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# HOUSTON COUNTY HOMETOWN HEROES

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**Don Moncrief**, *HHJ Publisher*  
**Brianna Smith**, *HHJ Managing Editor / Graphic Design*  
**Clay Brown**, *HHJ Sports Editor*  
**Sandra Hernandez**, *HHJ Staff Writer*  
**Owen Jones**, *HHJ Staff Writer*  
**Lori Kovarovic**, *Advertising Director / Sales*  
**Nathan Mathis**, *HHJ Sales*  
**Kayley Trischan**, *Graphic Design*

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# Centerville Fire Department – Andrew Schuler

FROM PSYCHOLOGY TO SERVING HIS COMMUNITY

By BRIANNA SMITH | HHJ Managing Editor



Andrew Schuler's path to the fire service was anything but typical, but he steps into the role with a curious mind and a hunger for impact.

Schuler, a firefighter at the Centerville Fire Department, originally studied psychology at Georgia Southern University. Wanting to take a break from school, he took a degree-related job.

But two years later, his work no longer resonated and he was looking for a career change.

"I kind of hated going to work, and I needed something different. Driving to Milledgeville and Macon was killing me," he said.

On the way to the gym, Schuler saw a sign at the old station advertising CFD and decided to give it a shot. A call from the station confirmed his newfound curiosity.

"It wasn't really anything planned. A lot of people were like, 'I've always

wanted to be a firefighter since I was a kid.' That wasn't really how it worked for me. It just kind of happened," he said.

Now, Schuler is approaching his five-year mark at his first station and admits the work is busy for a smaller city. Some days see one or two calls, some 10, but there is always work to do until evening time.

"We do a lot of maintenance on hydrants, vehicles ... we stay typically pretty busy until about five o'clock. In the afternoons, about three-ish, it kind of slows down a little bit. We will do some [physical training], we'll work out. We hang out together, watch movies, play games," he said.

Volume doesn't always mean the most dire situations, as Schuler explained. Sometimes, the call only requires blocking traffic for an accident.

However, when the call turns dangerous and makes an impact, it becomes truly memorable, like a call Schuler responded to a year into his career.

"There was a three-year-old boy choking on a hot dog ... I performed the backslaps and got the hot dog out. That makes you feel good. It makes you feel like you actually helped somebody that day," he said.

Another memorable call for Schuler saved a house from total destruction, thanks to the team's swift action. He's thankful for increased fire safety measures, but does like fighting fire and using his training when the time comes.

"Their entire garage was on fire. It was pushing into their kitchen wall. We got a really good stop on it, so it didn't get inside their house. It burnt their inside kitchen wall, and that's it. The rest of their house was still standing, and they just rebuilt the garage," he said.

Firefighting is without a doubt a tough job, but the culture at Centerville Fire keeps him motivated. Schuler gave credit to his mentors, Dustin Talley and Clint Traxler, and said everybody has been friendly.

"We have really good guys around us here. What makes it nice to be here is when the people around you are good to be around. You have fun. Everyone's open for conversation. If something's going wrong, you can fix it," Schuler said.

That support helped him tremendously when he first got into the field and navigated the unusual 24-hour work schedule. Add on a curious mind, and Schuler was set for success.

"I came from an office job that was a 9-5. It was a big switch and I was nervous. There's now a chance that someone else's life or someone else's property is in your hands. A lot of nerves to begin, but the guys around you pick you up, teach you what to do and knock those nerves off," he said.

Schuler's secret to balance is staying physically active and separating his work from free time.

"I like the gym, golf. When I leave here, I try not to think about the fire service. That's how you get burned out on most jobs. So, I try to avoid that unless I'm at work," he said.

And he prefers not to revisit, keeping him motivated for the next call.

"I typically don't talk about most of my calls again. I just want to separate that. [With] some of the stuff you do see or have to go through, having that block helps it not eat at you and not ruin the job or push you away," he said.

Now, Schuler has leadership in his sights and has made the effort to mature and grow. He thinks that progress was the reason he was nominated for Hometown Heroes.

In all he does, better days for fellow firefighters and the community is the motivation.

"When we're seeing them, they might be having the worst day, but maybe [it's] that one small thing that [I] did," Schuler said. "When I leave that scene, I helped that person."



# Centerville Police Department – Tavyonne King

A PROACTIVE FRIEND IN THE POLICE FORCE

By BRIANNA SMITH | HHJ Managing Editor



Officer Tavyonne King embodies ambition and proactivity at the Centerville Police Department.

Born and raised in Atlanta, King started her police career at the Fort Valley Police Department in 2020 and joined Centerville in August of last year.

She studied undergrad at Fort Valley State University and recently got her Master's in Criminal Justice with a law enforcement concentration from Albany State University.

Originally, her career aspirations were in the medical field as an OB-GYN.

Then, inspired by her aunt, she was interested in social work.

But around the eighth grade, casual television watching opened up a new possibility for King.

"I was scrolling on TV and I started watching 'The First 48.' It was interrogating people and I was like, 'This is what I want to do,'" she said.

The TV show sparked King's goal of becoming an investigator, but it also revealed a common thread through all her early career ideas.

"I always wanted to help people. I have a helping spirit. The jobs I wanted to do before: OB-GYN, social work, they all help people, so policing just falls in that line," she said. "When I saw 'The First 48,' and saw everything they did, I was like, 'Yeah, this is it.'"

King says the days are varied as a patrol officer. She starts her day early at 5:45 a.m., then after car inspections and a briefing, hits the streets at 6 a.m.

Early on, King checks businesses, neighborhoods, and vehicles for signs of break-ins. But her favorite part of the day, between neighborhood checks and answering calls, is when she runs traffic.

“I try to start running a little traffic, patrolling the areas, letting people know that we’re out here, we’re patrolling, we’re proactive policing,” she said.

Her other favorite aspect is anytime she can turn on lights and sirens.

“Any high-adrenaline calls that we have to hurry up and get to, emergency calls, they’re fun. I love it,” she said.

King’s favorite call comes from her time in Fort Valley. While working the night shift, she responded to a man stopped in a car on the train tracks.

She and her lieutenant first believed it was a DUI, but it was a medical emergency that she was already prepared for. Her response won her Employee of the Month.

“Come to find out, his sugar was actually low. Luckily, I had snacks in my patrol car. I had a honey bun, and I sent another officer to get him orange juice. We got his sugar back up and we called EMS to have him checked out,” she said.

The incident could have become much worse, leaving King relieved that they stepped in to help.

“If nobody would have seen him on the tracks, he could have been out there for hours. A train could have come. It was a big relief,” she said.

At CVPD, she enjoys the camaraderie between fellow officers and command staff.

“They understand us. We’re able to go talk to them about anything,” she said.

King believes a focus on proactivity and productivity is essential in her work. Being recognized by her team is motivating and behind the results is a desire to help.

“People deal with different things every day, and as a police officer, you see it. Every single day, every call you go on is something different,” she said. “Being able to be there, give people the best advice I can give them, and helping them get out of whatever situation, comforting them when something is going bad, that’s what I like to do.”

