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MARCH/APRIL 2024

## The Legend of George Gibson

Miami-Dade's oldest living officer tells a riveting story every member should know about what it was like to be a Black cop in the 1950s





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## COVER STORY



# Living Legend

## Page 20

Meet George Gibson, somebody every South Florida police officer should know. A groundbreaking, courageous, utterly engaging police officer *everybody* should know. As he turns 99 years old, the retired Miami-Dade County Sheriff's Department officer shares some of the amazing stories of his life, including what it was like for a Black policeman to work in southern Florida in the 1950s and '60s and how he fearlessly cleaned up some of the city's most crime-ridden neighborhoods. Gibson's intoxicating personality, combined with a razor-sharp memory of his 42 years on the job, tells some of the legendary tales of policing more than 50 years ago.

COVER DESIGN BY GINA CROTCHFELT

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## THE PRES SAYS

# An angel, a halo and a reminder about yesterday



STEADMAN  
STAHL

Starting this message with a thank-you note to George Gibson. The majestic image displayed on the cover of this issue of George from nearly 50 years ago looks almost as great as the photo on page 20 showing the 99-year-old George.

As many of you know, I'm big on history, and this legendary tale is a prime example that you never leave the profession. It's in your blood and then here we are – he is almost 100 years old. We don't forget the ones who have paved the way for us.

Obviously, he was a police officer in some very difficult times. And, as an African American, he probably witnessed a lot of stuff that I know shows how we're probably a better community and a better police department because of officers like him.

Turning to the news of our union, it's a very busy time here at the PBA. We are getting ready for our Officer Awards Gala on June 1. And we just finished the 2024 legislative session.

The headline from this session is the Florida House and Senate both passing the Halo bill, which creates the law requiring people to stay at least 25 feet back at the direction of an officer.

Even more newsworthy is that the PBA led the efforts to get this bill passed that also puts Florida's law and order out in front again. It's also important to note that in this day and age, when everything is so partisan, we even had the Democrats sign on to it.

The Halo bill is another tool to help make sure that we can get home safely to our families. It's going to give everybody another safe space to let us do our job. And there was just so much rhetoric about it, trying to tie it into the Floyd nonsense when this bill in no way prohibits anybody from taking video and stuff like that.

The bill certainly highlighted a good legislative session for the PBA. There are still some pension issues to work through, but overall, it was a good session.

More support for Florida law enforcement came from the elected official who has been there for us longer than any other. Governor DeSantis once again expressed support by holding a press conference here in Miami-Dade, as well as in Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, Jacksonville and other locations, announcing he was deploying more state troopers for cities having to deal with extra spring breakers coming to Florida.

He reached out to us to be part of the law-and-order press conference here in Miami, and we were glad to be part of it. He did another press conference, addressing how to ensure we don't have homeless encampments all over the place like you see in other cities across the countries.

His order mandates that local governments and jurisdictions can keep tents from popping up anywhere, especially in front of stores and in parks. And that the counties or cities are going to have to have homeless shelters to take people dealing with homelessness to those places. And if they don't go, they'll be arrested.

Turning the page to local politics, the race for Miami-Dade County sheriff is heating up, which we were anticipating. We are looking at all the candidates to see where they stand on a lot of issues, and it's going to be one of the toughest races ever to find a candidate to support.

There are some really good people running, and, obviously, some that we know that we won't get behind. Right now, we have to sit back and see who's going to stay in the race. It's one thing for somebody to pick up a packet and indicate interest in running, but they still have to file to run. So we are waiting to see who has the commitment to stay in it.

We know that once the field is determined for the August primary, the PBA endorsement will be the most sought-after. We're proud of it, and we don't take it lightly.

We know that it's not just our members, but the community also puts a lot of weight into our endorsement. So we have to make sure that we get it right.

There are a lot of factors that we look at with all our endorsements. Everybody's looking for where we're going to be at, what we're going to do. But there's still a lot more information that we have to get.

We have to know where everybody's at. The candidates have to want it more than us, and that's getting out there working, raising money, getting their name out there, meeting the electorate.

It is a very big deal. And one that everybody is asking about. Not just members. People in the community are calling me. Other elected officials are calling us to say they are relying on the direction we're going to go.



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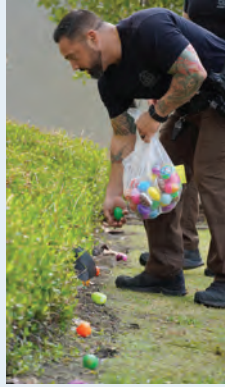
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CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

# The President's Gallery

## Easter Egg Hunt at Lighthouse for the Blind



## Political Action



South Florida PBA leaders with reps from the Miami Beach Police, Florida Highway Patrol and FDLE at the governor's press conference announcing support to keep Florida cities safe during spring break.



South Florida and state PBA reps with Representative Alex Rizo, who sponsored and helped push the Halo bill through the Florida House.



The Florida PBA lobbying team with Florida Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nunez in Tallahassee during the 2024 Florida legislative session.

**STAHL** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

There is no deadline for the endorsement. I would say we will know more in the next couple of months.

There's just so much uncertainty out there for everybody. And I'd like to try to tell the members and everybody I speak to, just take a deep breath. Everything will be OK.

I know that because of this, some members are reevaluating their careers, or people who are close to retiring are choosing to retire early. They don't want to even go through the process. They don't even want to be part of that transition of going to a sheriff's office.

It's a very tough time in law enforcement with hiring officers or getting them to stay in it. But I think the mood is getting better. The public mood, at least here in Florida, is very pro-police and positive. And I still say we have some of the best officers in the country right here in South Florida.

My favorite story from the past few weeks featured our sponsoring an Easter egg hunt for kids at the Lighthouse for the Blind here in Miami-Dade. It's their annual beeping egg hunt, and I'm not sure who had more fun: those of us there hiding the eggs or the kids following the sounds to find them. The kids were smiling bigger than we were, but not by much.

Officer Kenny Acevedo, who has since retired from the MDPD bomb squad, heard about this program being done somewhere else in the country for blind kids, and they wanted to know if we would help out. I said, "Absolutely." And the bomb squad guys put it all together for the Lighthouse for the Blind.

Some of these kids are blind and deaf, so they had to put their hands down on the ground to feel the vibration and find the eggs. To see the expression on their faces, I can't even describe it. This one little girl comes up to where I'm standing. There's an egg right there beeping. And you could tell she's looking for it, and she finds it.

And then she says, "Well, I'm only allowed to have eight eggs. This would make nine."

And so I said, "I don't think anybody's going to mind that you got another egg in there." And she's holding it now. She's not sure. The rules were eight eggs. So she takes a couple of steps and then she takes it out of the basket and puts it back down. Pretty cool.

To see that kind of stuff is very, very moving. And I'm telling you, it puts it in perspective. We have all these troubles over life. We find ourselves in all this political nonsense and this hatred that we see in the us-against-them mentality.

But I'm watching kids just trying to find an Easter egg. Blind kids. If you think you have it tough, come on out to these events and look at these kids. And if you think your life is tough, think you have it bad, come with me to the Jackson Burn Center and look at some of these kids who have been caught in fires.

I think that we have to put life in perspective. Let's not sweat the small stuff.

There's a saying in the military: "Yesterday was the easiest day of your life." It's always yesterday because whatever's happening, there's always going to be an issue today. There's going to be an issue tomorrow. It's always going to be an issue that we have to face down the road.

And we here at the PBA are ready for whatever those issues may be. Whatever the tasks, whatever the challenges are. We are ready to deal with them, handle them, fix them and just try to make the world a better place.

**Steadman Stahl**  
South Florida PBA President  
[steadman@sflpba.org](mailto:steadman@sflpba.org)

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# Vehicle crashes kill officers



DAVID GREENWELL  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

“Officer down!” When we hear these words, we immediately think that an officer has been shot. But one of the biggest killers of cops is actually vehicle crashes.

In 2023, of the 135 officers killed in the line of duty in nine different categories, 41 officers were killed in motor vehicle traffic crashes, while 47 were killed by gunfire. If you were to take a look at the actual crashes, you’d find that they were terrible tragedies that could have been prevented.

Here are some examples: Two officers responding to the same emergency call crashed into each other, killing one of the officers. Several officers were killed while standing outside their car on a traffic stop when they were struck by passing cars. One officer was killed by another officer when the responding backup officer lost control of the police car and crashed into and killed the officer on a traffic stop. Several officers traveling too fast lost control, left the roadway and struck fixed objects like trees, guardrails and bridges. Several officers also died while they engaged in pursuits and, while traveling too fast, lost control of their cars.

I personally saw and investigated approximately 700 fatal motor vehicle crashes when I was a Traffic Homicide sergeant, including several involving police officers. Doing death notifications for anyone is a terrible task, but even more so for a fellow police officer.

During my time as an RID sergeant in the crime-ridden 1990s, of course we stressed officer safety (and yes, defensive driving skills are officer safety skills). Unfortunately, crashes still occurred and multiple RID detectives were injured.

I will never forget Officer Robert Vargas, who was the first RID officer killed in the line of duty, on Feb. 7, 1997. Officer Vargas was struck by a vehicle that ran a stop sign while he was responding to a pursuit on a code 3. Robert was only 29 years old, had a wife and two young kids and was a U.S. Army veteran. I’m sure Robert is looking down and very proud of his two children, Robert Jr. and Amber, and the great human beings they have become. Robert was a true hero who was taken way too early.

Because motor vehicle-related traffic crashes have become one of the leading causes of line-of-duty deaths for law enforcement officers in the U.S. and the Miami-Dade Police Department spiked up to 1,200 police vehicle crashes in 2013, the Vehicle Operation and Crash Avoidance (VOCA) course (which I proudly still teach today) was implemented for MDPD in 2014. It is super important to teach and require motor vehicle safety among officers, beginning in the academy and through retirement, so they can stay safe while working to make our community safer. My objective while teaching is to get officers to realize how dangerous driving is on a normal basis. But when you add chasing criminals or responding to emergency calls, it is instantly a lot more dangerous. During the class, I ask my students to remember these three simple things: Speed is your enemy; seatbelts are



your friend; and never drive faster than your guardian angel can fly.

The Miami-Dade Law Enforcement Officers Memorial will be on Thursday, May 2, at Tropical Park to honor a total of 169 officers who have been killed in the line of duty in Miami-Dade’s history. Unfortunately, we know that there will be more names added in the future, due to the inherent danger of police work. However, the one area where we can best help our officers stay safe is to slow down and be good defensive drivers, because traffic crashes can be preventable.

If you want to read more about this topic, follow this link and read the CDC article: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/leo/default.html>.

And, more importantly than ever, as always, stay safe. If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 305-593-0044 or [dg@sflpba.org](mailto:dg@sflpba.org)



**JANUARY 2024 NEWS UPDATE**

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# Your health is your wealth



**NIZAM "ISH" ISHMAEL**  
VICE PRESIDENT

All law enforcement professionals face a combination of physical, mental and emotional stressors that can contribute to a higher prevalence of health issues compared to some other professions. Some of the factors contributing to the health challenges faced by us are high stress levels, irregular and demanding work schedules, physical demands, exposure to hazardous environments, public health risks, sleep disorders, emotional toll and limited access to mental health support.

