



HOUSTON COUNTY

HOMETOWN HEROES

2025

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A special publication of *The Houston Home Journal*

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HOMETOWN HEROES



ABIGAIL WOLFORT
HOUSTON COUNTY 911 CENTER



JAMES HILL
CENTERVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT




HARVEY BARR
CENTERVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT



A.J. CHILDS
HOUSTON HEALTHCARE — WARNER ROBINS



PAT KIGER
HOUSTON HEALTHCARE — PERRY



ALFRED McCOY
GEORGIA STATE PATROL



JESSE LOCKHART
FLINT ENERGIES



OLAN WILKINS
GEORGIA BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION



ENGINE ONE, SHIFT TWO
WARNER ROBINS FIRE DEPARTMENT



JOHN FORD
WARNER ROBINS POLICE DEPARTMENT




RYAN AMAN
HOUSTON COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT



BRANDI CLIFTON
HOUSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



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PERRY FIRE DEPARTMENT



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HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

ABIGAIL WOLFERT

HOUSTON COUNTY 911 CENTER

By Owen Jones
HHJ Staff Writer

Abigail Wolfert did not realize how passionate she would become about public safety until she started working for the Houston County 911 Center. As a Communication Deputy, she works the radio and answers phone calls, but there is a lot more to her job than that.

"We do call intakes on emergency and non-emergency lines [as well as] EMD calls. In addition, we also dispatch fire, law enforcement, and EMS, depending on your training," she said.

Wolfert is trained to dispatch to fire and law enforcement currently, how-

ever, she can take the EMS calls the 911 center gets. Her job also handles calls from animal control, utilities and calls after hours.

"We reach out to other agencies as we work in correspondence with Georgia State Patrol and other agencies we assist," she said.

Wolfert started her position in March of 2023. She worked the day shift for about a year and a half and then transitioned to the night shift in January.

"Nowadays, it's coming in at 5:15 in the afternoon, and we typically start hitting the ground because everyone is getting off work as those are our busy hours," she said. Wolfert typical-

ly handles Warner Robins Police Department and Houston County Sheriff's Office, which she described as heavy traffic radios.

"When I sit down it is typically [me] fielding radio traffic, finishing up calls from day shift and answering the calls that are coming in," she said.

Wolfert and many of her colleagues have recently been certified for Crisis Intervention Training. She said this certification allows them to handle more mental health calls.

Wolfert was also awarded the Houston County 911 Center Dispatcher of the Year award for 2024.

While on the job, one

The calm among the chaos



instance that has stuck with Wolfert is a call she received from a panicked older woman, needing fire and EMS based on the symptoms she described.

"She really just needed someone to talk her through and calm her down. While they were responding, I was able to sit there and talk with her, go through breathing work exercises with her and get her to a calming point by the time fire and EMS got there," she said. "She was such a sweet old lady and it touched my heart as I think about her a lot."

Before her current role, Wolfert worked at a law office and was looking for another avenue in life, so she applied to work at the 911 Center and continues to love the job.

"Us interacting with the public is so unique, and it's definitely something I love doing everyday and I come to work enjoying it," she said.

Wolfert's coworkers and public engagement are her favorite parts of the job.

"I am fortunate I have had two amazing shifts that I've worked and have completely fallen in love with," she said. "Being able

to see the change that I'm making with that elderly female where I could see the impact of calming her down because she was home alone and I was her lifeline until [fire and EMS] got there."

Wolfert gave the credit of receiving the Dispatcher of the Year Award and the 911 Center's Hometown Hero to her coworkers.

"They are such wonderful people and they make me a wonderful person. I was very shocked at the nomination for both of them," she said. "I am very dedicated to my position and to giving back to everybody, but I can only do that because I have such an amazing team I work with."

Overall, helping the community daily motivates Wolfert to do what she does when working for the Houston County 911 Center.

"I think it is making that change, seeing that difference and hearing the impact that we get. It keeps me coming back every day and enjoying what I do," she said. "My motivation is to be in those crisis situations and to know how to manage them while being that calm in the middle of the chaos."

Following family & finding meaning

By Brianna Smith
HHJ Managing Editor

He didn't follow his father into the military, but Officer James Hill still found a way to serve. Since joining the Centerville Police Department, the Florida native is already proving that protecting a community takes more than a badge, it takes heart, discipline, and the kind of drive that doesn't clock out.

Hill's police career began as a cadet in November 2023. After completing mandated training, he became a patrol officer in March 2024, marking over a year in his current role.

Raised in Merritt Island, Florida, Hill initially pursued a military career after high school. He enrolled at Georgia Military College in Milledgeville but soon discovered that college life was not for him.

Hill discovered that a career in law enforcement best suited his professional goals after exploring various options.

"I wanted to do something exciting. I don't want a desk job; I knew that right off the bat. I wanted to be out on the road every single day and I wanted to do something where it made me feel proud of doing it," he said.

Despite not following his father's exact footsteps, Hill shared his father's deep commitment to community service. While he respected his father's readiness to travel for Army deployments, Hill preferred to remain near home.

"What I do now has kind of been a backbone from him, the morals and the values that he's had, and I wanted to follow in his footsteps, and that's what led me to come here. I realized pretty early on that I don't know how he does it," he said.

Hill also admired his father's outreach into his community as a volunteer firefighter and Cub Scout leader.

"How he had time for anything else I don't know,

because I hardly have time. I pass this job to go home and take care of the dogs. He does it in magical ways and I don't know how," he said.

Speaking of time, Hill begins his workday at 5:45 a.m. with a briefing on overnight incidents. While his preferred duty is school zone enforcement, he also supports other law enforcement or responds to diverse calls.

"The children are our future, and we got to keep them safe. Between then and there, we'll go to a variety of different calls, anywhere from car accidents, domestics, neighbor disputes, or somebody's calling us because their pool got punctured," he said.

He learned the most from taking routine calls. Hill said his most memorable have been car accidents. His initial experience witnessing one left a lasting impression, highlighting the potential dangers inherent in routine activities.

"The impact that can happen from [car accidents] is kind of mind blowing, because it's another day. This is a normal speed. But then you see the crash and the effect of it, and it sinks in on the reality. We're driving around vehicles that we think is safe to us, but how dangerous it actually can be, we tend to look beyond that," he said.

Hill also noted the common issue of shoplifting, especially at Galleria Mall. Although many stores are large corporations, these incidents ultimately lead to price increases. Hill said that handling the routine calls has provided him with valuable practical experience in police work.

"Being good partners with the Galleria Mall has led to a lot of amazing experiences I've had dealing with shoplifters and how to work through that situation of chaos ... and then four hours of paperwork. But the 30 seconds of chaos is worth it," he said.

Amidst the chaos, Hill relies on a systematic, step-

by-step method ultimately focused on safety, emphasizing the critical impact a single second can have.

"You don't realize how long a second is. That's something that I've had to learn going through the chaos. But now I can keep level-headed and keep on going," he said.

Last winter's unusual snowstorm in Houston County was Hill's first time seeing snow, and it provided an enjoyable experience, including a snowball fight with his partner and bringing a snowball to the Chief. The resulting slowdown from road closures also presented Hill with a valuable chance to network with other Centerville depart-

ments between responses to car accidents.

"You get to talk to the other departments: our great public works department, the fire department. You get to sit there on the side of the road, talk to them about everything. The snow day, as cold as it was, was still a really enjoyable experience that I had," he said.

Outside of work, Hill enjoys golfing, fishing and spending time with his girlfriend and two dogs: a Jack Russell Chihuahua mix and a German Shepherd Husky mix. At work, among the routine and the unusual, Hill's common thread is a heart of service to his community, tied to a passion for

the job and a team player mentality.

"At the end of the day, I want to help people. ... I cannot change the world, but if I can change somebody's perspective of the world, then I feel like I accomplished what I needed to get done," he said.

And Hill is honored that his first agency is the Centerville Police Department, a place where he feels he can make a real difference in the community.

"I'm really happy with it," he said. "I wouldn't change it for anything else. To be honest, it's the people who make it."



HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

JAMES HILL

CENTERVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Always striving to raise the bar

before downtime in the evening.

“[It’s] mostly general work around the station, whether it’s cleaning the day room, cleaning the training room, hose rotations. Training follows after daily duties, but mostly general maintenance around the station,” he explained.

Barr’s first emergency call was a trial by fire and, according to him, was not only his most memorable but also what defined the genuine nature of the job.

“That was my first time actually witnessing someone die in front of me. So that was like, ‘Okay, I gotta step up what I’m doing in order to minimize this happening,’” he said.