King, a newlywed, said she loves spending time with her friends and family outside of work, especially her husband and two-year-old son. She also likes visiting family in Atlanta.



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# Emory Healthcare EMS – Sarah Griffin

TRAINING OFFICER FINDS HER TRUE CALLING SERVING OTHERS

By OWEN JONES | HHJ Staff Writer



A little sibling rivalry can be a good thing in the long run. That was the case for Sarah Griffin.

Griffin has spent the past seven years in EMS and the last four working as a paramedic for Emory Healthcare–Warner Robins and Perry. She also serves as a preceptor for the hospital and has recently earned the title of Chief Field Training Officer.

“As a paramedic on a high call volume 911 unit, I respond to emergency calls, provide immediate medical interventions, administer and manage critical lifesaving medications and treatments, stabilize patients in high-stress situations and ensure safe transport to the emergency room,” she said.

A typical shift for Griffin usually begins with her checking her ambulance and

making sure she has all the equipment needed for the day. Throughout the day, Griffin said she responds to 911 calls, communicates with patients and provides care within her scope of practice. In her free time, she enjoys reading, gardening, working out, cooking and meal prepping.

In her career, she has earned state certification as an EMS Instructor and Paramedic as well as a nationally certified paramedic. She was also named the 2025 Paramedic of the Year by Houston Healthcare EMS and the Knights of Columbus. Griffin has an Associate of Science in Para-medicine.

“While on the job, I’ve found that patient care often extends beyond clinical treatment,” she said. “Compassion, situational awareness and addressing the needs of both patients and their families can have a meaningful impact on outcomes and overall well-being.”

Griffin initially wanted to become an audiologist after graduating high school. After taking a personality test in college class, the results told her she “didn’t belong in an office setting or a job that is too routine”.

Unsure of what she wanted to do, Griffin called her brother.

“[He’s] a 68-Whiskey combat medic in the Army and now a medical student,” she said. “He has always inspired me and pushed me to do more, learn more and to be the best I can be.”

Despite their unspoken competition between them, Griffin’s brother encouraged her

to enroll in EMT school. She then signed up that following semester.

“After becoming an EMT, I wanted to do more for my patients, so I passed the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians for Advanced EMT training,” she said.

Griffin then proceeded to go to paramedic school and has been one ever since. Her favorite part is interestingly the unexpectedness of the job as a whole. She said no shifts or days are the same and never knows what is going to happen.

“I also love being able to help people feel better when they are having a bad day,” she said. “There’s a lot of joy and fulfillment that comes from being able to confidently say, ‘I made a difference today’, or ‘I saved a life today’.”

Griffin is not sure why she was nominated to represent Emory Healthcare EMS as their Hometown Hero. She said there are many others who should be recognized, but is grateful to have received such recognition.

Overall, Griffin desires to learn and improve each and every day and wants to serve others at the highest possible level.

“I want to help others, and I want to be the hand that reaches out to someone who needs support. I want to be the person whose smile brings comfort and can change someone’s day,” she said. “I want to be the kind of provider I would want to care for my own grandparents. Ultimately, I want to be the change I hope to see in the world.”



# Emory Healthcare – Kimberly Ham

A STALWART IN HOUSTON COUNTY URGENT CARE

By OWEN JONES | HHJ Staff Writer



**K**imberly Ham, MD has worked as an urgent care physician for 25 years, quickly moving up the ranks to now be Emory Healthcare's Medical Director for the Med Stops in Warner Robins and Perry.

She has served as Medical Director since 2020. Before, she was the Physician Advisor from 2018-2020.

Ham is board certified by the American Academy of Family Physicians while maintaining certifications in Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support, Pediatric Advanced Life Support and Basic Life Support.

"I provide clinical leadership and ensure that every patient receives timely, compassionate and high-quality care," she said. "I guide and support

and support our Med Stop providers, fostering a culture where empathy and clinical excellence work together."

In her role, she also coordinates a care plan collaborating with patients, families and their interdisciplinary team making sure folks feel heard, supported and connected to the resources urgent care offers. She said she is involved with care after discharge as she helps those patients through the next steps in the healing process.

Ham's day usually consists of a 12 hour shift working alongside a wonderful, collaborative team. She said they take a team based approach to ensure patients receive care efficiently and effectively.

"Our shared goal is to provide the appropriate level of care for each individual while maintaining a supportive and positive environment for both patients and staff," she said. "We are grateful to serve the community and help bridge care between urgent and emergent care needs by directing patients to the most appropriate level of care."

Ham said the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact and stood out as one of the most challenging parts in her career.

"[The pandemic] strengthened my faith and reaffirmed why I chose this profession,"

she said. “The hours were long, expectations were high and there were many unknowns, but we pushed through and emerged stronger as a team and as a community.”

Ham’s overall interest in working with people is when she knew she wanted to work in healthcare. She said she has always enjoyed building relationships while also being in a position to help others when they need it the most.

She thanked her coworkers for being there for her every step of the way.

“I am fortunate to work alongside a dedicated and compassionate team, and I truly enjoy caring for and supporting the community I live in,” she said.

Ham felt honored to be nominated as Emory Healthcare’s Hometown Hero. She shared she loves her profession and is grateful to have that recognized.

“Knowing that I can help my patients through all walks of life, including those who are unable to access their doctor’s office during the day or after hours is what motivates me,” she said.

Ham said treating pneumonia early to avoid a hospital visit or caring for a fracture or sprain are a couple examples that bring her satisfaction in her work.

“It is rewarding on many levels,” she said. “As a physician, I enjoy the mental challenge of medicine and the fast pace of the urgent care environment.”

Overall, Ham said her colleagues, coworkers and patients are the reason she loves this profession.

“They inspire me every day,” she said.



# Flint Energies – Hunter Walton

LINEMAN WORKING LONG HOURS TO KEEP OUR LIGHTS ON

By CLAY BROWN | HHJ Sports Editor

**E**lectricity is something we as a society take advantage of.

It's the ability to flip a switch and light a whole room, cook our food and dry our clothes. We don't notice the great effort it takes to maintain until it shuts off.

Hunter Walton, a First Class Lineman for Flint Energies, is one of those people that keeps the system running.

"[[It's] getting the lights on, but it's not just that," Walton said of his duties.

"That's what most people see because that's when they tend to realize we're there is when the lights are off... You got maintenance, construction, we update old stuff to new, just keeping up with everything."

It wasn't a straight shot for the Crawford County native; like many people, he had no idea what he wanted to do after high school.

"I went to college for about a year. After my second semester I just realized that's not what I wanted to do," Walton said. "Then I talked to a few guys I knew that actually worked at Flint, realized that something I want to do is working outside, you get to do something different every day."

He answered that call by enrolling at the Southeast Lineman Training Center in Trenton, Georgia. Walton said school is a popular option among those interested in the line of work, though it's not the only one.

"You can go that route where you get a little bit of training ahead of time," Walton said. "I went to school, which was about 15 weeks."

"Or you could just get on with a contractor or we have some where co-op students can come in and they get the gist. [If] you come through a co-op you're gonna have to go through an apprenticeship even if you went to school, it's just part of their training because now you're learning what the company wants you to do."