When I was younger, my attention was never on health insurance. I have realized that some younger people feel this for a variety of reasons. These may include that they often feel healthier and may believe they are less susceptible to serious health issues. They may also have limited financial resources, prioritize immediate needs and discretionary spending over health insurance or not fully understand the importance of health insurance. They may prefer alternative or holistic healthcare practices and believe they can maintain their health without traditional health insurance. Many prioritize short-term goals such as paying off student loans, saving for travel or buying a home, which can divert attention from long-term health planning. Selecting insurance coverage is often confusing, and understanding health insurance policies, coverage options and the enrollment process can be complex. Young LEOs may find the information overwhelming, leading to indecision or avoidance.

It is crucial to recognize that these reasons are not universal, and many young people do prioritize health insurance. However, addressing these factors through education, outreach and policy changes can help increase awareness and participation in health insurance programs among younger demographics. Understanding the potential long-term benefits and financial protection that health insurance provides is essential for encouraging younger LEOs to prioritize their healthcare needs.

## Miami-Dade County Health Insurance

I always say you get what you pay for. The Miami-Dade County government provides health insurance to its employees through a self-funded health plan administered by AvMed. Florida Statute 112.08 requires self-funded plans sponsored by local governments to submit an annual filing to the Florida Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR) documenting plan experience and financial position.

AvMed has acted as the county's sole plan administrator since Jan. 1, 2008. The county offers three HMO benefit options and one POS option for active and pre-Medicare retirees. Medicare-eligible retirees can select from a high-option plan with or without pharmacy coverage. Employee premiums vary by plan and dependent coverage. There are approximately 29,474 active county employees. The county's self-funded plan currently covers approximately 51,600 employees, retirees and dependents.

Miami-Dade County determines its contribution to the health fund as part of its budgeting process. County budgets are set on a fiscal year basis (Oct. 1 through Sept. 30), so the budget for a given fiscal year needs to be set well before any plan design and employee contribution changes for the next calendar year have been finalized. According to the county, based on the

existing plan surplus, the expected employee and retiree contributions, and the expected plan expense, the county then determines the amount it needs to contribute to produce a closing surplus equal to the OIR safe harbor surplus threshold plus any additional desired reserves. The county is required by law to have a 60-day safe harbor threshold to cover claim expenses. The required county contribution is then divided by the number of active enrolled employees to get a contribution per employee, and that is what goes into the budget.

As of Sept. 30, 2023, the plan has a fund balance of \$88.3 million. That represents 65 days of the anticipated fiscal year (FY) 2024 claim expense, so the county exceeds the OIR's 60-day safe harbor threshold as of Sept. 30, 2023. Since the threshold is past the 60-day, the county has guaranteed that the health plan is actuarially sound and will be responsible for any claims.

## Consulting fees

Miami-Dade County hires Gallagher Benefit Services to prepare the required annual filing and to provide consulting services. For FY covering Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2023, the total consulting fees were \$9,117,269.

The annual claim cost per person for FY 2022-2023 was \$15,733, for a grand total for claims incurred of \$460,497,175. The annual projected claims for FY 2023-2024 are \$494,349,033 and for the fiscal year 2024-2025 are \$527,089,970. Each year, the county contributes a certain dollar amount per employee toward our self-funded health plan.

	FY 2023/24	FY 2024/25	FY 2025/26
County Contribution per Employee	\$14,500	\$15,000	\$15,500
Annual County Contribution	\$377,754,000	\$390,780,000	\$403,806,000
Annual Employee Contributions	\$57,367,213	\$57,367,213	\$57,367,213
Total Funding	\$435,121,213	\$448,147,213	\$461,173,213

Once you are retired, the annual county contribution ceases, which is why retiree premiums increase. Since we have been elected to represent our PBA members, Steadman and I have always made it our mission to advocate for the best health coverage. We sit at all the healthcare containment cost workshops, representing our union members and speaking up for all our interests. I am immensely proud to have a seat at this table. We have been instrumental in stopping some of the foolishness that the county wanted to force on us and, on the other hand, have gotten better benefits implemented for us. The consulting group, Gallagher Benefit Services, has yet to correctly project accurate gain or loss amounts for the county.

I would like to hear from all the prospective sheriff candidates as to what would be their vision for Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office (MDSO) for health insurance for active and future retirees from the sheriff's office. I have a few ideas on how we can craft our own health insurance plan for MDSO and break away from the county's plan. After this candidate is elected by the people, I will be glad to share my ideas with our new sheriff. The bad news: For those of you who have retired already, you will have to remain with Miami-Dade County's retiree health insurance plan. The potential good news: For those of us who will be retiring from MDSO, if the sheriff creates their own healthcare plan for active and future retirees, we might be able to have the same or better coverage with possibly lower premiums. Please feel free to contact me at [ish@sflpba.org](mailto:ish@sflpba.org) or at 305-593-0044.

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# The building blocks of a positive work environment



**KARLOS RAMOS**  
SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

How good are the relationships you have with your colleagues? Considering that we spend nearly one-third of our lives at work, it's clear that good relationships with our colleagues will make our jobs a lot more enjoyable and less stressful.

Having a strong professional circle is critical when it comes to maintaining a positive and productive work environment. When employees feel connected to their colleagues and managers, they are more likely to feel engaged and motivated in their work. Employees will feel supported and more comfortable sharing ideas, asking for help and working together when problem-solving.

This is essential in fostering creativity and innovation in the workplace. In addition, these strong relationships within the workplace will improve productivity, increase job satisfaction and create a supportive and inclusive work culture throughout the department.

Not only will this enhance performance, but as a result, this will lead to successful development and can diminish the impact of negative trends. Communication is often underrated, but it is the basis for the relationships that we establish.

Investing in social connection is key to building a strong foundation in leadership and a resilient team. In today's fast-

paced and challenging workplace, let's focus on these vital components:

**Active listening.** Pay full attention to what your employees are saying, without interrupting. Show that you're engaged through verbal and nonverbal cues.

**Empathy.** Try to understand your employees' perspectives and feelings. Empathy helps build trust and rapport.

**Open-mindedness.** Be willing to consider different viewpoints and ideas, even if they differ from your own. This fosters an environment of inclusivity and innovation.

**Patience.** Allow employees the time they need to express themselves fully. Avoid rushing or jumping to conclusions.

**Feedback.** Provide constructive feedback in a respectful and timely manner. This shows that you value your employees' input and you are committed to their growth.


**Conflict resolution.** Address conflicts calmly and objectively. Open dialogue and seek solutions that benefit everyone involved.

**Follow-up.** Follow up on discussions and commitments made during conversations to demonstrate accountability and show that you value your employees' input.

It is important to establish these great skills and relationships. As a result, you will cultivate a culture of trust, respect and effective communication within your department.

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# USERRA and the military



**M. CRISTINA ESCOBAR**  
**ASSISTANT GENERAL COUNSEL**

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Act of 1994, also referred to as USERRA, was passed by the U.S. Congress to protect the employment of active guard and reserve military personnel called to perform military service. Its purpose is to minimize disadvantages and disruptions that can result from having to be absent from your employment due to a military deployment and/or service. It protects everyone who serves in the uniformed services and applies to all employers in the public and private sectors. If called to service, the act, among other things, provides for prompt reemployment upon completion of such service and prohibits discrimination and/or retaliation against persons because

of their service in the uniformed services.

USERRA is federal law, so it supersedes any state or local law or ordinance. However, most local jurisdictions have adopted ordinances that parallel USERRA, providing the same rights and protections afforded by the federal statute. Since USERRA establishes a floor — not a ceiling — for the employment and reemployment rights and benefits of those it protects, an employer and/or local ordinance can choose to provide greater rights and benefits to employees who serve in our military. We like it when that happens!

In 2007, I was contacted by a PBA member about military service members who had been deployed between 1994 (when USERRA was passed) and 2007. They had been denied the merit raises they would have received from the department if not for having been deployed and/or out due to military service. I was told these officers had a civil action pending in the court system, but as it was taking so long, they thought of contacting the PBA to see if there was anything we could do. It took no time for the PBA team and I to meet with Pepe Diaz, a Miami-Dade commissioner at the time, who spearheaded the resolution requesting that the county pay the merit raises to every employee who had been on military leave, retroactive to 1994. The resolution passed, thankfully, and payments were quickly made.

As a military member, you have rights. If you are called to military service, per USERRA, upon your return, you should expect to be reemployed to the position that you would have held with reasonable certainty had you not been absent, or one of similar seniority, status and pay. This is called the “escalator position,” which is the job position you would have attained if your continuous employment had not been interrupted due to uniformed service. Once this position is determined, the employer may have to consider several other factors before determining the appropriate reemployment position. Such factors may include your length of service, qualifications and disability, if any. The reemployment position may be either the escalator position; the pre-service position; a position comparable to the escalator or pre-service position; or the nearest approximation to one of these positions.

USERRA also protects you from discrimination and retaliation. It is insane to me that any employer would discriminate or retaliate against a member of our military, but sadly, it has occurred. If any individual's past, present or future connection

## 2024 Pending Grievances

This list represents the pending grievances filed at the various departments represented by the South Florida Police Benevolent Association as of **Feb. 29, 2024**. The PBA legal staff receives numerous other complaints that are resolved by other means.

<b>DEPARTMENT/DISTRICT</b>		
<b>BAY HARBOR ISLANDS PD</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>CITY OF MIAMI PD</b>		<b>4</b>
<b>MIAMI-DADE CORRECTIONS</b>		
ASSOCIATION	1	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>MIAMI-DADE POLICE</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>MIAMI GARDENS PD</b>		<b>4</b>
<b>MCSO (DETENTION)</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>NORTH MIAMI PD</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>SWEETWATER PD</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL GRIEVANCES</b>		<b>14</b>

with military service is a motivating factor in an employer's adverse action against them, whether in hiring, promoting, reemploying, terminating and/or providing benefits, the employer has committed a violation, unless the employer can prove that it would have taken the same action regardless of the connection. Even if there are multiple reasons for an employer taking adverse action against you, if the service connection is one of said reasons, the employer could be liable.

If an opportunity for promotion, or eligibility for promotion, is missed by you during service and is based on a skills test or examination, the employer needs to take into consideration several factors in determining the reasonable amount of time to allow you to adjust to the employment position and then give a skills test or examination. The amount of time deemed reasonable for permitting adjustment to reemployment varies from case to case.

However, in determining a reasonable amount of time to permit you to adjust to reemployment before scheduling a make-up test or examination, an employer may take into account a variety of factors, including but not limited to: the length of absence from work, the level of difficulty of the test, the typical time needed to study for the test, the duties and responsibilities of the reemployment position and the promotional position, and the nature and responsibilities of the service member while serving in the uniformed service. If you are successful on the makeup exam and, based on the results of that exam, there is a reasonable certainty that you would have been promoted or made eligible for promotion during the time that you served in the uniformed service, then the promotion or eligibility for

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

# The golf tournament returns



SERGEANT  
KENNETH  
HORGAN  
POAT  
COMMITTEE  
CHAIR

The POAT Golf Tournament is finally back. The playing experience at Indian Creek has been elevated to the highest level with its \$20 million renovation.

While connecting the past to its future, Andrew Green, one of the world's most acclaimed golf course architects, oversaw the renovation of the William Flynn-designed golf course at Indian Creek Country, located on the exclusive Indian Creek Island.

## 2024 scholarships

The Board of Directors of the Police Officer Assistance Trust is proud to offer seven scholarships this year. The following \$2,000 scholarships are available to the son or daughter of any full-time law enforcement officer employed by any agency in Miami-Dade County:

- Paul Janosky Art and Criminal Justice Scholarships (two separate scholarships)
- Mike Byrd Crime Scene Investigation Scholarship
- Christopher W. Todd Law Related Majors Scholarship (also

available to officers)

- Roger Castillo Perseverance Scholarship
- Amanda Haworth Perseverance Scholarship
- Chuck Duncan Determination Scholarship

One recipient for each scholarship will be selected and will receive a \$2,000 check to use toward his or her college expenses. All applications must be received by May 3. Please visit our website at [www.poaat.org](http://www.poaat.org) for specific guidelines and requirements.

