's the kind of responsibility Monroe County Sheriff's School Resource Officer Deputy David Stark thrived on.

Stark's experience working in schools started in the 1990s when he joined the department, working in Coral Shores High School for seven years. Stark took the SRO position at Plantation Key School in 2013.

Fast forward to Dec. 16, 2022. The students at Plantation Key said goodbye to Stark before he left for retirement in the best way they knew how: with a rally. Stark was surprised by two separate rallies, one involving K-5 students and the other involving grades six through eight.

"These kids...some of the things they said to me brought tears to my eyes," Stark shared.

But that bond isn't something that gets built overnight.

"The one thing that the sheriff likes to see is he likes us to build a rapport with the kids," Stark added, noting how that can happen in numerous ways. He loved playing football with the students. Stark also made sure to support his students once the school day was over by going to their sporting events.

Stark also served as an advisor to the junior explorers, cadets and senior explorers at the high school level.

"Some of the best times I had were with the senior and junior explorers," he said. "Last year we got to take them to the new jail so they could see what that was about."

It's the kids in the explorer program and outside of it who have made Stark feel like he has a home at Plantation Keys.

"You do your thing day in and day out and don't think much about it until these kids come up and tell you, 'Do you remember when you said this to me?'" he added. "Boy, that meant a lot to me."

Those connections are so important, not just for Stark but for his department as well. He says these kinds of relationships can make his job easier because even after these kids move on from Plantation Keys, they remember him.

"Numerous times, road deputies will say, 'I made contact with



so and so and he said that he knew you and wanted to know if I knew [you]," he said.

These stories are proof that while Stark may be headed into retirement, his impact will certainly not soon be forgotten.

## MCSO members read to children at local schools

There's no time like storytime — especially when it means officers are connecting with kids in their communities.

In December, officers from the Monroe County Sheriff's Office made visits to local schools to read to children. Sergeant Leon Boucier visited a class full of second graders at Plantation Key School, while Upper Keys Sergeant James Hager visited Key Largo School for a special holiday-themed reading.





# Pinecrest members unite neighborhood

In December, community policing took many forms for Pinecrest PD officers.

Crowds gathered up and down the sidewalks from Hollywood to the Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital on Dec. 2 for the 3rd annual Mystic Force Foundation Childhood Cancer Parade. Pinecrest PD officers delivered an engaging experience for many children who were battling cancer by sporting superhero costumes, like Captain America and Black Panther.

Led by another agency's motor unit, officers followed one another in their decal-wrapped vehicles, including one that displayed a large American flag and another that was bright yellow in honor of childhood cancer.

Alongside many other law enforcement agencies and community leaders, Pinecrest PD officers helped remind families that are not alone in this fight.

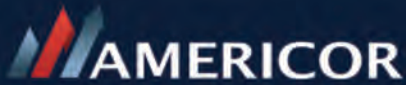
Continuing to build relationships with families in the community, the Pinecrest Police Community Resource Team (CRT) attended a multi-group neighborhood block party on Dec. 12. Offering food, beverages and giveaways, members of the CRT also had the opportunity to share valuable crime prevention tips with residents.

And nothing beats basketball for bringing a community together.

In partnership with the Citrus Family Network, a welfare services agency, CRT officers joined the HOOPS4UNITY Basketball Tournament on Dec. 17. First founded in 2021, this event is focused on bringing together first responders and youth who have experienced the foster care system. During the game, Pinecrest PD officers and youth teamed up together, coached one another and showcased their skills.



Members of the Pinecrest Community Resource Team attend a block party to share crime prevention tips.



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# The Gift of Giving

## South Florida PBA members deliver toys and joy this holiday season

This holiday season, members of the North Miami Community Policing Unit surprised hundreds of residents with toys and Christmas presents. Walking door to door ringing doorbells, members eagerly gave away what seemed like thousands of toys to help spread holiday cheer and brighten the holidays for low-income families.