Walton moved to Houston County in 2019 and is almost in his sixth year with Flint Energies.

A constant student of the trade, Walton suggests everyone interested come ready to work and ready to learn no matter how long you've been on the job or how much you



think you know.

“You gotta want to come in and learn. I think a lot of guys come in and think everything’s just going to be handed to them or [they’ll be] babied along,” Walton said. “You gotta learn it. You gotta want to learn it because you can get into this lull of it, just barely skating by, and you’re never going to learn all of it or really bring yourself to the full potential.”

Those struggles can especially take hold during the long hours in the heat. Though Walton said the typical schedule is four 10-hour shifts a week, storm hours sometimes go until the work is done.

“Just like life, you’re gonna have hard times and you just got to keep going,” Walton said.

“You get to that point where you’re like, ‘Man I’m tired,’ but you got to get to the finish line... You know once you’re done you just helped all these individuals get their stuff back on, get their life back together, everything’s straight. But also you know once you finish you get to go back to your family, and that’s the end goal anyway. Be safe and get to go home every day.”

Walton enjoys what he does, the good and the bad. But his favorite part isn’t specifically the work, it’s the camaraderie with his coworkers.

“We do a lineman’s rodeo... We get to take what we learn and what we do every day and they put it into a competition,” Walton said. “You climb, you get to do all the events whether you’re an apprentice or journeyman [in a] team with three guys... You get to hang out with all of the guys, the camaraderie is great... then when you add the rodeo into it you get all the competitiveness in us.”

There’s a lot that goes in to keeping our fragile society running. Next time you turn on your porch lights or plug your phone in to charge, thank a lineman.





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# Georgia Power – Jacob Harper

KEEPING THE ELECTRICITY FLOWING

By SANDRA HERNANDEZ | HHJ Staff Writer



Whenever we think of Georgia Power, we think of linemen who respond to a power outage or install power lines. However, we do not think about the people behind the scenes making sure we have our lights on – like Macon TMC Line Engineer Jacob Harper.

Harper supports the safe operation and maintenance of Georgia Power's high voltage transmission system. He works closely with crews to help ensure reliable power in middle Georgia.

He has been in the electric utility industry for about 18 years. This past year, he started serving as TMC Line Engineer, where he supports transmission operations.

Harper has a degree in electrical engineering and has completed specialized training in high voltage transmission systems and safety practices.

Every day is different for Harper; he is either planning, coordinating or supporting crews. However, safety and reliability are always his top priorities.

Harper also operates a Marshmaster, used to access transmission right-of-ways in swamps or other conditions a normal vehicle would not be able to drive through.

Although his day-to-day life is unpredictable, storm response is always memorable for Harper.

"Seeing teams work together to safely restore power really highlights the importance of preparation and team work," he said.

Harper wanted a career where engineering directly impacts people's daily lives. The

electric utility industry allows him to continue that impact.

He said his favorite part of the job is working with dedicated professionals who take pride in doing critical work safely and correctly.

For people interested in pursuing engineering, he said the sky is the limit.

“It’s a very fun career, rewarding, and you can see your work in action once you design it on paper and see it built in the field,” he said.

Harper believes his experience, work ethic and commitment to supporting his team and communities makes him stand out at Georgia Power. He said their job is essential to keeping homes and businesses going.

“Knowing that our work keeps homes, hospitals, and businesses powered is what motivates me every day,” he said.

Outside of the power lines, Harper enjoys spending time with his two sons. They play baseball, meaning most weekends he is at the field watching them compete.



# Georgia Bureau of Investigation – Skyler “Jake” Pelfrey

FIELD AGENT FINDS UNEXPECTED CAREER WITH GBI

By CLAY BROWN | HHJ Sports Editor



**T**he general public might not think about it, but the Georgia Bureau of Investigation does a lot of unseen, behind the scenes investigative work for Houston County and surrounding areas.

The Region 13 Investigative office in Perry serves Ben Hill, Bibb, Crawford, Dooly, Houston, Irwin, Peach, Turner, Twiggs and Wilcox Counties.

The agency handles a myriad of casework that differs in nature, and field agent Skyler “Jake” Pelfrey is one of several faces you might see out and about on GBI business.

“Anything ranging from death investigations, child crimes, fraud, use of force cases, anything like that you can be assigned here,” Pelfrey said. “There’s one other kind of agent, it’s a crime scene specialist...there’s also an intel analyst...but you will see most of the people in this building are going to be field agents.”

The GBI, much like the Georgia State Patrol, often assists local agencies in their investigations. Depending on the assignment, that work can take on different looks but Pelfrey said the job is all about people.

“I would say that probably 90% of what we do is talking to people,” Pelfrey said. “I have met some of the most incredible people I’ve ever met is on this job, and at times where I really didn’t expect to meet them...Some people you don’t want to talk to, but it’s the nature of the beast...I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

Pelfrey has been with the Region 13 office since 2022; funny enough, before then he told himself he’d never get into law enforcement.

Pelfrey grew up in Cartersville, Georgia and was in the Air Force for a few years before taking a role as an intel analyst for the DeKalb County Police Department.

“I was attached to [DeKalb’s] gang unit,” Pelfrey said. “While I was working there I would do work with their homicide squad as well. Just my little part and being attached to a homicide investigation and then seeing it all come together and seeing it finally result in the arrest of the right person...it just left me very satisfied.”

Staying back at the office while the officers in the field tracked down the suspects he’d found all this information on left Pelfrey with a lingering desire.

That’s when he decided to go back on his word to never get into law enforcement. He applied to the GBI and has loved his work ever since.

Getting a job with the GBI is a bit more involved than other agencies. Most local police and the GSP go to an academy that lasts around half a year, but with the GBI you are required to obtain a four-year degree.

“Technically there’s only two things you have to have, and the easiest thing first is be 21 years old, and the second is you have to have a bachelor’s degree,” Pelfrey said. “There’s not any kind of written rule as to what your bachelor has to be...to make your application more competitive it’s recommended that you either get some military time or law enforcement experience to help.”

Pelfrey had both military and some law enforcement experience, and he mentioned an old roommate’s bachelor’s degree was in finance, so it doesn’t “technically” matter what the degree is in.

There are qualifiers past education and experience, though. Pelfrey offered a warning for more introverted personalities.

“If you are not a talkative person and you don’t enjoy having conversations with people, I would say being in law enforcement might not be for you. At least in the patrol or investigator aspect,” Pelfrey said. “Everything that we do is going to involve talking to people and a lot of the conversations we have are uncomfortable conversations. If that kind of thing bothers someone, I would say either look into something more in the forensics side of the house or maybe something different.”



# Georgia State Patrol – Rebecca Iverson

RESPONDING TO THE FAMILY CALLING

By CLAY BROWN | HHJ Sports Editor

Houston County is home to many law enforcement and first responder agencies; one of the most recognizable is the Georgia State Patrol.

Trooper First Class Rebecca Iverson is one of the troopers you'll see on local stretches of Interstate 75 and surrounding roads doing preventative work.