In that moment, Barr said his mind went back to his training and seeking guidance from leadership.

“Really, it was the task at hand. It wasn’t all these emotions. I was focused on what I had to do,” he said.

Barr described his tenure at the fire department as a continuous journey, a rollercoaster where his colleagues transformed into family. He fondly remembered their camaraderie and diverse personalities, particularly shared moments of humor.

“It’s all this different information, different ways of doing things, and it just kind of all meshes together. You can get that just by

working with different people; we have four to five guys per shift. So you’re always trying something,” he said.

Among his peers, Barr strives to make the job more enjoyable. He wants to motivate everyone and cites Traxler, an engineer, as his favorite colleague.

“I enjoy the job. I try to uplift all the guys that I work with, make their day a little bit better. I know this job can be demanding, so the way I look at it, I would love to see the guys that I work with happy, therefore, they make everyone else happy, therefore, they can perform their jobs better,” he said.

Outside of work, Barr enjoys collecting firearms, relaxing at home with his family and girlfriend, and practicing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and Muay Thai. He said at work, his biggest motivation is constant improvement, which helps him find success amid the challenges of firefighting.

“I don’t like being subpar,” he said. “If I know I can do something a little bit better, I’m going to try to do it better. If I know I can improve this or in this area, I’m going to try. Personally, I think it’s just that drive to always be better that motivates me.”



HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

HARVEY BARR

CENTERVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT

By Brianna Smith
HHJ Managing Editor

For firefighter Harvey Barr, saving lives feels more meaningful than saving profit margins. Once headed for a career in business, he pivoted to firefighting for the Centerville Fire Department, a job he said better aligns with his core values of action, compassion, and constant growth.

Barr initially studied business administration, but found it uninspiring and changed

his focus.

“I’m a very active person and this job is physically demanding. I also care about people, and being in the business world, you don’t get to do that; you have to kind of make logical choices. So far, being a fireman was more aligned with what I wanted at the time,” he said.

Hailing from Kokomo, Indiana, Barr relocated to Middle Georgia in 2021 following his parents’ move and the

establishment of their aircraft painting business. Faced with a decision between further education or employment, he chose to join the fire department in 2022.

Barr’s day on shift begins early, around 5:45 a.m., where he does his morning routine, then reports to the station around 6:30. Then he is responsible for equipment checks and daily duties, training, responding calls, and then a workout

Putting faith in her role as House Supervisor



HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

A.J. CHILDS

HOUSTON HEALTHCARE — WARNER ROBINS

By Sandra Hernandez
HHJ Staff Writer

With patience and faith, House Supervisor A.J. Childs, RN, TNCC, has grown into a leader at Houston Healthcare — Warner Robins.

As House Supervisor, Childs oversees everything, from top to bottom and street to street. She is there to ensure that staff follow policy and receive what they need. Childs is also there for families, patients and everybody under the hospital's roof.

Childs started as an EMT and then became a para-

medic and emergency room nurse, which provided her with training in all kinds of trauma, pediatric, and cardiac care. Childs started her role as a relief house supervisor back in the late 1990s.

Throughout her career, she has taught every class she has taken and learned a great deal from her students. She feels she's well-rounded, which helps her relate to each patient within the hospital.

She has witnessed the hospital's growth over the years, especially in the products staff use. Childs shared they have more things at

their disposal they can better treat people with. She also said they have more educated people coming to work at the hospital.

"Just having staff and trying to build up our staff and be able to treat patients and families better and more efficiently and also quicker in some instances," she said.

Childs shared cases vary — some are long and drawn out, while others can be treated easily.

Childs' day begins by reporting to the person who was on day shift and following up on any tasks that the shift was unable to

complete. Then, the phones start ringing all night long; she shared they carry two phones, and they ring back to back.

Often, Childs will be on a phone call, and when she gets off the call, there will be multiple missed calls. She then follows up, ranging from ER patients needing sandwiches to an ER doctor needing surgical supplies and everything in between.

Over the past 42 years in the medical field, Childs has witnessed many things in her career. She loves her role because it is faith-based, and she is a Christian.

She considers her passion as death and dying because she wants to be with families and patients during the process of crossing over. Childs is always praying God will tell her exactly what to say, and He does it every single time, as well as advising when to be still.

"I get to pray with them, I get to laugh with them, I get to sing with them [and] just try to build them up. I'm put in the position a lot of times of helping families make the decision to withdraw care," she said. "That's a very special thing and it needs to be something that they can be at peace with when they do make that decision."

Childs comes into her shift asking, "Is there anybody we're worried about tonight?" She wants to know who's on the verge of passing away and find out if the patient has family with them. If there is no family there, she will insist someone calls her when the end is near.

"I want to be there because I want to honestly be able to tell the family that they didn't die alone. That's very important to me," she said.

Jessica Paige, Director of Critical and Progressive Care in the Critical Resource Division, believes Childs is Houston Healthcare, describing her as patient and a family advocate. She said people can see Childs' calling every day she comes into work, and she doesn't expect anyone to do anything she wouldn't.

"When she says that about not wanting people to die alone and taking that very seriously, those aren't just words. That is truly who

she is," Paige said. "She is there for everybody, she's there for me [and] she takes care of all of us as well. She's such a huge asset to this hospital and to the community. We're blessed to have her."

When Childs graduated high school in 1983, she had no idea what she wanted to do or who she wanted to be, but one night completely changed her outlook.

Childs and her mom went to the beach, and it was dark during their trip back home. They witnessed a head-on car collision, one of the vehicles blocking the road. Someone had already called 911, leaving Childs and her mother to watch.

She remembered seeing trapped passengers, dead bodies and hearing screams. Childs also watched as ambulances came and went until tow trucks arrived, allowing her and her mother to pass through.

She told her mother that night she would never be that helpless again. The following day, Childs signed up for paramedic school and, from there, progressed from paramedic to ER nurse to her current role as house supervisor.

Childs' favorite part of her job is the people, the employees, the patients and their families. She also enjoys seeing what God can do because He is at work everywhere.

She believes she has a passion for people, and her faith helps her understand what patients are going through at any given time. Childs has patience, which is why she loves her job. She said she wants to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, and every day, she comes to work praying that He will let others see Jesus in her. That is why she comes to work.

Childs' most significant support is her family. She met her husband, a 32-year veteran of the Warner Robins Police Department, on a job while they were responding to a car accident; Childs was a paramedic at the time. They were engaged at three weeks, married at six months and have now been married for 31 years, with two children who serve in healthcare.

"Houston Healthcare just keeps on blessing my life," she said.

A Critical Care Technician looking after her community

By Sandra Hernandez
HHJ Staff Writer

Patricia Kiger has been a core member of Houston Healthcare – Perry as a Critical Care Technician. She is one of the first friendly faces patients see when they walk through the hospital doors, providing ease to both patients and hospital staff.

Kiger works all night in the Emergency Room from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., assisting doctors and nurses in whatever they need.

Kiger starts her shift by escorting patients to their rooms and setting them up with whatever they need, such as a heart monitor that takes a patient's blood pressure every 30 minutes. It also checks their heart rhythm and oxygen levels.

Kiger then runs products to the lab, like blood and urine samples. After a patient leaves, she will clean the rooms. Overall, she gives patients the best care while they are in the hospital.

"I don't think anybody anticipates coming to the ER, but I think they're glad they do have it," she said.

Kiger has worked in the hospital for seven years. She first started on the medical-surgical floor, where they perform hip replacements and knee replacements and care for patients who are ill and require observation for a couple of days. She explained they make sure to get them through whatever crisis they're in.

Recently, she was transferred to the ER, which was a big change for Kiger. However, everything she learned on the medical-surgical floor prepared her to be a better technician.

"It's just a different pace, but they're both wonderful positions to be in because you get to look after people, kind of help them out in a time of need," she said.

She has also built bonds with people over the years. Kiger said they see people at their worst, and they have apologized to her for it, but she always tells them, "you don't have to apologize." She said no one wants to be at the hospital facing a tough moment.

"It's very encouraging to me to be here, to be able to have the role that I have because when I see someone in a bed, it reminds me that could be me in that bed," she said. "I could be in that unfor-

tunate situation that they're in. I'm always reminded of that everyday."

Kiger clocks in early to start obtaining patient reports. During that time, people are coming in from emergencies through EMS ambulances or simply through the front door.

She said they get them out and help them as best as they can. They also determine if the patient needs to be transferred to another hospital. Kiger said their goal is to improve them so they can return home.