"It's an amazing feeling just to see the gratitude from the kids, the enthusiasm and the excitement when you're handing them something we all take for granted," North Miami Police Officer Sean Mirjah explained. "Something like a small toy or a little doll means so much to them, and they're going to play with it pretty much every day and keep it close to them. It's a fantastic feeling."

After receiving countless donations from the Miami Dolphins, Ace Construction and Marian Charitable Foundation, members filled their squad vehicles and a SWAT truck. Then they began their drive throughout the community.

When residents opened the doors to see members standing there offering toys, they seemed thrilled. And one family, who had

met North Miami PD Officer Sean Laguerre before, emphasized the impact of this simple gesture.

Knowing the mother of seven lived in the area, Laguerre arrived at her house with presents for each of her children.

"She was like, 'Oh my God! You went from stopping me to almost giving me a ticket and lecturing me and now you're bringing me gifts,'" Laguerre said. "It was joyful to where tears came out. It's awesome."

Even people passing by stopped to take in the scene of officers in their neon yellow shirts unloading hundreds of toys for children. And some even asked to take a picture with the officers of the moment.

"One of the wonderful things about being a part of this unit is that you get to create bonds with the community that will last probably a little longer than if you were just on patrol handling calls," Mirjah added.



North Miami PD members deliver hundreds of toys to children in their local community.



Bal Harbour

In honor of the Mystic Force Foundation, an organization that raises awareness for childhood cancer, Bal Harbour PD officers brought in donations for their toy drive.



Homestead

Homestead PD officers said they felt the Christmas spirit this past holiday season during the Winter Wonderland Toy Drive, which brought in many toys for children in the local community.



MDCR

During the 5th annual MDCR Shop with a Correctional Officer, 20 foster care children were surprised with a shopping spree at Walmart. During the event, each child was paired with an officer, who helped them spend \$150 on whatever they wanted.



MCSO

In what has become an annual tradition, hundreds of brand-new bikes flooded in this past holiday season from MCSO members who seemed eager to donate.



MCSO

Just in time for Christmas, MCSO received a large donation of "Feel Better Bears" from the Key West Woman's Club. While responding to emergency calls, MCSO members will use these bears as an extra source of comfort for children.



MCSO

After a Christmas party at a local restaurant, members of MCSO loaded a trailer full of toys for children at the Wesley House Family Services. By the time the trailer was filled, there were more than 1,000 toys.





Miami Gardens PD officers brought smiles and cheer to 1,000 children this holiday. With the help of volunteers and sponsors, MGPD hosted a successful event at which each child received a toy of their choosing.



**Miami Gardens**



Members of the MGPD Investigations Division visited the Child's Rehab Center in Miami Gardens to bring presents to children with special needs.



Miami-Dade PD members of the Northside District hosted their annual toy giveaway to help make this season brighter for many children in the community.



**Miami-Dade**

Miami-Dade PD officers delivered holiday cheer with a special appearance from Santa, McGruff and the Grinch for children at the HCA Florida Kendall Hospital.



**Sunny Isles Beach**

Sunny Isles Beach PD collected hundreds of toys during its holiday toy drive and delivered the items to families in need, homeless individuals and local churches.



**West Miami**

Members of West Miami PD participated in Toys for Tots for the first time, filling several boxes with donations.



**North Miami**

Members of North Miami PD hosted their annual Shop with a Cop event for youth at T.J. Maxx.

## MDPD goes to the wall to honor officers in the military

There are those who protect and serve in their communities, and then are those who cross borders to protect and serve.

According to the U.S. Justice Department, 25 percent of law enforcement have a military background.

"I think it's important to remember that they are remembered," says Miami Dade Police Officer Christian Huete.

Huete, a veteran himself, wanted to do something to remind the Hammocks District that veterans matter. Hence, the department's military wall featuring the names of officers who have a military background.

"It's nice when everyone walks in the department, they can see that wall and remember the officers," Huete explains.

Huete is one of 18 officers who have a military background in Hammocks, and



three of them are still serving in the reserves. In fact, one of those officers, Christopher Morales, recently came back from the Middle East with a flag to complete the wall.