For GSP, that includes the expected things like DUI calls, seatbelts, cell phone usage and accidents. But they also assist local agencies often, handling accidents and other incidents so they can focus their attention on more domestic issues.

"I like to do speed and I like it on the interstate, but I also like school zones," Iverson said. "Because a lot of the school zones around here don't have flashing lights...I've contacted Houston County and I was like, 'Hey where is your problem area?'"

"I'm not sure why I like speed enforcement. Prevention is what we're doing. Sitting in a school zone, I'm out there because it's a problem area for one, and why are you going so fast when you're going to drop your kid off or you're passing schools and you see all these parents and all these school buses, why are we going fast? Pay attention, because you're not the only one in the world."

Iverson grew up in Orlando, Florida and has always been connected to law enforcement. Her mother was law enforcement for the city of Orlando, her sister was a dispatcher and her brother-in-law was in the field, too.

Even before she was official she was connected to the career on the civilian side; she worked as a Community Service Officer in Orlando for two years.

"I did a lot of accident reports, but I could do fraud report, a burglary, vandalism, anything like that, go take fingerprints as long as they didn't know who did it," Iverson said. "We only carried pepper spray, so we didn't deal with suspects. But it's kind of similar to what I'm doing now, it was like an assist to the sworn, so I could take care of the little stuff so they could do the bigger stuff."

Like many after high school, Iverson was looking for a job where she didn't have to go back to school.

"I think it's all I know," Iverson said. "I like interacting with the public and when I was trying to think of what I could do for a full-time job, I was like, 'Well, what can I do where I don't have to go back to school?' I couldn't think of anything, and I was like, 'Well, I



guess I'll go back to what I know, which is law enforcement.”

Iverson followed her mother to Houston County in December of 2021 and by July of 2022 she enrolled in trooper school.

While she did technically avoid going back to school, trooper training was an intense experience.

“Trooper school is no joke,” Iverson said. “It’s not just basic, it’s advanced. So we’ll do advanced firearms, so there’s two weeks of firearms. We’ll do advanced driving, so there’s two weeks of driving. A lot of people fail out of trooper school based on firearms and driving.

“It’s a mental game...It’s really long and it’s very hard, but if you’re physically fit and you don’t have to worry about that before you go to trooper school, you’ll be fine. I will say as a female you’re the minority in a male-dominated job and if you’re not tough, you won’t last.”

Being tough isn’t just a physical attribute, either. Law enforcement doesn’t garner much praise from the public, especially from those getting pulled over.

For Iverson, separating her personal from her work life is what allows her to deal with the thankless nature of the job, as well as be unbiased in her distribution of justice.

“My feelings for the day don’t dictate how I do my job. My job will be done the same way every time,” Iverson said. “I think some people get into, ‘That person is in a bad mood, that’s why I got a ticket.’ I give everybody a ticket...but it’s not because I’m just having a bad day...There’s a point where you have to separate what’s happening in your personal life from your job.”

Iverson has been serving Houston County and surrounding communities since graduating in 2023, working hard to keep our streets safe.



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# Houston County E-911 – Caitlyn Campbell

HANDLING HOUSTON COUNTY'S NIGHTTIME CALLS

By CLAY BROWN | HHJ Sports Editor

Our society is built around the daytime.

Most people work between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Restaurants and stores close at 9 p.m. when those people generally go home or to sleep.

But tragedy doesn't stop when the sun goes down.

Caitlyn Campbell lives opposite to the average. When most of us are getting up to go to the gym or make breakfast at 5:30 a.m., she's getting off of work. When you need emergency services in the middle of the night, she's the one answering your call.

Campbell is one of 11 Telecommunications Deputies, or 911 Dispatchers, on the night shift at the Houston County E-911 Center.

It's a job most people don't think about until they need its services, but one person in Campbell's life exposed her to it early.

"My aunt [Kelli Leary]...she is our maps lady and our data analyst, she's wonderful," Campbell said. "Before this [I] spent 10 years doing in-home health care for the elderly...after that I worked at a cupcake shop for roughly three months."

At that time, Campbell was pregnant with her son and considered high-risk, so she and her husband decided it was best if she stayed home. After giving birth, she was itching to get back to work.

"I decided I wanted to do something that was more fulfilling than making cupcakes," Campbell said. "I've been coming [to the 911 center] and hanging out with [my aunt] since I was little...So it's always been something I've always dreamt about doing. But putting it into practice and putting it into play was a really big thing for me."

It was relatively easy for Campbell to get on, too. There's no degree or external specialized training required.

"You don't have to have any experience. They put you through a six-to-eight-ish week training course where we learn our operating procedures, our standards, all about the job," Campbell said. "After book training [it] goes to a little bit of hands on training, where we put the new hires on the floor and they actually take calls with training officers who sit there with them."

"They learn the nature codes and what call to take and how to answer questions," she continued. "After they sign off they'll go to the floor or they'll call take for two weeks and then get in front of their first console. It's all on the job you don't have to have any



experience, which is wonderful.”

In December 2020 she accepted a position on the night shift, a monumental adjustment for the Warner Robins native.

“It was really rough adjusting to nights because I’d never worked nights where I couldn’t sleep. When I worked in people’s homes I was allowed to sleep when they slept,” Campbell said. “But with a lot of caffeine I made it.”

It’s also tough for Campbell because she and her husband work opposite schedules. When she’s coming home he’s leaving for work; she said they see each other for maybe an hour a day.

But there are aspects of the job that make all the sacrifices worth it.

“As much as we have bad calls, the good calls outweigh them by so much...It’s just the most amazing feeling, helping someone on the roughest, toughest day of their life, it’s just mind blowing,” Campbell said.

Campbell admitted that the job can be overwhelming at first. When you start out you’re unable to handle certain calls and will need some level of handholding, but she urges those interested in the field to stick it through.

“Be open. Don’t take stuff that people say to you as negative responses. Make sure you’re someone that can grow,” Campbell said. “I know it seems really tough back there but it’s not...It’s a leap you have to take. Once you dip your toes in and [if] you think it’s not for you, that’s completely fine. No one’s going to judge you for it.

“But if you think you can’t do it because you think you’re not good enough, I would advise you to please just stick around a try for a little bit, because you’ll get past that hump eventually.”



# Houston County Fire Department – Chandler Dean

ELEVATING FIRE SERVICE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

By OWEN JONES | HHJ Staff Writer

If you look in the dictionary for “firefighter,” Chandler Dean’s name will likely come up.

Along with firefighting, he serves as an acting officer in charge and also a field training officer, showing new firefighters the ins and outs of the job. He hopes to become a lieutenant.

Dean described firefighting as the best job in the world and said there aren’t too many other professions like it.

“You make relationships that turn into friendships, and your guys are your brothers as you spend 24 hours at a time, sometimes 48 hours at a time [with each other],” he said.

“You have to have a passion and a desire to want to be in this career field.”

Dean said you can see the worst of the worst and also the best of the best, however, one will experience a lot more dealing with the work-life balance of it all.