Kiger shared that she went back to school but has done so under the radar. Last year, as part of her personal goal, she attended Central Georgia Technical College. Recently, she received her diplomas in Hemodialysis Technologist and Hemodialysis Reuse Technician. She is excited to have accomplished her goals.

"Any way that we can educate ourselves helps us grow in knowledge and to, hopefully, understand and help another individual," she said.

Kiger has also received training at the hospital to make sure staff's accreditations and licenses are up to date. She shared she has a CNA license, meaning she is a Certified Nursing Assistant. Staff also complete an online curriculum, which also gives them credits. They receive basic life support and CPR training to help in certain situations.

Kiger shared that she likes to be "behind the scenes" and observe what's going on. She ascertains what a nurse needs before they need it. Kiger said they never know how busy it will be at night, so she makes sure they have everything available at arm's length.

Kiger appreciates how good her life is. She has seen what others go through, and it allows her to pray for them.

"I just want to be a help and a care to them because they're in a situation they're in and, just to me, makes me more empathetic and compassionate towards them because I can take care of them," she said. "I can offer them that when they can't take care of themselves right now. It's just very humbling to me that I have the opportunity, which is a wonderful one."

Ever since Kiger was young, she always enjoyed health. It was her favorite class in school, and she



HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

PAT KIGER

HOUSTON HEALTHCARE — PERRY

always excelled without having to stress about it. She often enjoyed reading medical information in her free time.

Before working at the hospital, she worked in the lunchroom for the Houston County School System. She loved serving meals and thought it was a wonderful way to serve. Now, she continues to serve her community by being there during times of need.

Kiger's favorite part of her job? The people she works with. She said she has worked with many great nurses and doctors over the years. Kiger believes every day, people learn and grow if they keep their eyes and

ears open. She said there is so much she learns every day just from either observing or asking questions to her peers.

"We all have strengths and gifts and abilities and we just kind of bounce off each other. We know where those strengths are and we just all work very well together in order to make everything great as much as possible here for the individuals that we're looking after," she said.

To Kiger, being a help and encouragement to them is a good thing, but often, it is the patient who encourages her.

Kiger is motivated by seeing patients recover. She enjoys seeing them out in the community; although

they might know each other's names, she remembers their faces.

Even in situations involving death, Kiger believes there's comfort and closure. She said some people have been going through a tough time, but they were happy hospital staff took care of their relatives during their time of need.

"You're not only ministering to that person that's sick, but just the families that come in you're also looking after them and I think there's just a lot of reward in that," she said.

Although Kiger isn't looking for recognition, her hard work shines through.

Making a difference with community policing

By Clay Brown
HHJ Sports Editor

People don't often have glowing reviews about the Georgia State Patrol. Seeing that blue and orange car can ruin some people's days and troopers often feel the brunt of that frustration.

But trooper Alfred McCoy tries to see past that and look at the person behind the wheel.

"Working patrol for the Macon Police Department and the Sheriff's Office, you deal with a lot of different situations as you do as a trooper," he said. "There are a lot of people that really need somebody to talk to... you really don't know what people are going through until you take a moment to step back and naturally talk to them... You'll be surprised to find out what's going on in somebody's life if you just ask them a question."

McCoy first entered the law enforcement career track in 2005 when the Macon Police Department hired him in October. He was with the MPD and Sheriff's Office until 2023 when he entered early retirement and came to work at Georgia State Patrol Post 15.

Several times he referred to his occupation as a job, but quickly corrected himself to career. To McCoy, being a trooper isn't about writing tickets or taking someone to jail.

"I think that's what a lot of people think that we do," he said. "I understand a lot more now as I've gotten older than I did when I first came into the career."

McCoy couldn't pin down a typical day in the life of a trooper because their responsibilities vary day-to-day, but he said sometimes he'll get off of I-75 and get back to his roots as a police officer.

"Most days I go out to I-75 and work parts of the interstate, sometimes I get back into some of my old habits of

riding around in some of the neighborhoods meeting people," he said. "There's a lady I got a chance to speak with on Hunt Road [in Kathleen]. I sat on Hunt Road one day and she came out, started talking to me about how people speed up and down her road and it just brings back that old community policing that I really enjoyed doing."

Those kind of interactions, and interactions with people in general, are one of his favorite parts of the job. He especially loves seeing kids who love the police.

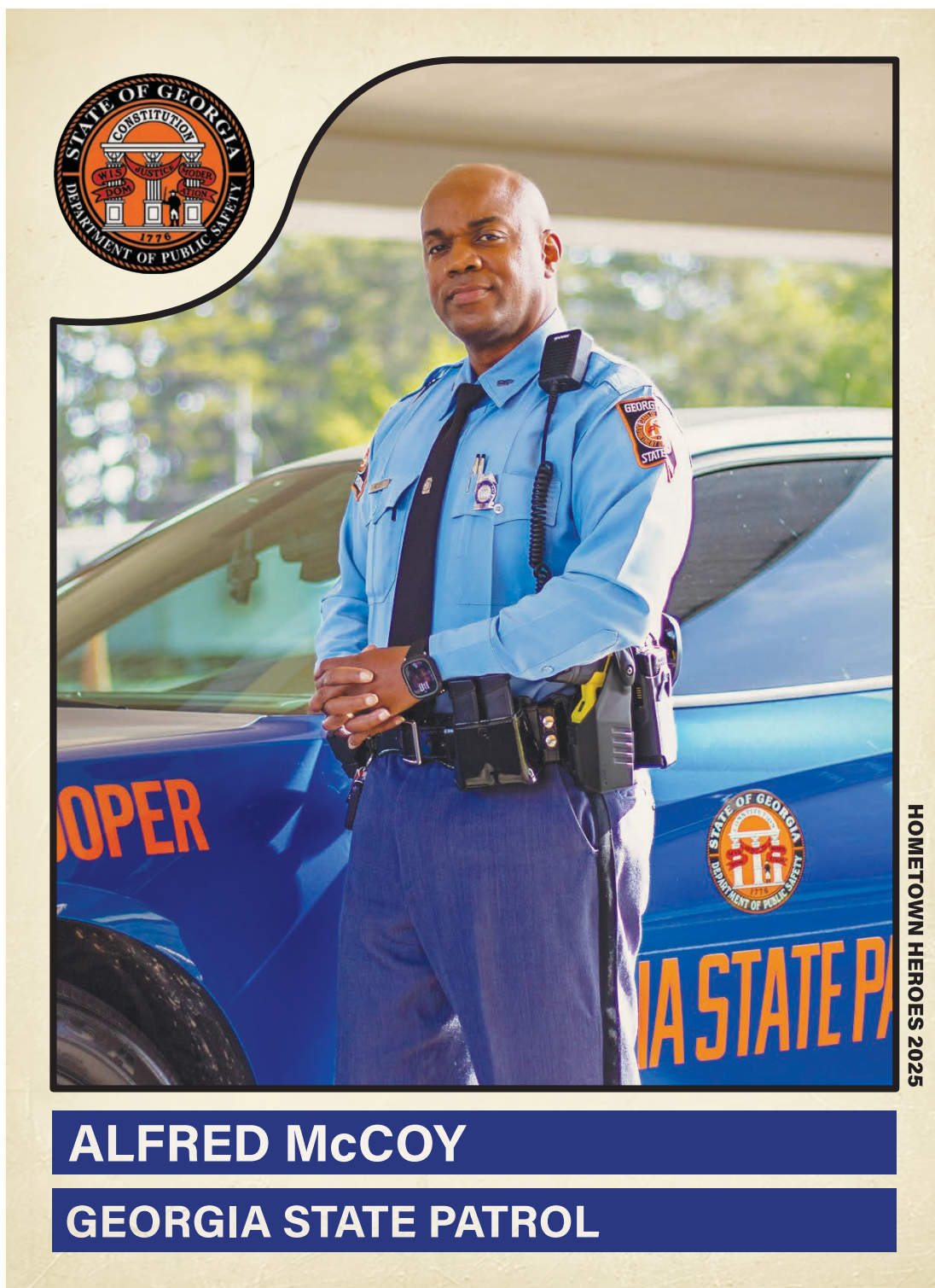
"My favorite has to be kids. Seeing those little kids that love the police," McCoy said with a smile. "We have some bracelets that we give out that has Georgia State Patrol on it. Talking to the kids, meeting the kids... talking to the parents. It's just interaction with people."

Even with the countless number of people McCoy has served over the years, one still sticks in his mind and reinforces why he emphasizes talking to people. While he was on light duty after having a motorcycle accident in 2021, a pregnant woman was the victim of a hit-and-run.