For further information, please contact the POAT office at 305-594-6662 or [poatoffice@msn.com](mailto:poatoffice@msn.com).

## Memorial scheduled

The Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Ceremony will be held at Tropical Park beginning at 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 2. All Miami-Dade County law enforcement officers who have been lost in the line of duty dating back to 1895 are honored at this ceremony. It is our duty to honor the memory of those officers who have died protecting and serving the citizens of Miami-Dade County.

Thanks for your support, and stay safe.

## LEGAL CORNER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

promotion should be made effective as of the date it would have occurred had employment not been interrupted by unperformed service.

There is much more to USERRA than what is in this article. As always, we encourage you to contact us should you feel something is off or if an employer violates USERRA. As in 2007, there may be a "thinking-outside-the-box" solution that pays off. But if not, know that the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) is authorized to

investigate and resolve USERRA complaints.

If you need assistance in filing a complaint or need other information, you may contact VETS at 866-4-USA-DOL or visit [www.dol.gov/vets](http://www.dol.gov/vets). If VETS cannot resolve it, another avenue may be via contacting the Department of Justice or a civil attorney, who may file a civil action. Hopefully you will never have to take such action. Your service to our community is always appreciated. If you are a U.S. service member as well, just saying thank you never seems to be enough — but thank you.

Stay safe. We have your backs!

The Miami-Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police and the Police Officer Assistance Trust cordially invites you and your family to attend the 43rd Annual

**Miami-Dade Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Ceremony**

The Sunset Service will take place on Thursday, May 2, 2024

**Tropical Park**

**7900 S.W. 40th Street, Miami, Florida**

*Please arrive promptly at 6:30 p.m.*

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MEMORIAL

# Get ready for another eventful reunion



**JOHN FRALEY**  
RPOC  
PRESIDENT

Going into March, we have two major things that are fast approaching the RPOC board. Our reunion will be here before you know it. Take a few moments to think about attending, then plan on attending. The dates are May 2-5.

Those of you who attended this event in the past know how much fun it is to reminisce with friends and colleagues. This is clearly a place to relive the past, both good and bad. The accommodations are great, the food is great and the drinks flow freely. It has been my experience that retired officers who attend seem to take advantage of that old saying, "If it's free, it's for me." Our in-house bartenders, Maggie Bambach and Penny Spisak,

do a great job managing the bar. Tip them well, as the tips go to our Love Fund and the Otis Chambers Scholarship fund.

Reba Miller, our RPOC chaplain, works very hard during the year. In addition to her duties as our chaplain, she manages health and welfare information for the RPOC. Reba has a unique way of handling information regarding death notifications. Reba's calm way of talking to family members is a great asset to our organization. Reba also spends countless hours planning the St. John's River Cruise that will take place on Saturday, May 4. The reservations for this event go fast!

I am planning the golf event for Friday, May 3. This has always been a fun-filled event. Please remember that tee times need to be guaranteed. Please let me know as soon as possible and forward the fees to me via Venmo or mail them to the RPOC. The fee this year will be \$60, half of which will be the prize money.

The applications for the Otis Chambers Scholarship are now being taken. Please go to our website at [rpo cpba.org](http://rpo cpba.org) for information about the program. I chair this program, and it has been very successful, with more than \$25,000 being awarded to date.

I attended the Usual Suspects Lunch put together by Pete Cuccaro, Madeline Pearson and Paul Law. Their lunches appeal to our membership in Central and West Florida, and attendees get together to continue friendships and relive the past of MDPD. Approximately 50 people attended, including members and their guests. A wonderful time was had by all.

I got to see Marshall Frank shortly before he passed. I clearly could see that the time was near, and he passed on Friday, Feb. 23. Another legend lost with a long history of greatness. Tributes were made to Marshall and others lost in recent months. Reba Miller mentions other recently passed members of the RPOC in her portion of the newsletter.

I am planning to meet with retirees who have long retired and record the history of the department as they saw it and were part of how it was then, as well as when they retired. Things were different then, and I cannot think of anyone who would not want to hear what it was like in the '50s and '60s. I think that recorded history will only enhance the legacy of the Miami-Dade Police Department, soon to be the Miami-Dade County Sheriff's Office. I wonder if I could get a gold star retired badge.

The members of the board of directors for the RPOC strive to make our organization the best it can be. We are here for you, the membership, to help continue the legacy of the department and its retirees. May God bless you all. Reach out to other retirees, if just to say hello, and remember to vote on Nov. 5. In these times, voting will be the most important thing we do.

Here are some additional reports from RPOC board members:

**Treasurer Ed Spisak:** We would like to thank all the members (you know who you are) who were so generous in your contributions to Membership Assistance and the Otis Chambers Scholarship fund. It just shows how generous members are when it comes to helping others.

Also, a reminder to those members (approximately 160) who have forgotten to pay their dues for this year: Please do so as soon as possible. We look forward to seeing a lot of you at our annual reunion again this year at Lake Mary.

**Chaplain Reba Miller:** Blessings, friends, families and all members. Spring is here and with it many celebrations: Easter, Passover and Ramadan. This is recognized as a time of rebirth, renewal and new beginnings. It is also a time of liberation and triumph, but most importantly, it is a time to give thankfulness and gratitude for all the wondrous provisions we have received from God.

A short story:

One day the pastor from the local church stopped by to visit with Farmer Jackson and his family. As the family and the pastor grouped around the table for Sunday dinner, everyone was discussing the sermon from the morning service. It touched on thanking God in all circumstances, good and bad. Knowing that even bad things work together for the ultimate good of those who love God (Rom. 8:28), the pastor asked Farmer Jackson to give the blessing.

Farmer Jackson started out, "Dear God, I hate buttermilk." He continued, "I hate lard." Around the table, the group was getting concerned. "Dear God, I really hate white flour." At this point, Farmer Jackson paused, then said, "But Lord, when they are all mixed together, they make the most delicious, light, fluffy biscuits that really make me happy. Even though what I am going through is hard and I do not like it, when I put you in the middle of the mix, you bring the best and sweetest-tasting results. Thank you for loving me and sharing your unconditional love with your humble servant. Amen."

Please join me and the entire LEO family in honoring the following humble servants and warriors who have passed away:

- Kenneth Hock, Key West: February 2023
- Manson Higginbotham, MDPD: June 2023
- George Coult, MDPD: September 2023
- John "Rod" Hendrick, MDPD: February 2024
- Marshall Frank, MDPD: February 2024

Wishing everyone a blessed holiday and complete peace and provision in all your endeavors.



# Congrats to retired members

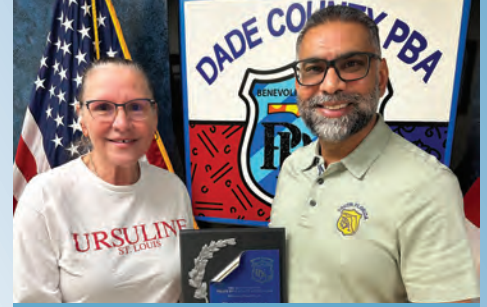
The South Florida PBA is proud to honor retired members who have put in long hours and outstanding service for their departments and communities. Join us in honoring these great members and exceptional public servants as they celebrate their retirement.



Alexis Sallano  
Miami-Dade Police Department



Anthony Collier Sr.  
Miami Gardens Police Department



Ellen Accola  
Miami-Dade Police Department



Raymond Gomez  
Miami-Dade Police Department



Ronell Middleton-Ottley  
Miami-Dade Police Department



Steven Johnson  
Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation



## THE ALVAREZ LAW FIRM

### Alex Alvarez

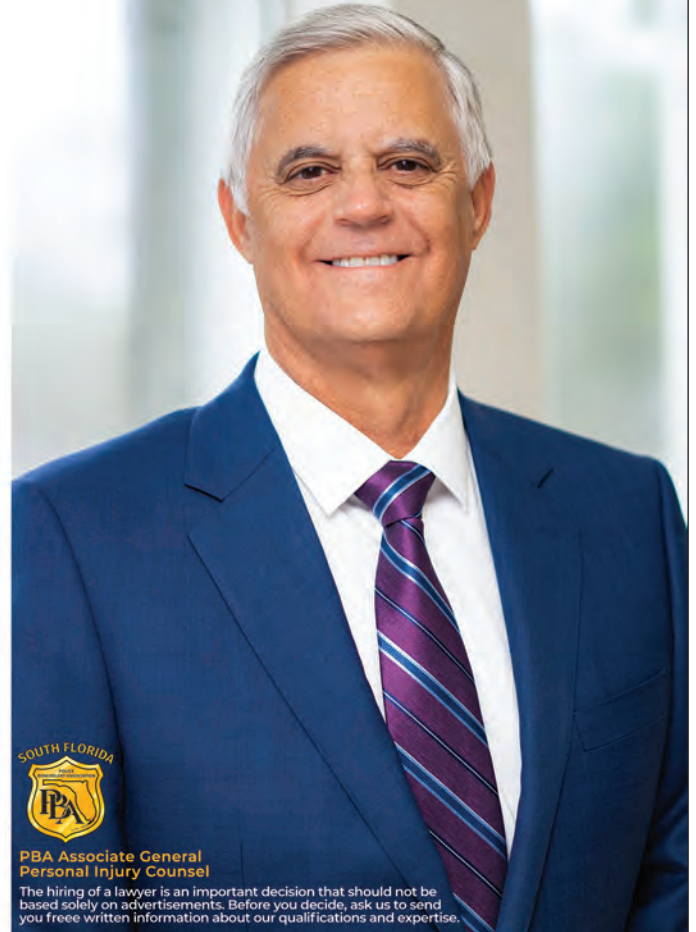
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The hiring of a lawyer is an important decision that should not be based solely on advertisements. Before you decide, ask us to send you free written information about our qualifications and expertise.

# Be smart enough to not lose control



**CHARLES E. NANNEY**

As a rookie cop in the Central District (now Northside) in 1988, I was told to take nothing personally. We routinely got “rocked and bottled” in the projects on calls and were subjected to daily verbal abuse and weekly physical attacks.

Although I was very young, I took this advice, and it served me very well at work. The problem was, I did not apply it off duty until much later, which caused all kinds of undue stress and road rage incidents, as well as other dumb incidents I cannot admit to. Simultaneously, at work, I took nothing personally; it was almost like I turned a switch on and off. This occurred despite being a street cop working in the most violent times, in the most violent areas. I show this contrast and I implore you: Take nothing personally unless it's personal, and even then, you must control your reaction.

Greek philosopher Epictetus stated, “It's not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.” This is so true, and if you cannot change the situation, you must change your perception of it and never give that power away.

Once you master this, it creates the ability to master your environment, and this is the key to a happier life in all we do. This also bulletproofs you from becoming a product of a bad temper and/or attitude. We must protect all of ourselves in law enforcement, not just our bodies. Losing your temper is a weakness and a lack of control that people will notice. This isn't good if you're a cop or cop supervisor. Step back and gain control, then take appropriate action filtered through “it's not personal.” Insults are designed to make you act without thinking. Be smarter than taking the bait.

If a subject on a domestic call yells at you, it's not personal. Handle the call. If someone cuts you off in traffic, let it go if off duty, take appropriate action if on duty — but it's not personal. Whatever happens to you or around you, don't take it personally. Rarely is what other people do because of you.