“It’s hard balancing being fireman Chandler and still being normal Chandler, because we see things that are unheard of, but honestly, it’s the best job in the world,” he said.

Dean joined the fire service in 2019, starting out with Warner Robins Fire Department. In 2023, he decided to transfer to Houston County Fire.

Before, Dean was an avid wrestler. He was State Champ in high school and went to Life University to wrestle. After finishing his wrestling career in 2019, he moved back home and did not know what to do next. A friend of his who works for the Warner Robins Fire Department, Daniel Sandoval, mentioned he should join the fire service and thought he’d excel.

“I tried out, got hired and I had no idea what I was getting into, but looking back now, it was the best decision I ever made,” he said.

Dean is still involved with his first love and has coached wrestling for Mt. De Sales Academy for the past six years. He described wrestling as one of his outlets and said everyone in the first responder field can benefit by having one given the stress of their jobs.

In 2023, Dean won a Valor Award for his efforts off duty and is also the department’s 2026 Firefighter of the Year.

To become a firefighter, one must have a strong work ethic and dedication. Dean compared it to professional athletics.

“You have to eat the right things, hydrate the right way, train the right way and live the lifestyle of a pro athlete,” he said. “At any given time, the tone can drop and you’re expected to perform at that level.”

Dean starts his 24 hour shift at 7 a.m., usually getting to the station at around 6:30



a.m. They will do pass downs first, where the previous shift will give them information. They will then do truck checks, making sure equipment is working at all times. After their daily briefing and daily duties are done, Dean tries to keep himself busy in between calls.

“Usually about 5 p.m. myself and our crew will go and get a workout until about 6 p.m. and then we usually unwind and eat dinner,” he said. “[Station 2] usually is our busiest station in the county, so we always have something going on as we respond to pretty much every major incident that happens.”

When not at the station, he currently runs a landscaping business with his friend, hangs out with his wife, Avree, and trains basically every day.

“I want to go as far as this career will let me go, and I don’t plan on stopping anytime soon,” he said.

Dean touched on a moment where he knew firefighting was something he would strive to do well at. During a fire, he said he wasn’t hydrating, training or eating like he was supposed to. He takes his job very seriously, and that moment was a turning point.

“I went in and I was the first one that came out because my regulator went off, and I was like ‘What am I doing?’,” he said. “After that, I told myself I’m going to get better and I’m going to continuously push guys around me because I don’t want to be in that situation again.”

Another moment that stood out for Dean was on his way to coach wrestling in Macon. He was driving I-75 N where he witnessed a crash. Keeping his wits about him, Dean quickly came over to help and saw a little girl stuck in the back of a Jeep.

“I have my golf bag in my trunk, and took the club and broke the back window, cleared the glass as much as I could, crawled in, got the girl out of her seat, gave her to her mom and went about my day,” he said.

At that moment, it was what he was supposed to do. He added any of their crew would’ve done the same thing.

“[In this profession] everyone has eyes on you, and I try to do the right things every day and try to motivate the guys around me and my family members,” he said.

Dean’s favorite part of the job is the relationships he has made with his fellow firefighters calling it a brotherhood. He said he has become rather close with a lot of them throughout the county.

“These people are really like your second family as we spend a third of our lives with each other,” he said. “I think my wife gets mad at me sometimes because I think I see my Lieutenant more than her.”

Dean felt very humbled and grateful for being named Hometown Hero and Firefighter of the Year. He said the work he has put in, like taking classes and more emphasis on physical fitness over the last year, is what may have factored in for this recognition.

“I just want everyone around me to elevate in whatever capacity that may look like,” he said. “I think when people see you doing the right things and you’re constantly ‘chasing greatness’, guys like that are just naturally the ones you want to follow.”

Overall, the people Dean surrounds himself with, who he works with, those he helps, and the ones he comes home to, are what truly motivate him. He said his wife is his number one supporter and does what he does because of her and his family.

“I want to make them all proud and hopefully by continuing and doing the right things, I will continue to do that,” he said. “I’m a [firefighter] because of the passion of helping people. I have a servant’s heart, and I want to serve people in the best way I know how.”

# Houston County Sheriff's Office – Andrew Lauritsen

LIEUTENANT'S FAITH GUIDES HIM WHILE ON PATROL

By OWEN JONES | HHJ Staff Writer



Every day is different while out on patrol, and Lieutenant Andrew Lauritsen loves every minute of it.

Lauritsen is a supervisor who ensures everything is in order and his deputies have what they need for the day. He also checks reports and goes to the scene with the deputies from time to time.

“If they need any help, they can call me. I try to have the best answers for them and try to be a mentor,” he said. “Even if their personal lives come up, I try to help them out the best I can by talking with them and getting them

through the hard times that they go through.”

Lauritsen also is present at major incidents, taking command and making sure everyone is in the right place during those situations.

He was born in Memphis, Tennessee, and moved to Warner Robins in the fifth grade. He played football at Valdosta State University, winning the Division II title in 2012.

In 2018, Lauritsen started working for the Sheriff's Office in the jail. He then switched to patrol in 2020 and has been in that department ever since. He's married with two kids, a four year old son and a five year old daughter.

Currently, Lauritsen works the night shift. A typical day usually begins with him getting briefed of what happened the previous shift.

“Before the shift beforehand turns it over, they'll brief me and the other supervisors of what went down and what to expect,” he said. “I pretty much supervise the whole shift, if everyone's busy, I'll take calls myself to make sure everybody is on track.”

Lauritsen said he will always try to remain variable for his deputies whenever there is a question and things of that nature.

Once Lauritsen was commissioned to be on patrol in 2020, he took many classes at the Georgia Public Training Center. He said he wanted to further his abilities while learning as much as he can when it comes to law enforcement.

“I take [my job] seriously,” he said. “The more education you have and the more aware of things you are, the better you are going to be and the better decisions you're going to make.”

Lauritsen's job deals with a lot of split-second decisions; dealing with that on a daily basis while keeping a “cool head” is something he keeps at the forefront.

“Don't let people's attitudes and actions persuade how you need to be,” he said.

What keeps Lauritsen grounded is his relationship with Jesus Christ. At the beginning

of every shift, he reads Bible passages with his deputies, which they really enjoy.

He said honoring the Lord is of utmost importance.

“I try to be the best witness possible, and that’s not only to my guys, but to everybody in the community,” he said. “If I have a sorry attitude and I’m being mean to people regardless of how they’re acting to me, I’m not being a very good witness and giving the glory to and honor to God.”

Lauritsen has always been fascinated with police growing up, as he always looked up to and respected them. He admires the fact that they give an effort to maintain order and protect the public from criminals.

“My biggest thing about law enforcement is being able to take action and try to make this community better,” he said. “You gotta be empathetic and understand where people are coming from, but still do your job at the same time.”

Lauritsen really loves being on patrol and said each day can be something different whether that be serving warrants, responding to calls or trying to catch the bad guys.

“The possibilities are endless and there’s no telling what you’re gonna come across,” he said. “I really like serving dangerous criminal warrants. I find that very interesting and helpful. I feel like we’re actually helping by getting those guys into jail and hopefully learn from their mistakes, just like we all do in life.”