McCoy just happened to answer the phone when she called, saying she felt like no one was listening to her, and no one would help her track down the vehicle that fled the scene. She had a tag number and all she needed was someone to go out to the location on record.

Once McCoy was released back to full duty he followed up on the case, found the perpetrator and cited them for leaving the scene. Eventually the woman got her car back, and when the case went to court, she turned around and thanked him in front of everybody.

McCoy said he felt bashful in that moment, but even today, it helps him remember why he does what he



does.

"It made me really appreciate that moment from her to recognize me for just doing my job," he said. "For me it was just doing my job, but it meant a lot more to her. That would be a moment that I wouldn't forget, because it felt like I made a difference in a crisis she was going through."

For those interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement, McCoy had some advice:

"I would say talk to your

family first, especially if [you're] married. The biggest thing that I get from a lot of people is they don't want to get shot, which, who wants to get shot?" he said. "Nobody wants to get hurt doing your job. But for me, my faith that I have, I know God has already written what my path on this Earth is going to be. So I don't fear when he decides he's going to call me home."

"My words to that person [are] chase the dream, go after it. Make the most out

of the opportunity that you can get. It's definitely worth it."

Talking to family was a big emphasis for McCoy, who said his wife and children have been his biggest supporters during his journey.

"I am thankful that God brought me into this career. It has taught me a lot of valuable lessons," he said. "The friends that I've made, it's helped me be a better dad, husband, son..."

Helping the community inside and outside the office



HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

JESSE LOCKHART

FLINT ENERGIES

By Owen Jones
HHJ Staff Writer

Jesse Lockhart, Communications Technology Advisor for Flint Energies, described his job title as utilizing an advanced metering infrastructure system that enables two-way communication between Flint Energies and its customers.

"I send the signal out, we get the notification telling us how many hours to run each type of device whether that be air conditioners, water heaters, irrigation or whatever the scenario is," he said.

On the metering side, Lockhart said they read the meters 24/7/365. Flint

Energies covers parts of 17 different counties in the state of Georgia. Fortunately for Lockhart, he said they are running at 99.6% efficiency, so not many meters need to be fixed on a daily basis.

"Storms tear us up, hot and cold [weather] tear us up, so we know during those times of the year or those scenarios, we know we're in for a little extra work," he said.

Lockhart began working with Flint Energies in 2004, serving as a low-control database coordinator for the TWACS (Two-Way Authenticated Communication System). He said the position has evolved from the metering side.

"We went from being able to ride around and read the meter once a month to being able to read them every day, 24 hours a day. It was basically just a huge jump overnight," he said. "The challenges with that was the technology that came with TWACS was like a basketball and what we were focusing on was a baseball. It brought so much more data into the limelight, and we were figuring out what we were going to do."

Lockhart enjoys working with any new technology. He feels like every day is different and that he accomplishes something new every day.

Lockhart has held the role of

Advisor for approximately 10 years. He said this role brings a lot more to the plate as the title has changed throughout the years. Lockhart also handles the AVL systems and the radio towers.

A typical day for Lockhart on the job starts with troubleshooting their morning reports, which come in and let them know how the system performed overnight.

"We work on the report and try to have it done by 10 a.m. as we have another report that comes out [at that time]," he said. "I'm checking radios as we got some brand new radios in, so I set them up so they can go in the vehicles."

Lockhart and his crew also have a meeting to discuss strategy after initially reviewing the reports from the previous night.

Outside of the office, Lockhart is a huge advocate of donating blood to the American Red Cross. He said he was only one pint away from donating six gallons of blood.

Lockhart has also won Employee of the Year for Flint Energies and volunteers at numerous community organizations, to the point that Lockhart won a cruise for his volunteer work.

"I look at volunteering as giving back to the community and you want to be an example for them especially for the youth as I love working with kids," he said. "If you see me out in the community you're going to see me talking towards those kids and motivating them."

Lockhart followed in his father's footsteps, as his father had also given a lot to the community.

"Seeing that and growing up around that, makes me see that there's a lot more to life. If you can help somebody, help somebody," he said.

His dad also taught him to speak to everybody, a principle he still adheres to today.

One thing that has stuck with Lockhart, whether on the job or working with Flint Energies in general, is that he represents his job as an opportunity to educate.

"What I take pride in is when I wear [my Flint Energies shirt], I'm going to be able to talk to you and get you to a point where we can try to figure out something that you may do differently and help and benefit you," he said.

An example he pointed out is that some people are

unaware that a ceiling fan operates in two different directions, one for summer and one for winter.

"I try to give examples or analogies that they can relate to," he said.

Before taking on a job at Flint Energies, Lockhart moved back home because his mother fell ill. He was then working for the Orange County School District in Orlando, Florida.

"Flint was hiring and the School Board was hiring also. I was looking to teach math at Perry Middle School, but Flint hired me right away," he said.

Lockhart started with Flint right away but volunteered for the school system, mostly helping at Northside because that was where his kids attended school. He also began coaching sports in the area and mentoring at the Boys and Girls Club.

Lockhart's favorite part of the job is knowing that he has accomplished something every day.

"You are looking for issues to take care of," he said. "I'm okay with it if someone brings me a problem because that's the way you grow. If someone finds an issue for us or the system is doing something wrong, let's figure out how to [solve] this and make sure this doesn't happen again."

Lockhart believes that his volunteerism is what got him nominated as the Flint Energies Hometown Hero.

"I try to be a role model and represent well," he said. "Don't let what you do out in public bring a bad light to you, your family and your community."

Overall, Lockhart wants to be that giver where other people look at him and say, "If I do some of the things that he does, I can make things around me better."

"What motivates me is trying to get everybody to understand that it's not all about you sometimes, it's just about giving," he said. "It's all about us, and if we all look at it that way, we can go further."



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HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

OLAN WILKINS

GEORGIA BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

By Clay Brown
HHJ Sports Editor

When you picture the typical law enforcement agency, Georgia Bureau of Investigation special agent Olan Wilkins probably isn't the image that comes up.

You might see a patrol car pulling someone over or responding to an accident on the highway, but Wilkins often arrives

after the incident is over.

He takes part in the investigative work and the paperwork. You won't see him flashing his lights out on the street, but his work is critical in pushing the legal process along.

"Generally when we get called in it's after everything has happened," Wilkins said. "So we typically, on most things, we will respond.

So if a murder occurs, they'll call 911, the police respond, they get there and they're like, 'Oh, this guy's dead, let's get some help over here.' So they'll call us and we'll come in and assist."

"So we're not typically [on the] frontline on most things," he continued. "We are a support agency, so we come in and especially with our smaller counties, we'll

help the local agency with whatever, typically with investigations."

Wilkins helps prepare these cases, typically felonies, to send to the district attorney's office and keep the ball rolling long after the initial incident.

"A lot of it is preparing our cases, getting them ready to turn over to the district attorney's office," Wilkins said. "We'll have a lot of interviews, there may be a crime scene to process that one of our crime scene guys would do...It is less fun but a lot of it is paperwork. It's making sure that everything is right and that you're documenting everything that you've done in the case and get it ready to turn over."

Wilkins had a unique introduction to the law enforcement career path when he took classes in the underwater crime scene program at Florida State University. He said scuba diving was cool, but it had a criminal justice focus. It snowballed from there, and he's been in the career for 11 years.

His first year was with a small drug task force in Miller County, Georgia, but for the last 10 years, he's been with the GBI.

"One of the really cool things about this job is you never really know what you're gonna end up doing," Wilkins said. "Because you could show up here planning to type up a summary and get called about maybe a barricaded gunman or you could get called about human remains that have been discovered somewhere. So there's a full gamut of things that you can immediately be shifted to."

Wilkins is unique in the fact that he is also a part time bomb techni-

cian. That adds another unpredictable wrinkle to his day-to-day duties, something he enjoys.

"I like a lot of the bomb call stuff. I feel like that's kind of a unique challenge," Wilkins said. "I took that on a couple years ago and I've really enjoyed it. It's a little different than typical investigation stuff...It's one of those things you kinda have to stay on top of a lot of different disciplines to be pretty good at it."

"And you can end up doing all kinds of unique things," he continued. "I've been lowered down into a well trying to look for human remains. We've worked numerous unique investigations where you just never know what you're gonna end up doing."

Wilkins has seen it all, and it's no walk in the park. He recalled violence, human remains, child molestation and other cases. His family and faith keep him going while sifting through the evil the world has to offer.