When we don't take things personally, it gives us more power over our thoughts, feelings and actions. When we don't take

things personally, we recognize the individuality of others, and we can accept that other people are different from us. We have little control over how others view us and relate to us. We have control over how we view ourselves and the situation, and how we respond to it. We tend to make assumptions and judgments about other people without knowing the full story, and usually what we assume about a person is wrong.

I have seen it over and over where supervisors become upset when an officer is late or has an accident, creating paperwork for them and undue stress. That's not personal nor about you. Handle it by the book — it is your job and not personal. Conversely, I have heard over and over, “My sergeant doesn't like me” or “The major hates me,” when the truth is they were only doing their job based on the officer's actions — or sometimes, two things can be true at the same time. You shouldn't learn every lesson the hard way, as choices made in anger can ruin your life.

Early in my career, utilizing investing for the future, deferred comp, etc. were great pieces of advice, but not taking things personally was the best advice I received and followed as a rookie and eventually incorporated into my personal life. Again, I beg you: Never give away your God-given right to change your perception of things that could be taken personally. Most are not. You will be happier when you realize this and apply it to your daily interactions.

People who take everything personally usually have a negative outlook on life. Abe Lincoln said, “We can complain because the rosebushes have thorns, or we can rejoice because a thornbush has roses.” Be like Abe and look for the good in every situation, and don't take things personally that are not! Overlook the thorns and appreciate the roses! Be smart and strong, never allowing anyone to control your emotions, and always remember it's not personal!

*PBA life member Charles E. Nanney is a retired Miami-Dade Police Department chief, a retired South Miami Police Department assistant chief and a retired Florida International University professor.*



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**Stop by or call the PBA for more information:**  
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**greenwell@dcpba.org • www.dcpba.org**

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PBA, 10680 NW 25 St., Doral FL  
Final registration is at the Captain's Meeting  
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# The Legend Lives On

The story of George Gibson will have a powerful, perhaps life-changing or career-changing impact on every South Florida police officer



George Gibson, left, at his home with South Florida PBA Executive Vice President David Greenwell.

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

Segregation set the borders in Dade County back in the late 1950s. Perrine had developed into an unincorporated community midway between Miami and Homestead, with the area to the east of the railroad all white and the area to the west of the railroad all Black. Goulds was another of the county's stretches with a predominantly Black population.

When white police officers from the sheriff's department patrolled Perrine and Goulds, the residents would berate them with rocks. The department had just five Black officers back then, but even they could be prone to catching a beating in Perrine.

Sheriff Tom Kelly wanted to clean up the South Side. So he assigned two of his Black officers — George Gibson and Thomas Fittin — to do the job. On the Midway, as Hibiscus Avenue was known, Billy's grocery store was a fixture where folks would hang out drinking beer. Gibson went in to ask where the problems in Perrine were coming from.

"They told me to go down to Johnson Street and Homestead, a juke joint called Liz's Place," Gibson remembered. "At that time, there was supposed to be the baddest man in Perrine. His name was Oscar King. And Oscar King had beaten a Black officer the week before and ran him out of Perrine."

Oscar King went at Gibson like every other Black officer who had come into this area known for low income and high crime. He would either beat them or run them off.

"Oscar King tried to do the same with me, but I was able to

turn him every which way but loose and arrest him," Gibson recalled with his razor's-edge attention to detail. "And Oscar became one of the best friends I had in this area."

So begins the legend of George Gibson, 99 years old, presumably the oldest living Black Miami-Dade Police officer and likely the oldest living officer in Miami-Dade, Florida, the U.S. and, well, you get the picture. He is the most unique of men, and uniquely representative of a time that has vanished from the memories of too many law enforcers in South Florida.

Gibson began policing at a time when Black officers weren't even allowed to arrest white people. Some 40 years ago, he worked the desk at Station 4, where he met a wide-eyed rookie officer named David Greenwell. Greenwell now checks up on George as part of his duties as the PBA executive vice president and as someone George remembers as being like a son.

The legend of George Gibson is almost too incredible to believe but one Greenwell has known for more than 40 years. It is a story he believes will tell members just how long a way law enforcing in South Florida has come.

George is part Jackie Robinson, part Wyatt Earp and even a little Dr. King or Malcolm considering he was an ordained preacher. He could stand up to anybody all by himself — and he had to that night he arrested Oscar King.

"My partner, he quit. He couldn't take the danger," Gibson disclosed. "But after that night, the people of Perrine and Goulds and Princeton, all the way to Florida City, they heard about the name of Officer Gibson. And peace came to the area."



### Looking for Black officers

Gibson actually turns 99 on April 27, but it's close enough to give it to him now. He says he feels great, and the way his voice never skipped a beat during the hourlong conversation to tell some of the legendary stories seemed to confirm that his heart probably has never skipped one either.

Beating almost as strongly as last April 27, when one of the officers in the MDPD knew he had turned 98 and posted it on Facebook. Police departments from all over the world recognized that with likes, posts and best wishes.

"And it made me feel better," George shared.

He was born on Long Island in the Bahamas and came to the States with his family as refugees in '31. There was no Coast Guard watching out or even U.S. Customs officers, so they sailed right in on a boat.

"Well, yes, if you want to call it a boat," he quipped.

The family settled in Dania for a few years, then moved to Miami. After serving in the U.S. Air Force, George started a very good job working for a dental supply company.

But he said he started noticing so many problems for Black people in town.

"I realized the sheriff's department was looking for Black officers," Gibson related. "So one day at lunchtime, I went down and interviewed. And I was accepted."

Immediately?

"Immediately, yes," he continued. "There was no police academy then. All they did at that time was give you a uniform and a badge. You had to buy your own gun."

### Crazy enough to go out there

It didn't take long for George to find out why there were so few Black officers on the job in the late '50s, and why he would become such a pioneer and groundbreaker. There was an order back then that Black officers could not arrest white males. And then it was extended to white females.

But he caught a white woman driving under the influence on U.S. 1 near 16th Street. He brought her into the station, and they called him "the bottom of the barrel."

After his partner quit, the department wouldn't give him another one and sent him on calls by himself. They wouldn't even



give George a radio,

"And as a matter of fact, I had to make my reports by phone," Gibson explained. "I would have to find the nearest public phone and call the department."

But none of this ever seemed to faze George. Or stop him. He tells a story about one night during a football game at Harris Field in Homestead. A Black man with an umbrella that had a sharpened point used it to stab a white officer. The way he tells the story, the Ku Klux Klan heard about this, and blood began to boil.

"I was patrolling in the area, and the dispatcher gave me a call to the Redlands," Gibson confirmed. "So I accepted the call."

He added that Lieutenant Joe Willis, a white officer from Alabama, heard the dispatcher give George the call. Willis also heard that the Klan was rallying in the Redlands.

"So Joe Willis asked to meet with me. He said, 'Are you going out there? Do you know what they'll do to you?'" Gibson detailed. "I said, 'Yes, I'm going out there.' He said, 'If you're crazy enough to go out there, I'll go with you.'"

Joe Willis joined George, and they went out there. And George described how he walked right up to the Grand Wizard.

"I said, 'Buster, look, I know why you're riding here. But two wrongs don't make a right,'" Gibson reported. "And he listened to me. They did not march on Homestead that night. And if you want to believe it or not, that Grand Wizard became a friend of mine."

### You could hear the weapons fall to the floor

George's unique combination of nerve and confidence made him a legend. He continued to work Perrine, Goulds, Redlands and other areas around Homestead where income was low and crime was high. He brought calm to the streets.

His captain realized how well he was working and allowed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

George to make his own schedule. But what he really did was operate without a schedule. Residents never knew what time he was coming on duty, and that helped bring control to the streets.

Not that he had to be a hardass or a badass. He clarified that his method was really just good old community policing, talking to the people and letting them know who he was.

“And they let me know who they were,” Gibson verified. “And believe it or not, by associating with the people, everything that happened in the area was brought to me. They didn’t call the police department. They brought it to me. And as a matter of fact, my wife, she became disgusted. She said, ‘Don’t they know there’s a police department they could report to?’”

Still, anything that happened, like a murder or any crime, George took pride in that they would tell him about it first.

“All I had to do was walk in the door, and whoever was involved would come on,” he said. “And I would take them to my police station and book them in.”

But that’s not all that happened when he walked in the door. His dedication, his commitment and his bravery could be best quantified by George showing up at the station on a Saturday night with half a bushel of guns, knives and other weapons that he had confiscated.

“When I walked into one of those juke joints, you could hear the weapons fall to the floor,” Gibson confided.

Those stories made the rounds in the department for more than 20 years. Greenwell heard them, including one in which Gibson walked into a bar and a guy wanted to duel with him. And that he shot it out with the man.

“Do you remember that, George?” Greenwell asked.

He did.

“That was in Perrine at Homestead Avenue and, let’s see, West Indigo Street,” Gibson recounted as if it were yesterday rather than 60 years ago. “It was a small juke joint there, and for some reason he just jumped up and started it. But it didn’t end well for him.”

### **They swore me in to protect life and property**

When Greenwell met Gibson in 1982, he was three years into working the desk as the final wave of his 42-year career. He commanded the operations center at Village Station. Young officers like Greenwell actually knew George as the guy who ran the department, the one they had to see to get their radios and sign out cars.

They also saw him reading the Bible every morning, as did every member of the public who came into the station. One such resident was a pastor with Christ the King Catholic Church, who suggested that Gibson make application to become an ordained minister in the church.

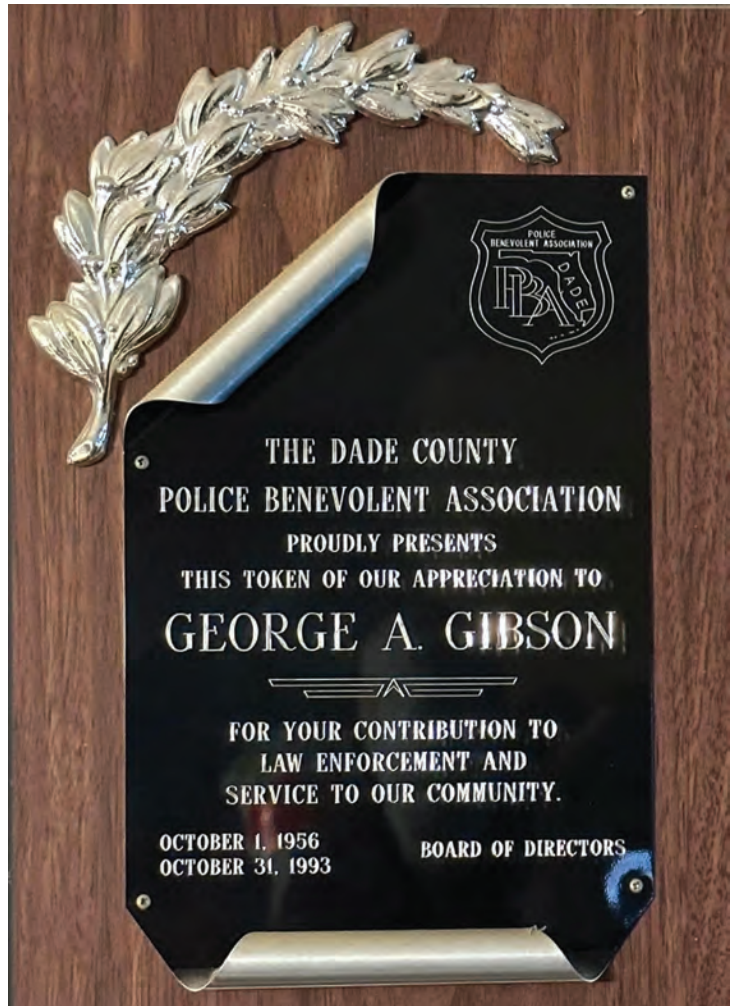
He did, was accepted, wound up preaching on weekends and became the first Black minister to do the Ash Wednesday service. And he served as a preacher for 40 years.