Lauritsen was surprised and grateful that Sheriff Matt Moulton nominated him, however, he said there are plenty deputies who are equally deserving.

“We all can’t do it by ourselves. This is a family, a team and we have to really work together to accomplish goals,” he said.

Overall, Lauritsen’s relationship with Jesus Christ is his “foundation” in everyday life. He said if he was left up to his own devices he’d not be where he is today.

“Relying on God and staying in His Word keeps me going as He’s blessed me with so much in life that I definitely don’t deserve,” he said. “He’s what keeps us centered, so putting my faith in him and trusting that He’s in total control eases the anxiety and stuff that could stem from this job.”

When he’s not working, Lauritsen loves to play golf, work out and is active in his church.



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# Perry Fire Department – Timothy Jones

A FRIENDLY FACE AT THE FIRE STATION

By SANDRA HERNANDEZ | HHJ Staff Writer



**G**uided by his faith and willingness to serve, Perry Senior Firefighter Timothy Jones has become a rising star at the Perry Fire Department.

Jones has been with the department for about four years, starting as a firefighter, then promoted to senior firefighter.

As a senior firefighter, he can use any apparatus at the fire station. This includes the engine, ladder truck and rescue truck. He also serves as a relief driver, meaning if one of the primary drivers is unavailable, he will fill in their position.

Jones clocks in very early in the morning then they will do “pass on.” Crews discuss what happened in the previous shift, if there’s

anything missing on the truck or if anything important happened.

From there, his shift will clean the entire station and drivers will ensure their equipment is ready for use. After their cleaning duties, they will get started on their plan for the day, such as training or inspecting businesses.

During his time, Jones has received various accolades, including Firefighter of the Year. He is also a HazMat technician, trained in responding to hazardous materials or weapons of mass destruction.

Jones is also part of the Georgia Search and Rescue team, with a five-class training program. Each class is different, but all discuss different forms of rescue, such as from confined spaces rescue or trenches.

Jones is also part of the Fire and Life Safety Educator team where he teaches children and the elderly about fire safety.

Originally from Jones County, he was 17-years-old when he quit his job stocking shelves at Ingles. His grandmother, who he was living with, told him he had to either play sports or work.

She later on told him the Jones County Fire Department was hosting a cadet program and encouraged him to join.

After a month, Jones knew he wanted to become a firefighter. The department then offered to enlist him into the fire academy.

From there, the rest is history. He had a full-time job as a fireman at just 18-years-old, right after graduating from the academy.

“That was cool. It gave me an early start,” he said.

Later, he worked at different fire departments. He strived to look for a place where he could grow and become the fireman he wanted to be. That place ended up being Perry Fire Department.

“I felt that this department seemed to give out the best opportunities. They offer raises for certain classes and they have a really nice structure as far as getting promotions. That brought me down here. I knew some people that worked here and they talked about how great it was,” he said.

Jones’s favorite part of the job is serving the tight-knit Perry community.

At the station, he shared that each shift also has their own Bible study group and they occasionally merge their groups together, another one of his favorite parts of the job.

“[I like] being able to get together as a group of people and have communion over Bible study and to live together, pretty much. All of my friends work here,” he said.

Jones aims to treat everyone like a friend and with respect. He said people tend to appreciate his kindness and believes he is well-liked.

“I always try to approach the day with excellence because that’s how Christ was. He was excellent [and] flawless. I kind of set that goal for myself. I often don’t fulfill that, I’m often not perfect, but that’s just how I try and do things,” he said.

He believes if a person can’t be trusted doing the small things, they can’t be trusted doing the big things. This is why with everything he does, he aims to get it right the first time or correct his mistakes. He always tells people he is not good at something until he has done it enough to be good at it.

Jones advises aspiring firefighters to be a part of the crew and aim to make the team better.

“I really try to focus on growing as a team because these are the guys I work with. If we have to do something that’s important or life-saving or dangerous, I need to make sure they’re good so that they don’t make a mistake. I have to make sure I’m good so I don’t make a mistake. It could get them hurt, get me hurt or the person we’re trying to protect get hurt,” he said.

Outside of the fire department, Jones enjoys fishing and serving as a Youth Pastor at a church in Macon. His selflessness, dedication, and faith is what makes him a shining example at the Perry Fire Department.



# Perry Police Department – James Jones

CAPTAIN REMAINS A DEDICATED PUBLIC SERVANT

By SANDRA HERNANDEZ | HHJ Staff Writer



The Criminal Investigations Division are among the first to arrive at devastating situations and are instrumental in finding justice. This is done with unmeasurable dedication, a quality Captain James Jones possesses.

After several years of promotions, he now oversees the Criminal Investigations unit.

Part of Jones's duties is criminal investigations, as well as overseeing the evidence unit. The unit is made up of detectives, a criminal analyst and two evidence technicians.

Jones is also in charge of overseeing the drone unit, a new addition to the police department.

This is Jones's third year serving as captain, however, he has been with the Perry Police Department since 2007. Now approaching his 20 year anniversary, he has worked up in the department, starting as a patrol officer.

A typical day-in-the-life for Jones is unexpected. As soon as he enters the building, he starts reviewing cases from the night before. He then decides which ones need follow-ups from detectives.

From there, they will hold meetings with Chief Alan Everidge to stay updated. Serious occurrences during the day warrant sending detectives and Jones to assist.

Over the years, he has received multiple Police Officer of the Year awards. He was also on the FBI Task Force from 2017 to 2023.

Jones has a Bachelor's degree in Homeland Security and is currently working on receiving a Master's degree in Public Administration from Columbus State University.

Jones's career has a unique start. Before becoming a police officer, he spent about 14 years in the fire service. While in fire service, he conducted arson investigations which occasionally overlapped with law enforcement; this is what piqued Jones's interest.

When Jones came to Perry, the chief at the time asked him if he wanted to be a police officer, kickstarting his law enforcement career.

After all this time, his favorite part of the job remains the same: interacting with the community.

"That's why we're here is to serve the community. We have a fantastic community here in Perry that is very supportive of the police department," he said.

Jones believes the only time people see officers is during their worst day. People often call them to bring comfort or closure, which is what motivates him.

"That's what I do it for. I think that's what most police officers enjoy most about the job is the interaction with the community," he said.

Jones believes he has a good work ethic and aims to do the best in everything he does while maintaining his division to the highest standard.

"We don't cut corners. We work cases here at Perry that, from a detective standpoint, a lot of jurisdictions would never work; but the way we look at it: a victim is a victim, no

matter how small the crime is, they're still a victim," he said.

The division going above and beyond in their investigations symbolizes their commitment to the community, Jones believes. The department wants to ensure citizens feel they are receiving the best service.

Outside work, Jones enjoys participating in races alongside his son. They recently participated in a mini triathlon in Augusta.

He said participating in these events are great because he and his son spend time together. The pair also recently hiked three days on the Appalachian Trail.

Although he loves his job, Jones shared it can be stressful, but spending time with family and friends helps him "unplug" from the world.