"[As cheesy as it sounds] it's nice to be able to help people," Wilkins said. "I know a lot of times we can provide closure, especially in some of the more violent investigations...Providing closure for family is pretty big...I got a good support from my family, my wife, and having that is very helpful. I have a strong faith that's a big part of it, understanding the good and evil in the world and kind of being able to wrap my head around that."

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all front-line responders
and first responders for
their hard work and
dedication to our
community.



From Mayor LaRhonda W. Patrick &
the Warner Robins City Council



Answering a critical call

By Brianna Smith
HHJ Managing Editor

When the Warner Robins Fire Department was asked to name a single Hometown Hero, they couldn't choose just one. Instead, they honored an entire crew: Engine One, Shift Two, whose teamwork, quick thinking, and calm under pressure helped save a life during a critical emergency call.

Together, Lieutenant Chris Rogers, Engineer Daniel Cottrell, and firefighters Da Juan Mitchell and Jadin Martin represent the power of preparation, compassion, and camaraderie, each bringing a different background, skillset, and story to the table, but united in purpose every time the alarm sounds.

Rogers has the longest tenure with WRFD at 12 years; Cottrell has been with the department for nearly five years, Mitchell for about two years, and Martin for around seven months.

"I came on in November, so it's still pretty fresh for me, everything up here. I'm trying to find my way when it comes to my role as a firefighter," Martin said.

Cottrell, with a Coast Guard background, met a lieutenant at church and was introduced to the job. He has been an engineer for roughly a year and a half.

Rogers, who originally wanted to be a police officer, followed in his father's footsteps and has been a lieutenant for five years.

"My dad finally convinced me to try the fire service, and I'm glad I did, because I love it now and I wouldn't do anything else," Rogers said.

Martin never considered firefighting but was introduced similarly with a chance encounter with a captain at the sauna. Conversely, Mitchell had wanted to be a firefighter since kindergarten and worked for Macon-Bibb County for four years before moving to WRFD.

"As a kid, you see the fire engines and you want

to be a part of that and you have a certain perspective on what you think the fire department is," Mitchell said. "I didn't get that experience with my last department, but coming here is everything I thought it would be. So I'm enjoying the ride right now."

Their shift begins with a formal roll call, where lieutenants exchange information, followed by equipment checks, essential and routine assignments, and downtime at night. In between the essentials, the team is training and responding to calls, often with perfect timing, Rogers mentioned.

"You just keep practicing, keep training, keep studying, keep teaching, trying to make sure everybody's prepared for when it does happen, and then you try to take a shower before you go to bed and you get a call when you're in the shower," Rogers said.

In April, the crew responded to what initially appeared to be a routine call: assisting an elderly individual who had fallen. However, this particular incident became crucial for the team and memorable for the department.

"[Mitchell] is an EMT, so he takes lead on most of our medical calls. [He] identified that this person was not just fine. He had stopped breathing," Rogers said.

The patient had stopped breathing, was unconscious, and had no pulse. The team immediately began CPR and used a defibrillator before transferring care to EMS, who reported the victim's pulse had returned. Rogers, Cottrell, and Mitchell were often witnesses to cases with less favorable outcomes.

"We've been there where they've called things on scene, pronounced them dead on scene. To give a family member some hope and give them a chance, that's all they're asking for. That gave us a little reassurance that it gave the family members closure,



the chance to be able to see them again. That's the biggest thing I hang our hat on," Cottrell said.

Rogers credited the team's training for their success, while Mitchell expressed excitement for Martin's early career achievement.

"It was a great feeling, because we wait for whatever to come our way. Being prepared for it and then having a positive outcome from it was pretty great. It made me feel like what I was doing here was actually making a difference to the city," Martin said.

Despite their contrasting music tastes – Cottrell favoring classic country and Martin preferring

metalcore – the fire department team shares a close, brotherly bond. They maintain a playful dynamic, often roasting each other, according to Cottrell.

"It's all out of love. It's a good time. It's the best job in the world. There's not many jobs where we come in and do things that we're able to do. We work hard, we play hard," Cottrell said.

Beyond the excitement, the team is driven by a strong sense of purpose: the adrenaline rush, the commitment to safety, and the desire to serve their community.

"Now I'm in a position to where not only I get to take care of other people, but

I'm learning better ways to be able to do that. I feel like God has made me a caring person, to take care of other people for a reason, and my motivation is to just continue on with the purpose that He's given me," Mitchell said.

Outside of their duties, the team enjoys a variety of personal pursuits. Rogers prioritizes time with his wife and children and occasionally plays golf. Cottrell also enjoys golf and traveling to see family. Mitchell is dedicated to exploring his new faith and spending time with his family. Martin enjoys working out and spending time with his girlfriend.

Embodying faith, family and virtue

By Brieanna Smith
HHJ Managing Editor

To Officer John Ford, being a patrol officer isn't grunt work — it's ground zero for grace. With every shift, he walks into the unknown with purpose, humility, and a heart trained to serve.

That mindset was shaped long before he wore the badge. Ford's father, a Marine Vietnam veteran, laid the foundation with a life rooted in public service, working for the Bibb County Sheriff's Office and later at Robins Air Force Base. Following his father's footsteps, Ford committed his adult life to law enforcement and military service, most recently returning to the Warner Robins Police Department in the summer of 2023.

Ford is often the first to respond as a patrol officer — unless a call requires translation or specialized skills. When he's not responding to dispatches, he's proactively seeking out crime, he explained.

"We'll go to any call where we get dispatched. And if I'm not actively on a call, more often than not, I'm specifically looking for felonies or gangs or narcotics," he said.

In November 2024, Ford received an award of merit for his response to a suicide attempt in June 2024, where the victim had significant blood loss. Ford assessed that the victim was alive, provided initial aid, and contacted dispatch to expedite EMS arrival. He continued to assist the victim until additional officers arrived and a tourniquet was applied.

Police Chief Wayne Fisher described Ford as remarkably humble, possessing the qualities the department seeks in its officers. He said Ford effectively combines his training and compassion in his work and takes every opportunity to teach others the same.

"It's the compilation of everything that's embodied in him, in his training and his moral compass that led to where it's very true to the point he had no other option [but to help.] That is how he

is built, professionally, individually and spiritually. It's very humbling for me as a chief executive to have members like John as part of our organization," Fisher said.

Those traits, Fisher said, enabled Ford to confidently act and become a source of balance and healing during the award of merit incident.

"[With] the compassion and empathy to seeing a person on the other side of that door that was in need of aid and care, there was no doubt where he needed to be," Fisher said.

Focused on the task at hand, Ford wasn't seeking recognition. He has consistently prioritized the job and finds the most satisfaction in collaborative roles, even those involving tasks others might deem menial.