Huete added that fewer than one percent of Americans have served in the military, which is why it's so important to re-



member those making that sacrifice daily.

"Whether you've served one year, or five years or 10, I just feel that it's important you're honored for that service," he added.

Huete says he plans for the wall to be a permanent installation. As new officers with military experience join the department, their names will be added.



# Holiday Cheer

## South Florida PBA members made it merry for the community

It was the holliest, jolliest season for South Florida PBA members. Throughout December, several departments spent the holidays having festive celebrations and giving back to their community members in need.

The Village of Bal Harbour was all lit up for its holiday celebration during the first week of December at the St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort. Members of the community were treated to refreshments, face painting for kids, a photo booth and, of course, a tree lighting.

"It's an annual event where the police department partners with the Village, and we use that opportunity to enhance our community policing activities and engagement with our residents," said Bal Harbour Police Chief Raleigh Flowers.

Here are some other departments who were among the merriest:



**Pinecrest**

You might not think of Batman as a classic holiday character, but it turns out he made an appearance at Pinecrest Police Department's annual Cops for Kids Christmas party on Dec. 19. Captain Edison Cruz helped hand out toys to 45 families. More than 150 children were in attendance, and some of them even saw Pinecrest Batman in action.



**Homestead**

The holidays can be tough for families in need. Not only do they need toys to put under the Christmas tree, but they may also lack the fixings for a Christmas dinner. Homestead members showed the true meaning of Christmas by handing out meals to local families at a local Walmart on Dec. 20.



**Sunny Isles Beach Boat Parade**

You've probably seen Santa in a sleigh, but have you ever seen him on a boat? Sunny Isles Beach Police brought Santa, the Grinch, and all their friends on a holiday boat parade on Dec. 10.



**Bal Harbour**

When Bal Harbour police weren't busy making sure the whole village had a merry Christmas, they were wrapping gifts for those in need. On Dec. 11, the department wrapped gifts to hand out to students in Miami-Dade schools.



The men and women of Bal Harbour Police got a special delivery from some local children who wanted to thank them for all that they do. Students at Phillis Wheatley Elementary crafted Christmas cards for the department featuring festive drawings and special thank-you messages.



**North Miami**

It hardly ever snows in Florida, but sometimes it does in North Miami. North Miami Police held an event for local children featuring snow, food trucks and even a petting zoo on Dec. 17.



**Miami-Dade**

It was all about Christmas traditions for Miami Dade police. On Dec. 17, the department celebrated the holidays with the community at the 15th Annual Ark of the City Christmas parade.





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# On The Case

## Donet, McMillan & Trontz law firm offers PBA members unique representation

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

Commitment and responsibility to individuals, the public and service that runs deep in the Miami criminal defense law firm of Donet, McMillan & Trontz, P.A. can be traced to so many seminal tipping points. One of those came when one of the firm's three wise men – partner Larry McMillan – used to accompany his father, MDPD Detective Richard “Duke” McMillan, on some job-related matters.

Larry relates that some of his vivid memories are of listening to the officer known as Mac, who served from 1959 to 1996, radioing back and forth with other cars or units. Or going to the state's attorney's office when he had to do depositions, or to the courthouse for trials.

David Donet and David Trontz met McMillan when they all worked in the Miami-Dade state's attorney's office, where they realized they are all cut from the same mold. For the past 20 years, they have formed a tripod that provides the type of expert criminal defense PBA members know they can lean on, should it ever come to that.

“We are committed, we're dedicated, and with a team here of three lawyers that know each other as well as we do, we use that to our advantage,” McMillan submits. “We treat every client as if they are our only client in our complete bloodline. And we're here to go to whatever lengths are necessary to achieve the best result on the case. You can take that to the bank.”

Members should note that when they call Donet, McMillan & Trontz, they get Donet, McMillan or Trontz. They are not passed off to associates, because there aren't any. They are the only attorneys in the firm, and they bank on their personal touch making an impact with clients because they handle the cases from start to finish.