His lifelong partner and wife, Doris, passed away 10 years ago. Their son, Kenneth, served in Vietnam, supplying Agent Orange to helicopters. He passed away last fall at age 77, and George indicates it was probably the result of being in Nam.

So the legend lives on. Taking in all the memories and historical significance of George’s career, Greenwell comes back to what touched him when he first met the man.

“He’s just such a gentleman,” Greenwell praised.

A couple of other questions culminate this tale, starting with why George wanted to do all this. What kept him coming back to the job day after day for 42 years, even though many people shot at him and some of his colleagues took verbal shots at him?



“What I loved about being a police officer is something they could take under consideration today,” he began. “When I went on the police department, they swore me in to protect life and property. And that’s exactly what I intended to do. And that’s what I did all my career. And, as a matter of fact, I never ran to the police department to get a paycheck or anything. It could stay there for a week or two. My intention was to keep the community safe.”

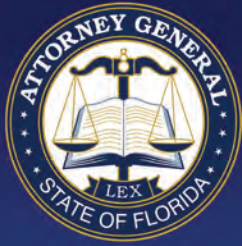
He knows it was mission accomplished by all the people who still call and a few who even come to visit him. These are people he used to bring groceries to or help them in other ways when their families could not always put food on the table.

You can tell that the story about George Gibson does not end. In fact, we will be back next year at this time to celebrate George’s 100th birthday. Until then, he has some parting words for his sisters and brothers doing the job he loved, the one he put his life on the line for to protect life and property and pave the way for so many who can now call it such a worthwhile career.

“I would tell them to keep doing the job and remember that they’re there to protect life and property and make sure the community is safe,” Gibson imparts. “When I was a police officer, and if you were out cutting your yard, I would stop to find out how you are doing. And that is what made me so good in the police department because the people knew they could trust me to bring me information. The most important thing, the reason you would be a voice to the police department, is that you have to communicate. And that’s what’s missing today.”

Thanks for the memories, George.

And thank you for your service.



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# You Deserve a Break Today

Former Miami lieutenant and his family back the blue with safe spaces for officers to rest and work at their McDonald's franchises throughout South Florida



■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

Former City of Miami Lieutenant Emilio Cabrera remembers those days and night on patrol, sitting in a car, writing the report or catching your breath after the call just handled. Days could be hot and sweaty. Nights, well, scribbling by the light of the interior light was the necessity.

"We want it to be dark in there when you're just busy writing, or the next thing you know, you've got a gun in your ear," Cabrera recalled about when he worked the road in the mid '70s and an unsavory might sneak up on you if the lights were on inside the patrol car.

So when he left the job after 10 years on to become a McDonald's franchise owner, Cabrera immediately invited his sisters and brothers into the restaurant. He reserved tables so they could write their reports and make their phone calls, and he joined them for a cup of coffee, forever being one of the boys in blue.

As report writing became computerized and cars turned into offices on the street, cops on patrol seemed to live in them. Until the post-Floyd era hit, and officers needed a place to get away from it all.

Well, now each of the 18 McDonald's the Cabrera family owns has a designated, reserved "Police Workspace." As the oasis under the golden arches all around Miami, as well as in North Miami, Miami Gardens, Sunny Isles and surrounding cities and towns, came online, South Florida PBA members had the honor of posting signs noting where they can have a happy meal, a happy beverage or just rest.

And the smiles on their faces as these havens rolled out seemed to say (ba-da-ba-ba-ba), *I'm lovin' it.*

"It's refreshing again to have business owners in the community that want to just open up their doors to where the officers can come in and write a report, get out of the car or stretch your legs. I think it's great," South Florida PBA President Steadman Stahl recognized. "I hope that there are more businesses that will follow suit."



## Good time, great taste

Cabrera and his wife, Hilda, whom he married right out of the academy in 1973, started E.C. Management Corporation (ECM), which, along with their children, Anthony and Stefanie, own and operate the McDonald's. When it comes to law enforcement, *they do it all for you.*

ECM includes in its mission promoting positive relationships between the local police departments and the community. That only starts by coordinating with the local departments in each of their restaurant areas to host events such as Coffee with a Cop or Cookie with a Rookie and accentuating opportunities for community members to ask questions, voice concerns and get to know their neighborhood officers.

In her role as ECM's community outreach coordinator, Ana

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



Emilio and Hilda Cabrera, center, along with their children, Anthony and Beatriz Cabrera (left) and Stefanie and Bryan Bentancourt, have created police workspaces at the McDonald's they own and operate throughout South Florida.



Emilio Cabrera, left, chats with an officer from the City of Miami, where he used to work, at one of the police workspaces in a McDonald's he owns and operates with his family.

**MCDONALD'S** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

Margarita Martinez maintains contact with local police officers if they need something from the McDonald's, or the McDonald's need something from them. Like many fast-food establishments, they have issues with the homeless or incidents that make it helpful to have officers around.

"I do enjoy it because I get to know a lot of them on a human level. I mean, they're really great people," Martinez confirmed. "When I'm at a McDonald's, I'll call one of our neighborhood resource officers, and I'll say, 'Hey, are you in the area? You want to meet me for some coffee?'"

During one of these conversations with a City of Miami officer, she heard how some establishments used to have a police work area or a workstation. He also told her that having to deal with some of the anti-police sentiment contributed to creating a need for them again.

It didn't take much to convince the Cabrera family to provide new police workspaces. A few phone calls and emails to a printer later, she had the materials to declare the areas in each Mc-

Donald's for police. Asking officers to come in to post the signs proved to be more than a photo op.

"It was because Emilio was a police officer, and that's his way of giving back to these guys because he knows exactly what they live through day to day," Martinez added. "They're human just like the rest of us. So they need to feel appreciated, and this is the least we can do."

Hilda noted how ECM's support for local law enforcement also is part of the commitment to being a good neighbor. And it's why they were right there to participate in feeding first responders who worked the scene of the Surfside condominium collapse.

The payoff, she added, is sights like mounted unit officers on horseback ordering from the drive-thru at their McDonald's in Davie.

"We want the customers to feel safe. We want our employees to feel safe. And we want the officers to feel safe," Hilda continued. "So it's great to have them feel that they can come in, sit for a while and do the reports."

**The simple joy of McDonald's**

Emilio quickly moved up in patrol to become a sergeant, then did tours training officers at the academy, in homicide and with motors. Then, he moved to SIU, handling local matters with politicians and also assisting the DEA in some investigations. From there, he moved up to lieutenant.

He was involved in a case trying to apprehend people who were robbing local fast-food chains. After they made the arrest, a McDonald's liaison offered a friend of Emilio's who worked in motors a job working in security. That led to one opportunity for Emilio to join McDonald's as a prospective owner-operator. And then a second.

Finally, on the third attempt, he grabbed a bucket and mop and realized McDonald's was his kind of place. Having just finished his master's, Emilio would go to McDonald's training – working for free – before or after his tour.

"He had to learn everything, so he would come, take off his police uniform, put on the McDonald's uniform, and every day, either open the store or close the store," Hilda reported. "I was pregnant with Stefanie while we were doing all this, and everybody thought we were crazy."

Master's in hand and 2 1/2 years of training and waiting for McDonald's, Emilio was ready to own and operate. The location in Perrine would be perfect for the Cabreras because they lived near there and Anthony and Stefanie were still years away from starting their own McDonald's training.

Corporate called with an offer to buy the store on Biscayne Boulevard at 79th Street. There was a good reason for that.

"When we got the offer for that restaurant, we considered it even though it was a bad area of town," Hilda recalled. "But we were lucky that because of his police background, they thought he was the right person to handle that store. This was May 1, 1983."

Fast forward 40-plus years. Anthony and his wife, Beatriz, and Stefanie and her husband, Bryan Bentancourt, now handle most of the day-to-day operations. But the police workspaces have been a breath of McYouth for Emilio.

Many of the photos Martinez has circulated of the workspaces coming online show Emilio having a cup of coffee with an officer from that local department. Or chatting outside with motors officers.

"I'm still a cop," he mused.

Of course, there is the feeling that it's a good time for the great taste when officers come into the workspaces. But it's more about McDonald's being their kind of place for law enforcement officers and for them deserving a break today and every day.

Judging by the number of officers who came out for the sign postings/workspace openings, timing could not have been better for giving them a break room on the road. Martinez noticed how much they were lovin' it.

"Oh, I mean, they love it. They love it," she exclaimed. "They're thankful. They're appreciative of the fact that we appreciate and basically have their backs, too."

When Stahl met Martinez at a Governor DeSantis press conference in Miami-Dade during February, he wanted to get the word out about the workspaces right away. He wasn't the only one. Local TV news was already doing a story on it.

The PBA president was elated and hopes others will be motivated by this business stepping up to make the community safer and support the police.

"I was really taken back when I heard about it, and I'm just so happy to meet people like this," Stahl declared. "It makes me more and more proud of the officers I represent and the community we all work with. I think it's a win for the police. It's a win for the community. It's a win for the businesses. It's a win-win-win for everybody."





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# Environmentally Friendly

## MCSO deputy goes above and beyond — and below — to protect natural resources in the Keys

■ BY DAN CAMPANA

Every cop has *the* story.

*The* arrest they talk about for years for one reason or another.

*The* case that makes other cops take notice.

Sheriff's Deputy Willie Guerra's 31 years on the job in Monroe County—the last 23 protecting the beautiful natural resources of Florida's Middle Keys — culminated with him hiding inside a garbage can at sunrise to nab an elusive lobster poacher.

"This guy was good. He had night vision, the works. He'd go out there, load up, come back in ... change his clothes, go to the roadside and pick up a bag of 300, 400, 500 undersized lobsters and everything that he would pillage from traps," Guerra explained, adding that the suspect knew how to spot police and conservation officers trying to track him down.

"One night, I was able to catch him in the act," Guerra continued. "I actually had to sit in one of those circus-clown garbage cans ... had to take out the bag and jump inside the garbage can. He was like five feet away from me, scanning the cars. I ended up arresting him."

It was a big get for Guerra and the area's lobster businesses, and it came a year after law enforcement first tried to take the suspect down. A mistake on the arrest warrant kept him out of custody — until that fateful morning. As Guerra wrote up the case, he connected the man to the warrant, which racked up a ton of charges on the guy.

"We realized we had a huge violator that's been terrorizing the commercial fishermen for years. They were able to charge him for every single lobster, jacking up the bond to \$1.5 million," Guerra said. "That's one of thousands of cases, but that one stands out. I remember getting calls from Alaska Game and Wildlife saying, 'How the hell do you guys get [that bond] on a lobster?'"

Guerra's greatest hit might be the first time the blotter showed charges on possession of a speared lobster — it's illegal to ever spear a lobster — or possession of an undersized red grouper. Those same reports include great details of the time Guerra met suspects who denied they had caught any fish as they walked with a cooler containing 37 undersized mangrove snappers. Then there was the man Guerra watched spear a lobster and put it in his pocket.