Jones advised those interested in pursuing a law enforcement role to self-reflect before diving in. He urges them to know who they are and understand their commitment.

"You have to have the heart of a servant to do this job and do it good. It's not always fun," he said.

Jones believes there is often a misconception that law enforcement is about chasing cars and locking up bad people, but that is not always the case. He said people have to be mature and ready to get into the profession.

He also encourages those interested in law enforcement to have a good work ethic. "We need go-getters. We need people that when they come to work, [they] provide a service because the citizens support us," he said.

Jones also advises to ensure family understands the task they are undertaking. The job has been hard on his wife, daughter and son, he said.

Jones sacrificed presence at holidays and birthdays. However, he believes it is important for families to ride the journey together.

Jones said he has been blessed with being with his wife for 32 years, and she has been with him through his fire department to his police department days.

"It's just stuff like that. People have to be mindful of it's not all car chases...I just wish people understood that," he said.

Law enforcement is not always fun, but Jones believes it is a rewarding career and, if done right, is something to be proud of. He believes not everybody is a bad person, they just made a bad decision, however, there are consequences to their decisions.

Only a handful of people he has arrested were grateful to Jones because he changed their lives for the better.

"I think those instances really mean a lot from a law enforcement officer's standpoint," he said.

Jones talks to one frequently. At the time, Jones was a young detective and the person he arrested just graduated high school.

Jones said the person was always in trouble, escalating into property crime and theft.

Jones arrested him and the man did his time in prison.

"I think that was the catalyst that really hammered home the idea that, 'This [isn't] the lifestyle that I want'... he's always been so gracious and so thankful. It's never a time I see him that he doesn't say something positive," he said.

The person now has a family and owns a small business. Although Jones thinks he didn't make a significant impact, this person believes Jones arresting him was a blessing that put him on the right path.

"Somebody's got to do this job. If you have that servant heart, you are a good person, you have integrity and you really believe in commitment, that's the people we need out here, on the street, doing this job," he said.

Through his many sacrifices and endless cases, Jones continues to serve his community and will leave a positive impact at the Perry Police Department.

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# Robins Air Force Base Emergency Management - Makayla Tester

HANDS-ON AND PREPARED TO HANDLE ANY EMERGENCY

By SANDRA HERNANDEZ | HHJ Staff Writer



Robins Air Force Base Emergency Management always makes sure the warfighter is ready for chemical spills or taking biological agents.

Ready to be on scene is Senior Airman Makayla Tester, Military Lead for Emergency Management Logistics.

Each section has a military and civilian lead. Civilians who are prior military handle administrative duties. Tester said their sections work hand-in-hand to ensure the job is done.

Emergency Management fits into two operations: peacetime and wartime. Peacetime focuses on responding to natural disasters. Members are also HazMat and Operations trained, allowing them to work with the fire department in the event of a chemical spill or possibility of hazardous

materials.

Wartime switches over to CBRN, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear. The agency teaches the base populace, both deployed military and civilians, how to wear chemical gear. Tester said this ensures survival and efficient chemical gear operation if adversaries use chemical or biological agents

Tester joined the military at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. She attended tech school to apply for the job in December 2020. She has been in Emergency Management her entire career and is approaching her six-year anniversary this October.

Due to the current state of the world, the agency has been deployment training and getting people ready for CBRN. When Tester is not teaching in the mornings, she makes sure the agency vehicles are ready to go, including a response truck and a mobile emergency operations center, also known as MEOC.

They also have an ATV, a Polaris and a razor ready to respond.

Tester, also a facility manager, conducts equipment checks in their wing training area. She makes sure the area is clean and the HVAC system, lights, and electricity are working. This takes time since there are many buildings in the area.

Tester has been coined a couple of times by the three-star General. This was due to events that happened during her deployment that impacted locally as well. She said they were teaching multiple people about CBRN to prepare them for any events that could potentially happen.

Tester has also received the Airman of the Quarter Award for CE2. She explained

their equipment total was about \$500,000. Tester was one of the sole people to take care and maintain the equipment.

One event Tester looks back on was a public health exercise in 2023. Emergency Management worked with both RAFB Security Forces and the Fire Department.

The scenario in this exercise was an upset airman attempting to release a biological agent on base. They called in her agency and they responded with environmental engineers. In this exercise, they made recommendations on what suits to wear on scene.

Once on scene, emergency management took samples of the biological agent, which is what they would do if the scenario happened in real life.

Tester enjoyed being a part of that exercise and it is one of her favorite memories.

“That was something that was really cool to do. It was super fun and I enjoyed responding,” she said.

When Tester went into METs for the first time, the recruiter advised her to visit the Air Force website and look for jobs that speak to her.

Tester grew up in Tennessee, saying people can experience all four seasons in one day. This is what inspired her to get into natural disaster response, which led her to her current position.

Tester noticed the response during Hurricane Helene, which heavily affected her home state in 2024. This solidified why she enjoys her job.

“It’s reaching out with the local community and helping them with anything that they may need. Even with the HazMat response portion, it’s still helping the local community making sure that they’re staying safe from any type of hazard or accident that may happen,” she said.

Tester’s favorite part of the job is networking. Since emergency management is the only career field that teaches CBRN, they see every military member at RAFB.

“I think my favorite part of teaching CBRN is seeing someone start to understand why this is so important,” she said.

During her time, she has learned the ins and outs of the job and was able to visit a lot of places. Tester’s duty station was Guam, where she spent two years. While she was there, she did Temporary Duty for training. She was able to go to St. Louis for a C2 course, which teaches what to do if there’s an active shooter or a chemical response. She then went to Korea for a week to help with an exercise.

Tester is a Government Purchase Card holder and a member of the Wing Inspection Team. She said their flight is small, consisting of five military members in a 10-member office. She believes being able to speak on the military side is why she was named a Hometown Hero.

Tester said she is motivated by a career she enjoys. She describes herself as a hands-on learner, so being in logistics helps get her motivated, as well.

“I get to do stuff with my hands. I’m not afraid to go and play in the dirt to grab a sample, to check and make sure our equipment is working. I think that’s just a big portion of it for me,” she said.

Her mentality is work hard, play hard. She advises people interested in the career to network, because it can come in handy.

Outside of her everyday duties, she is a crafter at heart and enjoys crocheting, cross stitching and coloring. She also describes herself as an avid music lover and thrillseeker, who constantly visits Atlanta for concerts and Six Flags for rollercoasters.

She is ready to take on any thrill and keep Robins Air Force Base safe.

# Robins Air Force Base Fire Department - Marcus White

A POSITIVE LIGHT AT THE DEPARTMENT

By SANDRA HERNANDEZ | HHJ Staff Writer

Did you know Robins Air Force Base has its own fire department? Assistant Chief of Fire Prevention Marcus White is in charge of ensuring the community knows they are here for them.

White serves as a manager, providing oversight in fire prevention and safety. He also serves as the department's Public Information Officer.

The team comprises six fire inspectors that check all the facilities on RAFB, whether it is business or an industrial setting. White said they provide a thorough inspection in regards to fire safety measures.