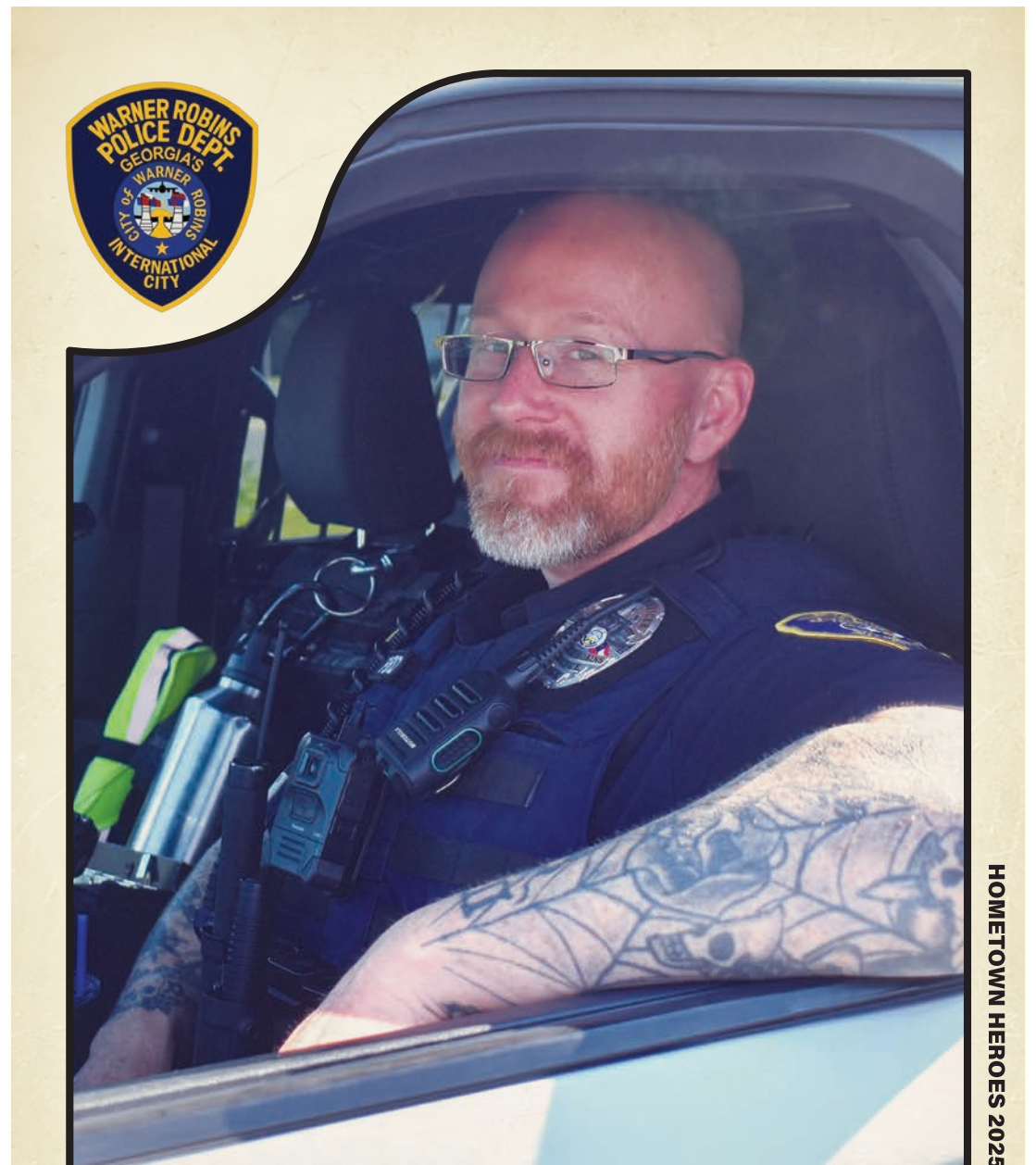
"There are some people that if they make it to a certain rank, or if they make it over somewhere else, they view being just a patrol officer as if it's some type of demotion, or if it's some type of grunt work. And that never sat right with me. Never be ashamed of any work that's honest," he said.

Ford believes he can make the most significant difference in these capacities.

"I've been other places before where you get a little bit of rank, you get a little bit of authority, and now you're stuck behind a desk or you're having to meet with the sheriff. You don't get to have the one-on-one surface-level impact that you do when you're in the field. ... I don't want to come out of the field. For right now, here's where I can do the most good," he said.

Ford felt the Warner Robins Police Department placed a much higher value on ethics and integrity than other places he'd been, contributing to his employment with the organization.

"I'm fairly cut and dry — right is right, wrong is wrong. If there's good versus evil, I choose good. If there's right and wrong, I choose right. If there's light and there's dark, I choose light. Those are non-negotiables. ... I'm not going to be party to any-



HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

JOHN FORD

WARNER ROBINS POLICE DEPARTMENT

thing that doesn't have its integrity in check and moral, legal and ethical standards," he said.

Ford views his life's work as a sacred calling. This belief is reflected on his vehicle with a reference to Isaiah 6:8: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

"You might be able to kind of placate your sentiment for a little bit by telling yourself the benefits are good, the money's good ... If you are

working outside your calling, at some point, the misery will become problematic to unbearable," he said.

Describing himself as a homebody, Ford enjoys spending time with his wife and children, attending church, going to the gym, and working on home projects in his spare time. Being a pragmatist, his family assists him in seeing the positive aspects of his work, a perspective he aims to share with them, moving beyond stereotypical portrayals of police work.

"If [my kid] says, 'Daddy,

how was your day today?' I don't want to focus on the negative. Especially because she's young, I don't want to skew that for her, too. It's in so many different regards more affirming to a little nine-year-old girl to tell her how daddy was able to help somebody. That's much more satisfying in a very visceral level," he said.

Grounded in faith, strengthened by family, and driven by divine purpose, Ford is more than a police officer. He's a beacon of integrity.



HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

RYAN AMAN

HOUSTON COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

By Owen Jones
HHJ Staff Writer

Ryan Aman, Houston County Fire Department Firefighter of the Year, passionately describes being a firefighter as the best job he has ever had.

Aman has been a firefighter for HCFD for a little over a year. While this job isn't the easiest he has done, it is most certainly the best.

"The easiest job I've ever had was in the United States Army because I didn't even have to think. They told me what to do, where to be, how to be and what to wear," he said. "Firefighting, the best job I've ever had. It is the most fun and it's never the

same."

Aman worked in the corporate sector and felt dull. Firefighting has kept him on his toes, and he enjoys every minute.

"I can have days where I am slammed back to back with calls or days where we can get good training in. Every day is something new," he said. "Also you're serving the community and helping those that are in need. This is a fun, great job and I'm very passionate about it as there's nothing else in the world I would rather do."

Aman described a typical day on the job by first getting pass downs from the previous shift, including anything wrong with the firetruck or

equipment replacements. They also inspect the truck for damage and put in repair requests when needed.

"There is also usually some kind of training set for us that we have planned out whether that be at the training grounds or training at the station on computers," he said. "We also maintain cleaning the station and the trucks in the bay making sure they stay inspection ready at all times, and we're running calls throughout."

At around 5 p.m., Aman tries to incorporate some workout, whether in or out of gear. At around 9 p.m. is a time for Aman to unwind.

"[This time] you're trying to get a little sleep in because

'Nothing else in the world I'd rather do'

Lord knows, we may get a call [in the middle of the night]," he said.

Whether on a call or not, Aman is up again by 6 a.m.

From the military, Aman used his G.I. Bill to get a Technical Management Degree, which helped him get into leadership roles at the department. Aman is also getting ready for Fire II and Hazmat ops and awareness. In the military, Aman has received a Good Conduct medal, an Army Achievement medal and an Army Accommodation medal. He served active duty state-side at Fort Drum, went into the reserves at Fort Benning, and finished his military career in Macon.

One aspect of being a firefighter that stuck with Aman is the family atmosphere.

"They are very supportive, they want to see you succeed, your leadership wants to see you succeed and they want to help you grow," he said. "My lieutenant and captain are very passionate about getting you ready for the next step. It's all about making the best firefighter you can be and being able to serve the community the best as humanly possible."

After his time in the military, Aman missed the friendships that he had made in the military. He said it was unlike anything he had ever seen. Asking around, one of his friends recommended firefighting. Aman soon after became a volunteer firefighter for Crawford County.

"From the first call I went to which was a car fire to the first training meeting we held, I knew this is what I wanted to do," he said.

After volunteering without pay for the Crawford County Fire Department, Aman was thinking about trying to make this a career, getting a bunch of support from his wife to pursue this career. He then learned about the Houston County Fire Department.

"Everything about [Houston County Fire Department] from how dedicated these firefighters are to how much passion and

love they have to the job and the community, it was right up my alley," he said. "It was the best decision I had ever made."

Actually, fighting fires is Aman's favorite part of the job.

"Everything slows down in my head as I stop thinking about everything and it is peaceful," he said. "Make entry, search the home and fight fire, there's not any daily stresses of normal life, like being a husband or a father. You're heart's racing but you all fall back to what you've learned. There's nothing in the world like going to a fire call and knowing what to do."

Aman's passion for firefighting and his willingness to learn is what he thinks got him nominated as HCFD's Hometown Hero.

"I know that I don't know everything. I know that I will always be learning, and I am always willing to learn," he said.

Overall, Aman lives by the three Fs: faith, family and firefighting.

"I can't do anything in my life without God. I couldn't be a fireman without my wife and kids and the rest of my family. My two daughters are my biggest cheerleaders as I've never seen a kid so excited for their parent to do something," he said. "It does matter what department you work for or what State you're in as it's just like the military, we're family."

Aman's motivation for it all stems from his family. When it's all set and done, he wants his kids to be proud of him.

"The biggest thing I want to take away from me doing this job is to just understand that there is a bigger picture. There's times where you're going to have to sacrifice your time and well-being because someone really desperately needs it, and I want my kids to know that," he said.

The glue that holds the Sheriff's Office together

By Owen Jones
HHJ Staff Writer

When we think of a typical Houston County Sheriff's Office nomination, we may think of a deputy. However, the heroes behind the scenes have an equal amount of impact.