Guerra covers a large stretch between Islamorada and Big Pine on land and water. Born in Chicago, Guerra grew up in South Florida with a love of the water, fishing and the overall natural environment. He spent several years working in state corrections and with MDC&R, where he said he honed his communications and people skills, before getting back to nature in his current role.

"This job gave me the opportunity to be around something I really enjoyed, especially down here in the Keys. This is such a special place," 50-year-old Guerra said. "If you really enjoy the water and



fish, you understand how delicate it is. On top of that, we rely on the resources. It's a big thing for our county ... we lose our resources, we lose a lot of the tourists. They come here for the fishing."

That's why protecting lobster traps and ensuring fishermen only keep what's legal are vital to keeping businesses alive in Guerra's territory.

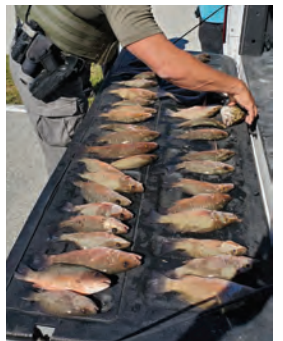
"We're extremely tough on the resources cases," he added.

Scroll through the Monroe County Sheriff's Office Facebook page, and you'll see many highlights of Guerra's tireless work to protect those resources. Visit the area, and you'll see the signage Guerra championed to help the public understand how to fish legally.

Guerra also gives back to the community and schools through traditional initiatives like Toys for Tots and his own efforts to provide food and other items to families in need. There are many social media posts of Guerra helping to gift bikes to local youth in another of his charitable endeavors.

"That's another little thing that I've been doing for many years," Guerra noted. "I'm pretty proud of it."

Pride in his work is a way of life. It has to be for a deputy who is not afraid to wait in a garbage can to catch a criminal.



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# Take this job and...

## A look at what one department is doing about the challenges of recruiting and retaining officers

By Mitchell Krugel

### Help Wanted

#### Coral Gables Police Department Now Hiring

Seeking officers who don't want to continue at their departments but don't want to hang it up  
Excellent opportunity for FRS members thinking about retirement

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An actual help-wanted ad for the Coral Gables Police Department might be worded a bit differently. Or detail the qualifications, experience wanted and flexible work schedule available.

But job opportunities in Coral Gables include all that is noted above and illustrate how this department is like many others in trying to find qualified officers. Trying to staff up. Figuring out how to hire enough cops to keep the community safe.

The Coral Gables Police Department currently is budgeted for 210 full-time officers, which includes an increase of 15 during the past three years. There are 30 or so vacancies in the department, and Chief Ed Hudak would like to make a number of those available to veteran officers from across the state and across the country.

The hiring philosophy that will become apparent at many departments is bringing in some seniority without that having an adverse effect on existing staff. And actually have a positive impact.

"Similar to what Miami-Dade's got going on now, too, where they're looking for certified officers from other departments," Hudak pitched. "So I'm looking for those officers who want to work a few more years so we can continue to build the bench. I think we give great benefits, and it is a city that fully supports its police department. It's a very service-oriented department, you're not going call to call and the salary is not going to be too bad."

That salary is about to get a minimum of a 22-percent bump during the next three years with the breakdown at a 9.8 percent raise the first year, 6.5 percent the second year and 3.5 percent the third year. (Disclaimer: The Coral Gables collective bargaining rep – not currently the South Florida PBA – is asking for a 30-percent raise over the three years and proposes paying for it by not filling the 30 vacancies. At the same time, that union has reportedly argued that the department does not have enough personnel to keep the city safe.)

Supplemental benefits include 300 hours of overtime that will also be counted toward the retirement benefits. And officers in FRS or another retirement system who come to Coral Gables can keep 10 percent of their money because they won't have to contribute the 10 percent to the city's retirement system. So they get a 401K for which the city matches contributions.

"We can put them in positions to apply for the mounted patrol or K-9. We also have SWAT positions that are open," Hudak detailed. "There's a lot of internal stuff we would look at to give people the opportunity."

Rather than looking at it as trying to pilfer officers from other

departments, Hudak advocates for an approach that might become the way to perpetuate the highest levels of policing. Coral Gables, he said, could be a destination for officers who might be worn out in current jobs but aren't ready to retire.

"I think what it does for our department is bring a level of experience that we don't have right now," he elaborated. "If I can bring in some retired people who are willing to impart some wisdom and build up that knowledge base, the department as a whole benefits."

Hudak added an important qualifier for this strategy.

"I'm not looking to replace the upward mobility of our younger officers," he emphasized. "But I do think there's a bunch of women and men that are not quite ready to stop being a cop but may not want to do the grind that larger departments have."

As an example of how the influx can have a profound impact, Hudak looks at what filling vacancies can do for work schedules. Right now, Coral Gables officers are doing five eight-hour tours in a work week.

But getting officers coming in through patrol would enable the department to go back to four 10s per work week. That would also provide ample opportunity to take on extra-duty work because the department is using salary savings to pay the overtime needed to make sure it is staffed up on the road.

The recruiting pitch does not just include taking advantage of the many options like bike patrol, the downtown unit, motors and a crime suppression team, among other opportunities.

"We've had troopers that have come to traffic and homicide, so there's a lot of different options that we can give people," Hudak added.

There's also a passing of the baton that officers can effect here that might be more important to policing than ever. With the political influences on the job throughout the country, it's not the just the older heads who will be valuable to departments, but the cooler heads as well. They are the ones needed to teach the younger officers how to handle the current climate of policing.

So in offering some last words, Hudak has some words of advice that might make a final tour on the job within the calmer, less call-heavy confines of Coral Gables a valuable option.

"Officers retire, they get a couple months under their belt and they're losing their minds because we are not wired to go from 110 miles an hour to zero," he explained. "So if officers are willing to put a little more time into it, it's a life that a lot of cops I'm thinking would want to get."



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# Another 'Classic' event for the PBA

With the help of Louis and Kiko, the union pumps up the volume on its charity golf outing

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL  
■ PHOTOS BY LINDA CARTA

Players and participants and supporters and sponsors experienced the South Florida PBA Golf Classic in full force when their rounds hit the "ParTee Hole." Golfers also brought the "Love," which was the mission for the day.

And the second annual Golf Classic on March 15, held this year at Redland Golf & Country Club in Homestead, became another example of how the PBA has upped its games. The Classic was another event produced through the PBA's partnership with Louis Fonseca and Roberto "Kiko" Suarez, whose expertise in marketing, promotion and accoutrements has added off-the-charts fun to the association's fundraising.

Fonseca and Kiko form the tantalizing tandem that created the Pig Roast Bowl Series. Their handiwork made the second annual PBA Pig Roast competition on Dec. 9 the biggest event of its kind in the country, with 110 teams participating.

The way they helped crank up the Golf Classic featured the ParTee Hole, another one called "Beat the Broadcaster" and sponsorship from Miami-Dade Commissioner Roberto J. Gonzalez. Their signature spiced-up, post-round buffet, complete with sushi and some shakers to quench players' thirst, elevated participation to a sellout of 144 players, who generated another delectable donation to the PBA's Love Fund.

"Just spicing up what's already kind of instilled, just giving it a little bit more, like a boost or charge," Fonseca pledged. "We just made it a real big party, so that's kind of what we're all about right now."

Fonseca is a Marine Corps veteran who has forged a noted career in the sports and entertainment industries. He has staged many philanthropic and charitable events featuring professional athletes, musical performers and other resources, pulling from being involved with Miami-Dade nightlife in his youth.

"We're all about backing the blue, backing our first responders and being very community-involved," Fonseca added. "I'm a Marine veteran as well. So we always pay it forward in giving back to our community, and it's very important for us in creating community-engaging events."

Suarez is renowned as "Kiko" for the segment he starred in and produced on NBC 6 and Telemundo 51 for three years called "Que riko con Kiko." He retired from television six months ago and started the Kiko Hospitality Group, which does events, marketing and restaurant consulting.

The Pig Roast Bowl Series is a production from Louis Kiko Hospitality, which combines Fonseca's expertise in entertainment with Kiko's expertise in food. They have been friends for more than 20 years, and putting together pig roasts that bring



CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

The 2024 South Florida PBA Golf Classic champions.

# Classic moments from the South Florida PBA golf outing



## ANOTHER CLASSIC CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

out the flavor of Cuban and Hispanic cultures has become their labor of love.

They are involved with barbecue and cooking competitions at the national level, including being members of the Kansas City Barbecue Society (KCBS) and competitors in the KCBS Jack Daniel's World Championship Invitational Barbecue. But they have made the PBA's Pig Roast Bowl Series the biggest barbecue event in the country by inspiring members to bring their culture, their secret sauce and their wanting to win to create a recipe for unforgettable events.

"It's all for love, and there's a lot of fun because the officers are out there competing and talking s--- to each other," Kiko declared. "It's all fun and games, but don't mess with their roastin' pigs."

Prior to inaugurating the Pig Roast, Fonseca and Kiko were

introduced to PBA President Steadman Stahl through a connection from Julio "JP" Priede, a member of the board of directors.

"We told Steadman and his team, 'Let's take this to the next level within law enforcement and backing the blue,'" Fonseca added. "It's not only about a pig roast, it's a campaign. It's a campaign of backing the blue."

Fonseca and Kiko worked closely with the PBA on the first Golf Classic in 2023. They used their contacts in the sports, entertainment and culinary worlds, as well as philanthropy, to promote the Love Fund, which helps families of fallen officers and officers who have been catastrophically injured in the line of duty.

"Everybody knew what the PBA was or what the letters meant, but never really knew what it stood for," Fonseca submitted. "We bring in a different market, a different space all around and give light to what the South Florida PBA is, what

it stands for, what they do and what their involvement is when they call and ask you for a donation.”

Kiko was in when Fonseca pitched him the idea of partnering with the PBA. But then, when Kiko was recovering from eye surgery, Stahl came to visit him at his house. They realized they had a lot in common, including coming from the same neighborhood. From that point on, Kiko was all-in on the PBA.

“Bro, this guy’s a really good person, you know what I’m saying, and the PBA is the top of the cops,” Kiko added. “They’re just all about positive vibes, and Steadman has been a class act since we met him, so that’s kind of the reason why we backed them so much. Now, it’s whatever they need and we’re there for them.”

Evidence of how they spiced up the Golf Classic, how much fun they made it, could be seen in the photos of many of the



A group of players show how much fun they had at the PBA Golf Classic.

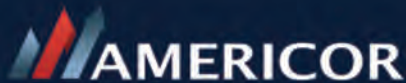
foursomes that participated. There seemed to be at least one player flashing a big thumbs-up.

Most likely because it was a memorable day filled with all the surprises, courtesy of Louis and Kiko.

“For us, it’s you got to go out of the box, and we think that way,” Kiko accentuated. “You got to put up a show that people are going to remember. They’re going to talk about it, and they’re not going to forget about it until the next time, until the next event.”



Fun at the Beat The Broadcaster hole.



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# REFLECTIONS

Catching up with a renowned South Florida PBA Member

## A Groundbreaking Career

Joann Roberts blazed a trail for all female officers in South Florida

■ BY DAN CAMPANA

If she had to, Joann Roberts would do her entire law enforcement career all over again.

Even at 89, if she could, Roberts would proudly wear the badge to serve her community once more.

"I'll tell you something, if I were capable today and I were young enough, I'd still be doing it," Roberts said. "Every time ... when I hear a siren, I want to go."

Roberts' journey as a law enforcement officer for three decades is filled with moments of significance, beginning with being the only woman in her academy class in 1956. And plenty of moments that seem unbelievable by modern police and societal standards.