Members should also note the importance of this trio's time in the state's attorney's office. Their understanding of the administrative process and their relationships with the staff enable them to pick up the phone to get insight and information.

“Not necessarily to resolve the case, but just understanding what happens, how the case gets filed and what's necessary to make a case,” McMillan explains. “On the defense perspective, you know what it takes to make it. And if you understand how it works, you know how to put up obstacles to divert filings or whatever needs to be done on the case.”

A deeper look into these legal eagles reveals additional noteworthy attributes. Trontz served with the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division and did a lot of paratrooping. He then became a judge advocate general (JAG). Donet, who is also fluent in Spanish, is working as an arbiter with the county, hearing grievances and complaints within police departments.

Additionally, McMillan's father was instrumental in establishing the MDPD underwater recovery unit. McMillan has also known South Florida PBA President Steadman Stahl for nearly 40 years, going back to the days when he says Stahl had expressed some interest in dating his sister.

All three attorneys wound up leaving the state's attorney's office and joined the same civil firm. As their friendship was cemented, they decided to form their own firm. And in what



From left, attorneys David Donet, Larry McMillan and David Trontz

might have been a serendipitous milestone, on March 3, 2003 – 03/03/03 – they formed Donet, McMillan & Trontz.

The past 30-plus years have positioned the tenacious triumvirate to uniquely serve PBA members. The firm has represented many law enforcement officers over the years prior to being selected as PBA counsel. It has been handling cases from the PBA because the attorneys know the inner workings of the department and what types of things are creating issues for the members.

They have relationships with individuals at the highest levels of the police department, and credibility from having worked their way up with those members. Donet, McMillan and Trontz also have many close friends or family members who are PBA members and, as a result, are very empathetic to the rewarding yet challenging profession they have chosen.

And during those 30-plus years, they have formulated an approach to representing members that truly differentiates the firm's presence.

“We have long, extensive meetings with clients before we sign up cases to really understand and appreciate because we want to be fair to them, we want to be fair to us,” McMillan emphasizes. “But if we decide to get into a case, we understand, we feel, and we have a passion for it.”

As for winning cases?

“If you're helping the person get through this situation and minimizing the adverse negative consequences of the case, then that's a win,” McMillan adds.

The current landscape of law enforcement compels officers to face various challenges to their job security. Some of those unfortunately lead to criminal charges, especially for younger officers who are making decision or arrests more experienced officers might realize don't carry sufficient evidence to warrant such an action.

So McMillan has some words of wisdom for those officers doing their great work.

“Other than maintaining your good moral compass, stay true to doing what's right,” he says. “Because one thing that people don't really calculate or understand about litigation is the emotional toll that it takes on you, the uncertainty of what's happening. So you've got to be there to answer questions and to help people get through this situation.”



# Paying off your mortgage: Good or bad?



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Paying off your mortgage early is an enormous financial decision which requires careful consideration. While owning your home outright can bring a sense of financial freedom and security, it's important to weigh the pros and cons. Moreover, there are many financial planning considerations which should be balanced before making a move. Here are some of the main arguments for and against paying off your mortgage early and other financial planning thoughts:

## Pros

The most obvious benefit is that you will own your home outright, which can give you a sense of financial freedom and security. This checks an important box for many. It is something I commonly refer to as the "pillow factor" — how well you sleep at night. This means that you will not have to worry about making monthly mortgage payments, and you will have more control over your living expenses.

Paying off your mortgage early can also save you a significant amount of money in interest charges over the life of the loan. The sooner you pay off your mortgage, the less interest you will have to pay. Additionally, when you pay off your mortgage, you may be able to free up cash flow and reduce your monthly expenses. This can allow you to save more, invest more and even retire earlier. With no mortgage payment, you will have more discretionary money, which can be used for anything.

It is also a reasonable investment strategy to pay off your mortgage early. It frees up cash flow to make other investments, all the while knowing you will not have to make a mortgage payment anymore. That said, you'll have more liquidity to invest in other opportunities, such as stocks, bonds or real estate.