Without Brandi Clifton, the Sheriff's Office would not function as it has been for so many years. Clifton is the Executive Secretary to Sheriff Matt Moulton.

"I keep his calendar, set up meetings for him, I do all the bills for the Sheriff's Office and take care of all of the front office needs," Clifton said.

She described her job as whatever she is asked to do, along with everyday office tasks. She assists the Sheriff, Chief, Colonel and office staff with anything they need.

"When citizens call or come to the Sheriff's Office, I am the first person they see, so I help them with questions or concerns they have and get them to the appropriate office that can help them further," she said. "I love helping others as I think that is why they know they can depend on me so much."

Clifton has been Executive Secretary for the Houston County Sheriff's Office for about nine years but has worked for the Sheriff's Office for almost 28 years. She spent 15 years working at the 911 Center and three years in the Warrants Division as a warrant clerk before becoming Executive Secretary for Sheriff Cullen Talton and now for Sheriff Moulton.

Before going into law enforcement, Clifton attended CGTC and completed the EMT program, but she always knew that law enforcement was her calling as it ran in her family. Her father worked for the HCSO and retired from the Warner Robins Police Department as a Major after almost 40 years. She said he rejoined

the HCSO Reserves Unit for several years until he finally retired from law enforcement.

She gives all the credit to him for inspiring her to go into law enforcement. Clifton's father has greatly impacted her life, and she has always wanted to make her family proud.

"My daddy is my hero. I grew up wanting to be just like him, and he is the reason I got into law enforcement," she said. "Law enforcement is my life. I love helping people and love working for the Sheriff's Office."

Both of Clifton's grandfathers also have law enforcement backgrounds.

"My Pa Pa, B.E. Dennard Sr. was the Chief of Police in Perry and my Granddaddy, H. Glenn Morgan was an Investigator at HCSO prior to Sheriff Talton taking office," she said.

Clifton is very proud to say that she has worked for the longest serving Sheriff in the United States, Sheriff Cullen Talton.

"I truly loved him like a Granddaddy and I miss him so much," she said. "Working with him and Chief [Billy] Rape all these years have been great, and we are so blessed to still have Chief Rape here. I will miss him once he decides to retire."

Clifton is very grateful to Sheriff Talton for believing in her to take on the role of Executive Secretary. She is also very thankful to Sheriff Moulton for keeping her on during his term.

"Sheriff Moulton is doing a great job and has spent a lot of time with Sheriff Talton and learned a lot from him, so this transition is going very well," she said. "It has been very busy but it has finally started to slow down for him."

Helping people all day, every day is one of Clifton's favorite parts of the job. She said you can change somebody's day by just listening to that per-



BRANDI CLIFTON

HOUSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

son.

"That's what we try to do here, we try to help people as much as we can," she said. "I like being there for people and for people to be able to depend on me and know that I'm going to help them and do what they need done."

Clifton wants to thank Sheriff Moulton for recognizing her as the HCSO's Hometown Hero. She thinks her nomination stems from Moulton being thankful for Clifton's job.

"I would like to thank [Sheriff Moulton] for rec-

ognizing me. It means a lot, and I am very grateful he acknowledges not only my hard work, dedication and my commitment to the office but also to others here as well," she said.

When giving the nomination, Moulton said Clifton is the glue that holds the Sheriff's Office together.

"I feel honored," Clifton said. "I'm always there for the guys and the girls here in the office, if they need something I'm there. I'm going to make sure they have what they need."

Overall, Clifton has a servant's heart. She wants to serve Houston County best and be a good role model for her son, Zachary.

"[Zachary and my husband Craig] are my whole world, and I want them to know how much I love and appreciate them," she said. "They have both supported me when I work those long hour days and work after hours to get whatever I need to get done at the office."

Serving a greater purpose

By Sandra Hernandez
HHJ Staff Writer

The Perry Fire Department has several trained firefighters who put their lives at risk for their community. One of those heroic individuals is Keanu Kirk, who has progressed to mentorship as a Senior Firefighter, as well as a certified Emergency Medical Technician and Hazmat Technician.

Kirk's role involves teaching new firefighters, responding to emergencies, and serving his community. This varies from help installing smoke detectors to responding to emergencies, whether medical or a structure fire.

Kirk has been with the Perry Fire Department for almost seven years. In terms of growth, he has seen a culture change, mainly an enhanced focus on training. He shared Captain Vince Walls has made a significant impact in the training department.

He has also noticed that his colleagues have changed, becoming more motivated to train and take classes. Kirk has also seen them become more motivated in their fitness because, as firefighters, they have to be in shape to handle strenuous tasks.

"The biggest thing that I've seen so far is the training and focus on being fit and doing the job that's supposed to be done," he said.

Kirk's day starts early. As soon as he clocks in, around 7:30 a.m., they do radio checks. This involves going to the fire trucks, getting on the radio, and ensuring each truck is clear.

After completing radio checks, they begin performing truck check-offs. Kirk explained that they receive their tablets and conduct an inventory to ensure they have all the necessary equipment.

If they are missing equipment, Kirk will go to the supply room and restock whatever they need. While truck checks are going on, a couple of firefighters will clean the station. Once housekeeping duties are complete, they will begin training if it's on the agenda. Other responsibilities on their agenda include meetings with Human Resources, where they will discuss protocols for harassment.

After completing all their

scheduled tasks, the shift waits for calls or goes to training.

In addition to his numerous roles, he has completed challenging courses, including the Spartan program, a 24-hour course. He described it as very strenuous, testing the individual both mentally and physically and pushing them to their limits.

He has also completed the Georgia Flames program, which helps firefighters master essential skills. It is based on the same concept as the Spartan program, but lasts 48 hours and operates at a higher capacity. Kirk said the operational tempo is higher, meaning participants are expected to complete tasks at a much faster pace.

Other notable training includes being a truck operator, which involves learning how to drive the truck and operate the water pump. He ensures the nozzles are getting the correct amount of pressure.

Becoming a firefighter was originally not on Kirk's radar, but presented itself through high school friends who worked for Warner Robins Fire Department. He asked them what it was like to be a firefighter, and they gave him a positive review; If they liked being a firefighter, he figured he would like it too.

When Kirk decided to leap, he thought he was applying for WRFD, but accidentally applied for the Houston County Fire Department.

After two weeks, and no response, he began searching for another job. That was when his mom stepped in and texted Kirk about a firefighter recruit position for the PFD.

Kirk considered giving it another chance and applied for the job in July 2018. The rest is history, and he has been with the department ever since.

Kirk's favorite part of the job is coming in and being able to work with a group of people who have the same mindset. He also enjoys serving the citizens in his community.

"I think my favorite thing about that is being able to put a smile on someone's face on their time of need or their worst day," he said. "You don't always get a smile, but when you do, it feels good. Then, obviously, the gratefulness and the



HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

KEANU KIRK

PERRY FIRE DEPARTMENT

thanks we get when we do respond and help them out is pretty rewarding. I'd say all the training that we do makes it worth it."

Kirk considered last year a busy time for him because it was the year he put in the most training hours of his career. He said he wanted to better himself, which led him to take a lot of classes.

In 2024, he also accomplished the plans program, a milestone that many people haven't achieved, he said. Kirk was also awarded Firefighter of the Year during the recent First Responders Luncheon at Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

"I think just the constant training I was doing, going on outside resources and

just trying to better myself. I think my peers saw that as worthy of being firefighter of the year," he said. "[I] come with a positive attitude everyday or try to at least. [I] just try to have a good time [at] work because there's enough negativity around."