When she reflects, however, she does so in a matter-of-fact way that speaks to her resilience and commitment to the job she couldn't stay away from.

"The main thing I loved about it was serving the public. I was doing something that was to benefit them," she explained. "I started when most women weren't in law enforcement. I broke a lot of glass ceilings, but I also suffered a lot of indignity, which wouldn't happen in today's time. But the '50s, '60s and '70s were a different time."

So, how did a woman decide in the 1950s to become a police officer? In its simplest version of the story, her husband, Fred, told her one day he had applied to what was then known as the Dade County Sheriff's Department. She wanted to understand what he was getting himself into, so she applied to the Metropolitan Police Academy with no real intention of going into police work.

However, just before graduation, Sheriff Thomas J. Kelly interviewed her out of curiosity about her being the sole woman in the academy.

"He said, 'Why do you want to be in law enforcement?' and I said, 'I don't, I was just trying to find out what my hus-

band was going to be doing so I could relate to him,'" Roberts recalled. "He said, 'We need women in law enforcement.' The man was very much before his time."

And so it began for Roberts. While Fred began a 30-year run with Dade — their two children also worked in law enforcement — she got her start in 1959 by doing shoplifting details and, occasionally, undercover. The latter wasn't too hard because Roberts didn't get to dress the part of a cop.

"I was called a policewoman and couldn't wear a uniform," Roberts shared. "But I carried my Smith & Wesson .38 Police Special in my purse."

For the ensuing four or five years, Roberts endured men "with the IQ of wallpaper paste" — fellow officers and superiors alike — telling her she couldn't be the police because she was female. Within a handful of years, it caught up to her, so she quit to become a teacher.

"That was a mistake because, basically, I don't like kids," she quipped. "I just realized I missed law enforcement, and I liked what I had the possibility and chances to do."

Roberts taught science and world history at Carol City Junior High School but immediately applied for the academy again after she fulfilled her teaching contract. Unlike her first time in the academy, Roberts wasn't the only woman during her second stint, which began in the early 1970s.

Things were better, though not necessarily great, once she got rehired, went to the academy again and was assigned to Dade's Northwest District. The working conditions for females back then would be almost unfathomable today. The female officers didn't have their own restroom, which meant sharing one with the public or jail inmates. Even with four women on the force, they didn't have a locker room.

"We wore our uniforms to and from work so we didn't have to change



### Joann Roberts' Record

- Only female officer to graduate from Metropolitan Police Academy in 1956
- Hired by Dade County Police after graduation, but left to become a teacher in the 1960s
- Left teaching, re-attended the academy and rejoined Dade County Sheriff's Office in the '70s
- Worked as SRT negotiator and background investigator in the 1970s and '80s before retiring from Dade County in 1984
- Hired by Orange County Sheriff's Office in 1987 and retired from the job for good in 2002



Joann Roberts with her husband, Fred, also a Dade County officer. Although she had to combat inequity, Roberts has fond memories of Miami-Dade for everything from the long hours and days during the riots in the

'80s to her time spent as a negotiator on the Special Response Team and as a background investigator for new recruits. She retired in 1984 to travel with her husband for a few years before the itch struck again.



By the late 1980s, in her mid-50s, Roberts hooked on with the Orange County Sheriff's Office, where she worked patrol, courts and anything else she was

asked to do.

After about 15 years with Orange County, Roberts wrapped up her amazing run, a career that gives her perspective on what women in law enforcement need to contemplate.

"Never let anybody tell you that you can't do it," Roberts declared. "You can do it. It's not a man's job, it's a person's job."



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# Members Only Section

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

## MDPD makes statement to stop human trafficking

The message on the walls of Miami-Dade Police Department districts was loud and clear: “Lives are not for sale,” as noted in Miami Lakes.

And that you can't put price tags on human hands, as the MDPD Intracoastal District displayed. These exhibits, as well as the one in the Midwest District with hands reaching out for freedom, the human silhouettes behind bars in the Kendall District and the faces of human trafficking in Cutler Bay, made bold statements about one of the biggest tragedies affecting the U.S.

The Miami-Dade Police Department hosted a districtwide

competition in January for National Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Many districts created their own version of a “stop human trafficking” mural, with symbols of handprints and blue ribbons posted in their lobbies.

Human trafficking is a form of modern slavery. There are cases all over the United States, but Florida ranks No. 3 in human trafficking nationwide. There were more than 2,000 cases reported in 2023 from the state of Florida alone.

To report human trafficking to law enforcement in Florida, call 855-FLA-SAFE.



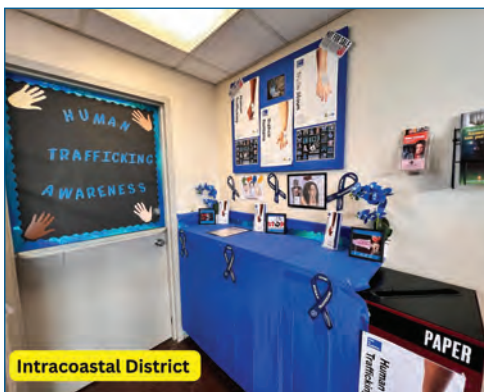
Town of Cutler Bay



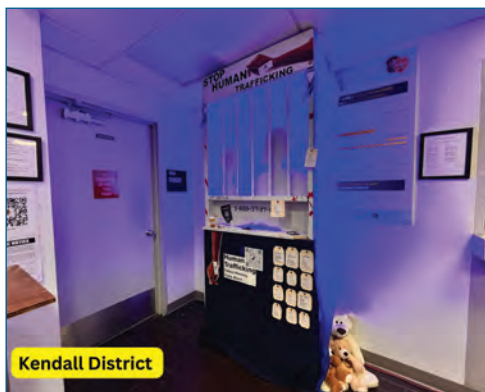
Hammocks District



Midwest District



Intracoastal District



Kendall District



Town of Miami Lakes



Northside District



Northwest District



Village of Palmetto Bay



South District

## Award-winning responses from Miami-Dade police officers

The Miami-Dade Police Department has had a lot to celebrate the past few weeks. Several of its officers have been rewarded for their recent hard work.

On March 6, Air Support Unit Officers Brendan Gill Jr. and Carlos Torres Jr. received Lifesaving Awards for locating a missing woman in the water.

Then, on Feb. 22, Marine Patrol Officer Marvin Flores was awarded a Bronze Medal of Valor for helping out after two boats crashed into each other while out on the water. There were serious injuries reported in the incident, and Flores came to the rescue. On that same day, Officer Robert Brutto also received a Lifesaving Award.

Finally, on Feb. 14, local Commissioner Roberto J. Gonzalez awarded Sergeant-at-Arms Jamie Ritcher with a proclamation for his involvement in a traffic accident. Additionally, Ritcher received a Lifesaving Award from Miami-Dade Police.



Miami-Dade Sgt. Jamie Ritcher, center, was honored for his response to a traffic accident.



MDPD Officers Brendan Gill Jr., third from left, and Carlos Torres Jr., third from right, received Lifesaving Award.

## Monroe County Sheriff's Department recognizes best of 2023

Monroe County Sheriff Rick Ramsey recognized three employees for their outstanding service to the community at the annual Officer of the Year ceremony.

Detention Deputy of the Year Sgt. Jaiquilla Johnson, Reserve Deputy of the Year Tiffany Rodda and Mary Beth Harris of Centennial Bank were presented with honors in Marathon on Feb. 9.

Also recognized were Deputy of the Year Sgt. Joel Slough and Support Person of the Year Marsha Todd.



Alexandre Gaufillet, left, receives the Key West Police Department Officer of the Year award.

## Key West member makes his way through traffic to be named Officer of the Year

Officer Alexandre Gaufillet has been selected as Key West's 2023 Officer of the Year.

"He is a conscientious, dedicated and determined police officer who works very hard to make positive changes in his everyday duties," said Deputy Chief Randy Smith, who presented the honor at the March 7 ceremony.

Officer Gaufillet received praise from the department for going above and beyond his work as its traffic unity coordinator. He was recognized for demonstrating his passion for helping the community through leading traffic and bicycle safety campaigns for the citizens of Key West, scheduling police escorts and maintaining the traffic unit's assets, and through his involvement in the Law Enforcement Liaison Program.

"He consistently displays great leadership skills as well as multifaceted, comprehensive knowledge that has proved invaluable and essential to this department and the citizens of our community," Smith added.



From left, Monroe County Sheriff Rick Ramsey with Officer of the Year honorees Sgt. Jaiquilla Johnson, Deputy Tiffany Rodda and Mary Beth Harris.



## Honoring the lifesavers in Key West

Key West police officers once again showed their ability to be at their best with lives on the line. Recent heroic acts were recognized at a ceremony on March 14. Led by Deputy Chief Randy Smith, the awards recognized some of their own for saving lives.

Sgt. Cynthia Williams and Officer Andrew Litton were working port security at Mallory Square on Jan. 14 when a man collapsed, needing medical attention. Both officers utilized their CPR training right away. It turns out, the man was running a marathon when he collapsed in a crowded area, but because of these two officers' lifesaving actions, he survived.

On Sept. 2, 2023, Officer Kristopher Bouvier was in a similar situation when he was dispatched to a scene where a man was unconscious. When he arrived, Bouvier found the man had no pulse, and he began administering CPR. Later, Officer Joshua Hesse arrived at the scene to help out, while Bouvier continued CPR. Eventually, paramedics arrived on the scene, and while on the way to the hospital, the man regained a pulse.

On Dec. 26, 2023, Officer Erik Roberts responded to a local bar, where he was alerted that a man was overdosing. When he arrived, he immediately gave the man Narcan, but that didn't do very much. Roberts gave him a second dose of Narcan, which improved the man's condition.



Key West Lifesaving Award winners Officer Andrew Litton, left, and Sgt. Cynthia Williams, center, with Deputy Chief Randy Smith.



Key West Lifesaving Award winner Officer Erik Roberts, left, with Deputy Chief Randy Smith.

## Miami-Dade corrections officers out in the community

Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation officers fingerprinted a different crowd. The officers took out their Fingerprinting for Kids Safety detail, which they often do at events around the community.

As officers continued their efforts to connect with the community, they attended several events in March where they provided fingerprinting and more. The MDCR Honor Guard participated in the Miami-Dade County Human Resources Glow to Thrive 5K, while its community outreach team brought smiles to the 5th Annual Carnival on the Mile in Coral Gables and the Calle Ocho event.

The Miami-Dade officers took these opportunities to recommend that parents get their children fingerprinted. Every person has a unique set of fingerprints that stay the same from the time they are born, making them the best way to identify a child if they go missing.



## Sweetwater police officers receive a big thank-you

Family members of a victim in a recent case showed their appreciation for the Sweetwater police by making a giant homemade thank-you card. They filled the card with messages of gratitude and completed their heartfelt gesture with a basket of candy for the officers.

One victim wrote on the card, "Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your non-stop efforts in getting justice for my daughter. You will forever have a place in my heart."

The family just wanted to bring a smile to the officers' faces, as they posted on social media.

Sweetwater members responded with a post of gratitude for this overwhelming act of appreciation. The post read:

"It's certainly not necessary at all but we are so grateful to have this amazing reminder of why we do what we do! Thank you so much!"



## The Fresh Prince of FIU BBC

The Fresh Prince of Bel Air traded in his California lifestyle for the beaches of Miami. Will Smith is no stranger to the ways of South Beach — and South Florida, for that matter — having released the single "Miami" in 1997.