## Cons

The primary argument against paying off your mortgage is that you are dumping a huge amount of capital that could be used towards other opportunities. While paying off your mortgage early will save you money in interest charges, it may not be the best investment if you could earn higher returns elsewhere. For example, if you could earn an annual return of 8 percent on a stock investment and your mortgage interest rate is 4 percent — you make a 4 percent return after the cost of capital.

Paying off your mortgage early can compromise certain tax benefits. For some, mortgage interest may be tax deductible, so the more you pay in interest, the more you can deduct. This means that paying off your mortgage early may also reduce the amount of money you can claim as a tax deduction. For example, if you have a mortgage interest of \$12,000 a year, you could reduce your taxable income by \$12,000, which could save you \$3,000 in taxes if you're in the 25 percent tax bracket.

## Financial planning considerations

**Emergency fund.** Make sure you have a fully funded emergency fund before paying off your mortgage. This is not your regular savings, vacation fund or anything of that nature. It is a savings account exclusively dedicated to covering your families' expenses should something financially catastrophic happen: you lose your job, you are suspended without pay, or if you are a dual-income household, your spouse loses their job.

**Retirement savings.** Before paying off your mortgage early, make sure you are on track with your retirement savings. Paying off your mortgage early may free up cash flow, but it's important to make sure you're saving enough for retirement. If you're not on track, consider contributing more, even maximizing the amount you contribute to your deferred compensation account.

In closing, paying off your mortgage might be the thing you've set out to accomplish financially, and the sense of financial freedom it brings is tremendous. Keep in mind, though, that the equity in your house is stagnant and will not fund your retirement. At the end of the day, to access the equity in your house you will have to sell it or take a reverse mortgage, which is the opposite of what you set out to accomplish.

As always, discuss your plan and objectives with a trusted financial professional and have a good understanding of the implications of your actions.

*Nicolás Valdés-Fauli is the founder and CEO of Thin Blue Line Financial ([www.tblfinancial.com](http://www.tblfinancial.com)). Call or text 917-428-9629 or email [nvf@tblfinancial.com](mailto: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



Ray Garcia  
Councilman

305-364-6100  
garciar@miamilakes-fl.gov

November 29, 2022

Mr. Steadman Stahl  
President of the South Florida Police Benevolent Association  
10680 NW 25<sup>th</sup> Street  
Doral, Florida 33172

Dear Mr. Stahl:

Thank you for your kind words in congratulating me on my election as Councilman of the Town of Miami Lakes. I will work hard to represent my community with effectiveness and integrity.

If I can ever be of your assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Again, thank you for your kind words.

Sincerely,

Ray Garcia  
Councilman Seat 2  
Town of Miami Lakes



ASHLEY MOODY  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

Dear Steadman,

Thank you for dropping  
off a copy of the Heat magazine.  
I'm always so touched by the  
support and friendship of you guys.  
I look forward to seeing you soon.  
Best, Ashley Moody



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**WHAT FINANCIAL STRATEGIES SHOULD I CONSIDER IN MY EARLY CAREER?**

**WHAT PART WILL DEFERRED COMPENSATION PLAY IN MY RETIREMENT INCOME?**

**HOW WILL THE RETIREMENT OPTION I CHOOSE IMPACT MY RETIREMENT INCOME!**

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- 2. 457 DEFERRED COMPENSATION REVIEWS.**
- 3. EXAMINE YOUR JOINT INCOMES OR DUAL PENSIONS WHEN APPLICABLE.**
- 4. EXAMINE YOUR RISK TOLERANCE NOT ONLY IN TODAY'S ECONOMY, BUT IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.**
- 5. HELP YOU DETERMINE THE INCOME GOALS YOU MAY NEED TO SUPPORT YOUR RETIREMENT LIFESTYLE.**

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**or email: [cs@mydfsfl.com](mailto:cs@mydfsfl.com)**

**For a virtual or in person consultation at no cost,  
please contact our office to schedule**

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