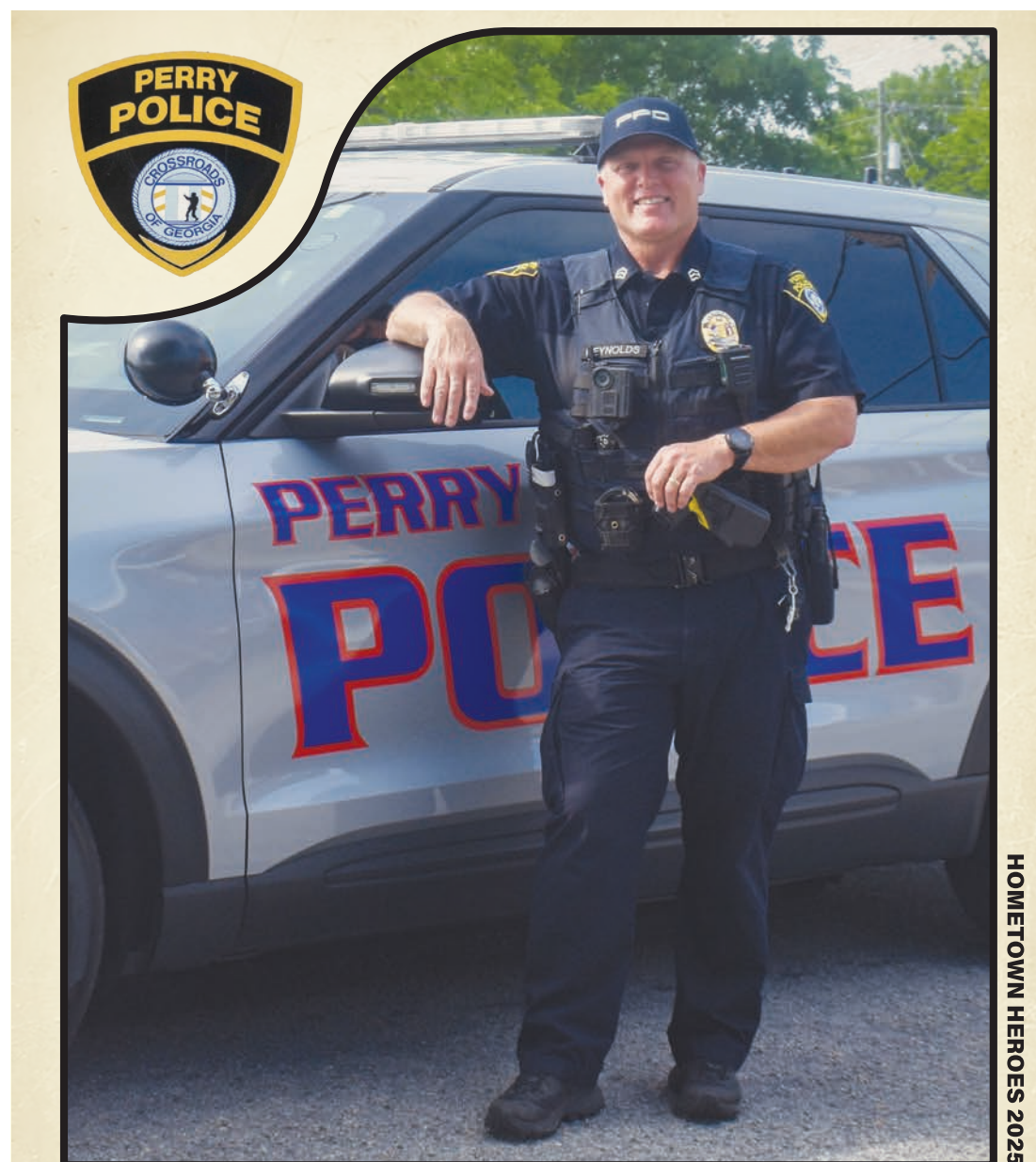
Kirk is a diligent worker and frequently tries to secure overtime hours at the fire station. When he is not working, he likes to be reclusive. If he isn't doing anything work-related or taking classes, he is hanging out with his dog, going to the gym, and recuperating from a hard-working shift, preferring to charge up his "social meter" after responding to calls all day.

When people become or

are hired as firefighters, they learn about the history and take an oath to protect and preserve life, property, and the environment. Kirk lives by that oath, which is what motivates him every day.

"As first responders, people look to us to help them in their times of need. Sometimes it can be a life or death situation, so it's very important," he said. "I think that holding ourselves to a standard, maintaining it, getting the training, going out, getting uncomfortable doing stuff you don't want to do ensures that you come prepared to those calls and provide the best possible outcome for these people that we serve. It's a big purpose."

Being the change within the department



HOMETOWN HEROES 2025

TERRY REYNOLDS

PERRY POLICE DEPARTMENT

By Sandra Hernandez
HHJ Staff Writer

There are many misconceptions about law enforcement, particularly in recent years, which have created uncertainty and distrust. Sergeant Terry Reynolds with the Perry Police Department is tackling those misconceptions by being the change.

At the Perry Police Department, there are four squads, each led by a lieutenant and a sergeant. Reynolds was recently appointed as a sergeant and is still learning the ropes of the supervisory role. There are eight members in his squad, including himself and the lieutenant.

Reynolds has been a ser-

geant for six months but has been with PPD for six years. He came in with no rank, a "slick sleeve," as he described it, and then the department sent him to the Police Academy.

Reynolds also served as the Field Training Officer, mentoring new police officers for three years. With a focus on training, PPD will send its officers to three more months of mandated training.

Reynolds, who noted that the city has high standards, continued to train new officers as the Patrol Division grew to 32 officers.

"You have to meet the standard that's been set, which I think is great. That's why I believe Perry is what it is; that's why I believe it's the

safe city that it is," he said.

Reynolds said the department is constantly training; this year, their focus is defensive driving. He believes it is a great topic since officers spend 12 hours a day in their cars.

In the police department, officers swap between night and day shifts every 56 days. While Reynolds is on the day shift, he'll be at the police department ready to work at 5:30 a.m. By 5:45 a.m., they have a shift briefing. By 6 a.m., they are on the road, keeping their community safe.

Reynolds said the days are busy compared to quieter nights, especially with an increase in accidents due to higher traffic.

Day shift is also responsible for tending to the "Are You Okay?" Program, where the 911 center checks in with registered individuals. If they do not respond, officers are dispatched to their home. Additionally, Reynolds assists with criminal investigations.

Reynolds said the night shift has changed due to a bustling downtown. He shared the "sleepy" Perry has become busier downtown, which brings new challenges.

Traffic slows but remains an issue with driving under the influence. Reynolds said the purpose of stopping a vehicle is to make sure the people driving are safe and the people around them are secure.

While being pulled over can be nerve-racking, Reynolds wants the public to remember his officers care about fairness while balancing public safety.

"Our job though is to make sure that your rights aren't violated. We want to make sure the public is safe without violating anyone's rights as well," he said. "So, we have to make sure our team is prepared for that with the right training, with the right knowledge and that we remember – the Perry Police Department is here to protect the public."

Reynolds says the job has a customer service aspect in how they communicate. He does not want officers to be rude but instead put themselves in the person's shoes and treat everybody with respect.

"How we speak to them changes how that interaction goes, because maybe the last time they spoke to a police officer wasn't great," he said. "They may have some kind of feelings when we walk up to the car and they may think, 'Oh, here we go again.' Even if they get a ticket or if they get arrested, I don't want them to leave thinking, 'He was rude.' We're all people; we all have bad days and we shouldn't push the bad day worse."

One day, Reynolds and his wife were at the Burger King drive-thru when the person at the window leaned out and waved. As they pulled up, the woman told Reynolds's wife, "He saved my life."

A couple of years ago, the police department responded to a shots fired call, which they believed was a drive-by. Reynolds was driving towards the shooter when he saw a man waving and point-

ing, then a car matching the description.

Pulling behind the car, he was advised over the radio the shooter may be in the area. Then, he saw someone lying on the ground, and as he got out of the car, he looked around to make sure he wasn't being ambushed.

The man on the ground admitted to the shooting, and he was taken into custody. Reynolds then tended to the injured woman, using his training to control the bleeding. EMS then arrived, and the woman is alive today.

"It was already a tragic moment, but it could have been worse and every time I see her [she] lights up. It was an event for me that I'll never forget for different reasons but I'm glad it turned out favorable," he said.

Remembering a negative stigma with law enforcement, Reynolds wondered if he could make a change within the walls.

Reynolds went on a police ride-along and fell in love with law enforcement, finding the same sense of brotherhood that he had experienced in his military career. Being the change, keeping the public safe, and being a good role model for his daughters motivates Reynolds every day.

"I told my daughter, 'If you want to see a change, be a change.' I was complaining about law enforcement, the way they're projected on the news and my youngest [daughter] said to me, 'Daddy, if you want to see a change, be a change.' If I expect her to move forward on her desires, then I had to show her that I'm willing to also," he said.

Reynolds' favorite part of the job is the people, reminiscing about football games and downtown events. He enjoys seeing kids excited to see him, gives them a high five or a sticker and loves making their day brighter.

Reynolds recalled a happy moment he experienced during the Dogwood Festival. He saw a friend he hadn't seen in 15 years, and as soon as the friend saw him, he gave him a "giant bear hug," as he described. Reynolds was in full uniform and said the moment reminds people that those who work in law enforcement are human, after all.

"I'm a daddy, I'm a husband, I'm Terry. Sergeant Reynolds is my title but that's not who I am," he said.



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