Smith is known for hanging out with the Men in Black, but this time he was hanging out with the men and women in blue on Florida International University's Biscayne Bay Campus on March 12.

Smith, playing Detective Mike Lowrey, has chased down "Bad Boys" with Martin Lawrence in the past, so it made perfect sense for him to take a picture with the officers at FIU. The department captioned the picture, which it posted on Facebook:

"Now this is a story all about how — Will Smith visited BBC. Thanks for stopping by @willsmith!"

## Congresswoman honors Pinecrest's finest

On Feb. 9, U.S. Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar led a special ceremony to honor Pinecrest Police Chief Jason Cohen and Officers Andres Garcia, Yosdany Viera and Pete Pangakos. They were presented awards to celebrate their exceptional contributions to the safety of the Village of Pinecrest community, part of the 27th Congressional District in South Florida, which Salazar represents.



## Bay Harbor Island kids play chess with a cop

On Feb. 27, Bay Harbor Island members hosted Chess with a Cop. Sharing their knowledge of chess and the spirit of friendly competition, the officers engaged with kids at the Ruth K. Broad Bay Harbor K-8 Center.



# Pizza with a purpose in North Miami

There's nothing like the smell of a fresh, hot pizza.

North Miami members took the opportunity to celebrate National Pizza Day, which happens on February 9, without putting the emphasis on the sausage or pepperoni. Instead, they encouraged local children to use their creativity for a contest they called "Pizza Art."

Officers met up with children from the North Miami Parks

& Rec Department's after-school program. The challenge was for the kids to draw their best works of art all while enjoying some pizza.

The contest also served as a way for the department to celebrate Black History Month. All the artwork became a tribute to Black history from these young artists.



## New South Miami Police Department initiative helps disabled citizens

The South Miami Police Department is announcing a new program aimed at helping those in the community with special needs.

The Persons with Disabilities Registry Program is voluntary and helps those with disabilities be better served during interactions with law enforcement. If a person chooses to be a part of the registry, they will get a sticker to place outside the window of their home, allowing officers to know someone in the home is on the registry.

Additionally, the person with the disability will receive a bracelet to alert officers that they're on the registry, so their emergency contact can be found quickly in the event of a crisis.



## A tribute to crossing guards from Miami Gardens

Crossing the street may seem like a simple task, but in the hustle and bustle of Miami Gardens, crossing guards have become more important than ever.

Feb. 2 marked Crossing Guard Appreciation Day, so Miami Gardens members took the time to thank local crossing guards for all that they do. Members joined students in running an obstacle course set up especially to train crossing guards.

A post on social media also praised these public servants, reading in part: "We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the unsung heroes of Miami Gardens—the dedicated crossing guards who ensure our children's safety daily. Rain or shine, they stand tall, guiding our loved ones across busy streets with care and vigilance."

# Take it to the bank

Planning with Nicolás Valdés-Fauli keeps PBA members from losing sleep over their finances

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

PBA members flocked to union headquarters in Doral the last week of February as if free money were being given away. In a way, it kind of was, but more about that to come.

The PBA Hall filled up so quickly because certified financial planner Nicolás Valdés-Fauli was presenting his uniquely impactful rubric to managing money for law enforcement officers. Here was counseling beneficial to LEOs who have just come on the job, are in the last year of the DROP or anywhere in between to help them meet their goals and ensure they have enough money to live on now and in those post-job, enjoying-quality-of-life years.

As Valdés-Fauli discusses all the money-management issues during these financial-planning seminars the South Florida PBA has scheduled, he motivates members to find a particular peace of mind at the end of the rainbow. He gets them stoked about what he calls the pillow factor.

“I do say it a lot in seminars and meetings, that I like to provide a great deal of pillow factor,” Valdés-Fauli explains. “I describe the pillow factor as how well do you sleep at night because of not worrying about whether you have enough money. I really enjoy relieving anxiety and helping them truly understand what’s going on in their financial lives, having a good grasp on it and feeling a strong sense of security.”

A good night’s sleep versus lying awake at night worrying about whether you will have enough to get you to and through retirement comes down to a simple feeling of confidence when your head hits the pillow.

“That’s making sure that you are comfortable with your financial planner, that you’re comfortable with your finances, that you’re comfortable with what we’re doing,” details Valdés-Fauli, the leading man in the South Florida PBA-endorsed company Thin Blue Line Financial. “When times are good or when there’s uncertainty in the markets, the pillow factor makes you feel confident with me or whoever is at the helm. And does that person make sure that you have a complete and thorough understanding of the nuances of your benefits.”

The many members who have attended one of his seminars, as well as the hundreds of officers in Miami-Dade he serves as their financial planner, are enjoying a restful eight hours every night. They have experienced his boundless energy, fueled by his avocation of running marathons and doing triathlons. (He just did the Miami Marathon and has run the New York City Marathon.)



Valdés-Fauli’s affinity for going the distance is what has enabled him to become the trusted adviser for the PBA members in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. That has manifested from experiences like working with an officer who was about to come out of the DROP. She had some colleagues who were in the same situation, and they wanted to check out Valdés-Fauli.

“I saw that she was in a particular situation with this huge lump sum obviously paid for with her hard work, and she was in need of help,” Valdés-Fauli relates. “She brought me into her office. I gave a presentation to six or seven people, and it literally just started to grow from there.”

It has grown to members filling up his seminars to capacity. Before the pillow talk, Valdés-Fauli gives them a dose of reality as part of his approach to opening up the hood, looking at the different parts and revealing how they can save people a great deal of money on the expenses associated with managing their deferred comp.

“Sometimes, it’s saving up to 1 percent in fees,” he details about the gains he can generate through the Thin Blue Line Financial differentiators. “When I give tons of presentations at police departments, roll calls and all this stuff, I talk about, ‘Well, this approach costs .02 percent, which is two basis points. Or this one costs 1.3 percent, which is however many more times more expensive. You can see everybody’s eyes gloss over.’”

And then Valdés-Fauli brings it home like a marathoner sprinting that last .2 miles.

“So my next slide is a dozen eggs for \$5 or a dozen eggs for \$485,” he continues. “That’s the visual that basically makes everybody understand. You can either pay \$5 for a dozen eggs, or you can pay \$485 for the same dozen eggs. Now, saving 1 percent sounds negligible, but over the life of your deferred comp that could be tens of thousands of dollars.”

Such results blooming from a simple, empowering way of doing business continue to compel hundreds of members to seek out Valdés-Fauli as their certified financial planner. He grew up in the finance world, doing time on the banking and lending side before getting into Morgan Stanley's financial adviser training program.

Soon after that, Valdés-Fauli said he met his first police officer client, who turned the light on about why this could be his calling.

"I realized it was a tremendously underserved demographic in the sense that this person in particular was in the investment plan and had a lump sum of money that needed to be professionally managed and last her the rest of her life," he recalled.

Of all the metrics and measures of success, the one that matters most to Valdés-Fauli is counting his clients as friends. That way, financial planning for every individual becomes personal in the best sense possible.

So putting their plans together is very much a "we" proposition. To put it into police parlance, Valdés-Fauli is your partner in every sense of "I've got your back."

He takes a three-step approach to creating the plan. The first step is gathering all of the details, going through their numbers and understanding a client's financial current state. The second step is setting financial goals, like what you want to achieve investmentwise.

"I advise them and counsel them on all those good decisions or bad decisions, things that they should avoid," he says.

And then the third step is analyzing a client's financial situation to prepare a plan, taking into account that their level of understanding of financial products and investments can lead to easily being misled.

"I also educate them on all of the pitfalls that they should avoid and the nuances and details of their plans, because law enforcement officers have special benefits that are available to them and them alone," he adds. "I make sure that they fully understand everything that we're doing and the expenses associated with everything."

Here's how Valdés-Fauli puts the money where his mouth is. Your money is your money, not his. He only charges clients a flat fee based on the assets under management.

"I receive no compensation for any recommendations or any implementation," he emphasizes. "So if I say, 'Let's buy this' or 'Let's invest in this,' I'm not getting any financial kickbacks or



Nicolás Valdés-Fauli, center, with South Florida PBA President Steadman Stahl, left, and Vice President Nizam "Ish" Ishmael, is the union's endorsed financial planner.

any compensation or anything for any recommendations. Anything we ever do, it's because it's in their best interest, not mine."

Let's put that to the test. Think of this conversation happening in real time and asking Valdés-Fauli when is the right time in an officer's career to start working on a financial plan?

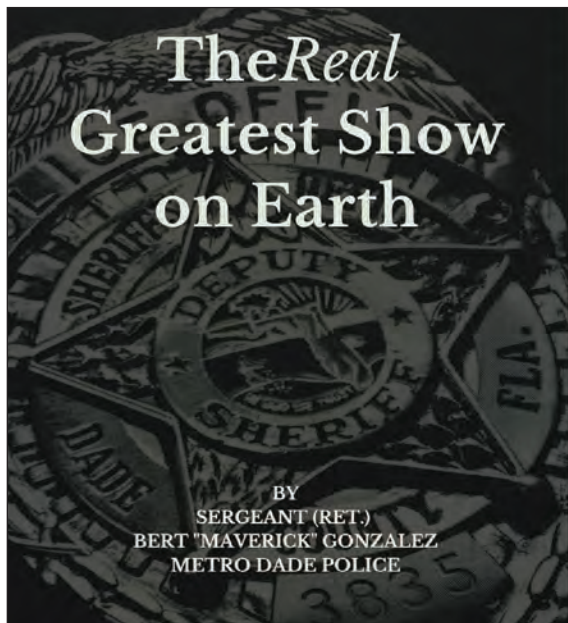
"I guess the right answer is that it's never too late and it's never too early," he advises. "If you're just starting your career, it's an excellent time to familiarize yourself with your deferred comp options, to begin to understand the importance of contributing early and familiarize yourself with the benefit options to avoid some costly, irreversible mistakes."

At any time during your career, financial planning is important to make sure your deferred comp investments are aligned with your investment objectives. It's the path to guard against that nightmare too many officers have, and one that Valdés-Fauli wants to guard against.

"The biggest concern everybody has is running out of money," he says.

If the PBA endorsement isn't enough to confirm why Valdés-Fauli's financial planning is among the best in the long run, then consider what he is encountering on his path to doing his first full Ironman Triathlon this July in Lake Placid, New York.

"The harder you train applies to everything else in your life," he relates. "So you take that discipline to your work life as well."



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# Thank-You Notes TO THE PBA

## For Fallen Officers

Retired Police Officer Rich Samolewicz and his wife, Donna Samolewicz, want to express thanks on behalf of the 9463 Foundation for another successful toy drive that helps present gifts to children of officers lost in the line of duty.

The mission of the 9463 Foundation for Florida's fallen officers is to remember fallen heroes, educate the public and support and assist the families who have lost loved ones while they were serving our community.

The gifts collected filled several trailers for local toy drives and were delivered to the American Police Hall of Fame in Titusville, Florida. They were distributed to children throughout the U.S. who have lost a parent in the line of duty. These gifts were not only sent from the Hall of Fame for Christmas but for birthdays as well.

This thank-you note includes this message:

"We know there are many organizations that you can donate to, but to understand why we are so passionate about the 9463 Foundation, we have taken the liberty of attaching pictures of some of the fallen officers' families receiving these gifts. It was certainly an emotional experience to all that were present.

"More important than the gifts are the lasting relationships forged with the families. We can never replace what they lost but can let them know they are not forgotten. It took your donation to make this possible. We cannot thank you enough for caring about them too."



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