Inspections are regulated and guided by a series of codes and standards. White also strives for their department to engage with the public through education and community engagement events.

"Not only are we an authoritative figure, but we're also an educational figure that provide a fun and safe way for people to work, live and play on Robins," he said.

White has been in the fire service since 2003, but was recently appointed to his new role after filling in for the past year.

There have been a lot of changes in the fire department and entities throughout the base, which White attributes to early retirements. This caused a lot of people to step up and fill the gap, which he took advantage of.

White describes a typical day for him as engaging, fun and public-facing. He said there are "two sides of the hose." One side is responsive, while the other is preventative, which is where White is on.

On his side, he serves as a liaison to the people on RAFB.

"I'm not necessarily responding to them in what could potentially be the worst day of their life, but we're responding to people with a more preventative approach," he said.

White considers educational events as a fun part of his job, because he has creative freedom.

"As long as we're delivering the message, whether it's education or we're engaging with people doing fire drills and stuff like that, it's usually the lighter side of the response. [We're] able to engage with our people and let them know 'Hey, we do have a fire department on base,'" he said.

White believes engagement gives them a snapshot of who they are without the sirens. When they encounter people on the job, he aims to make it a positive experience.

On the fire side, several certifications are required to get into the fire service. This includes Firefighter One to HazMat technician level. He said there are three phases: HazMat awareness, HazMat ops, where they learn how to mitigate with defensive measures, and finally, HazMat technician level.

Another technical certification is confined space, which has helped him in his current position.



At RAFB, many times they go into places like aircraft tanks or manholes.

Whenever they are in those situations, White represents the fire department and ensures they are doing it in a safe manner. He also ensures people know how to contact them if they need to respond.

“That’s the fun part for me. I get to be the liaison between our fire department and the 22,000 people that work on Robins,” he said.

As a child, he knew he did not want to be stuck in a job he was not passionate about. Since he was an athlete, he wanted to use his physical abilities.

He chose to join the Air Force because he wanted to help people. White’s family members also served, which is what intrigued him to pursue it professionally.

White has been named Firefighter of the Year. Early in his career, he was promoted to Airman six months early due to his efforts, work ethic, positive attitude and exemplifying excellence. He considers that a distinguished award he enjoys looking back on, even 20 years later.

“I look back on that and try to remain who I was then through and through. Then pay it to who I can that’s willing to listen and pay attention,” he said.

Although White is the face of the department, he considers himself as a representative of the firemen on the trucks and those who perform facility inspections.

As a PIO, he receives calls related to special events near and far. In one event, White gathered a handful of firefighters to compete in a nationally recognized boxing tournament.

The tournament brings police officers and firemen together for one night a year, who box to raise money for underprivileged children in the metro Atlanta area.

“Being able to perform in that capacity and represent not only our fire department but middle Georgia, it’s been an honor to be able to do so,” he said.

Engaging with people in a positive light is what White considers his favorite part of the job. He hopes to represent his department well and contribute to the RAFB lifestyle.

“When they call my number I take it very seriously. We put our best foot forward to represent, engage, and positively impact, especially our youth, as much as possible,” he said.

White wears his badge with a passion. He cares about the people in the profession as well as the people they serve.

“I think I exemplify that to anybody that get the opportunity to encounter me. They know that I’m passionate about the badge and I’m passionate about the people inside of this gate,” he said.

White is also dedicated to their mutual aid partners. He cares about the safety of those in the fire department and whoever is in need of their services.

Outside of the fire station, he enjoys spending time with family. He is also involved in his youth sports mentoring program, which he said he puts his heart into. White continues his community engagement through a men’s group he is part of and likes farming to slow down.

“I’m not afraid to try anything. To me that’s the key to life. I like to try different experiences and I’m [passionate] when I engage with something...I’m living and experiencing as I go. [I like to] be engaged whatever it is, family, hobbies, kids, whatever,” he said.

White encourages those interested in the fire service to do it. He believes it is another side of life that not everyone gets to see.

“If you have a niche or a desire to do so, at least try it. It provides life perspective that you probably won’t get working anywhere else. You get to see life through a different lens,” he said.

# Warner Robins Fire Department – Michael Buckner

FROM RV TECH TO DEDICATED TRAINING CHIEF

By BRIANNA SMITH | HHJ Managing Editor



There's no doubt that in firefighting, extensive training is needed to do the job right. And at Warner Robins Fire Department, Assistant Chief Michael Buckner is the man with the plan.

Buckner is the department's head of the training division, responsible for developing and implementing training plans.

Buckner stepped into the role in March 2025. Before that, he was the captain who delivered the training. Overall, he has been with the department for 19 years.

His day starts 30 minutes before his scheduled start time. Once the training safety officers arrive, he'll conduct a briefing to discuss goals and responsibilities. After that, he ensures they have the resources for success.

On top of that, Buckner oversees investigations and heads the

department's social media team.

"A lot of paperwork," he said, laughing.

Additionally, Buckner is the Health and Safety program manager.

"Anything health and safety related with the fire department is my responsibility. That includes policy enforcement, policy development and obviously, implementation. Anything you can think of, from [personal protective equipment,] all the way to some of our equipment that we use, I'm responsible for," he said.

Before firefighting, Buckner was an RV technician in Byron, where a chance encounter with a coworker sparked his interest.

The coworker had come into the shop, sweating profusely, his arms and face bright red. Buckner originally thought his coworker was having an emergency, but he had just returned from responding to one.

"I asked if he was okay and he said, 'Yes, I just got back from a fire ... I'm a volunteer firefighter.' He explained it to me and the rest is history. After that, he invited me to my first training meeting with Peach County Fire Department and I became a member very shortly thereafter," he said.

Buckner started as a volunteer and, in 2005, was deployed to Louisiana to assist in search and rescue efforts after Hurricane Katrina. For him, being an RV technician paled in comparison to being in the storm's aftermath.

“When I left that location and came back to Georgia and had to go back to my regular job ... I could no longer do that job. At that point I made a decision that I was going to become a full-time firefighter, and that’s what I aggressively pursued,” he said.

Now in an admin role, mentorship is his passion and a perfect fit as training chief.

“Firefighting is the best job on the planet. When you get into an administrative role, helping people to develop and advance their career is the most rewarding thing that you can have in this job,” he said.

And it’s the people at the fire department who motivate him. He said their tenacity, demeanor, positive attitude and perseverance are inspiring.

“They will pursue training with every part of them. That is just something that’s built into the DNA of the Warner Robins Fire Department. They are extremely dedicated to what they do for themselves, as well as the citizens,” he said.

Buckner is dedicated as well, working overtime for Emory Healthcare EMS and as a live fire instructor for Georgia Fire Academy. Through the state he also trains volunteer departments when they are unable to secure training.

Although he takes on a lot and works tirelessly, he admits he can’t do it all alone.

“I’m not a bragging person. There’s no ‘I’ in this. The fire department can’t run off a single individual. The vision can’t run off a single individual. It takes a team to be able to accomplish what we have to be able to accomplish. I wouldn’t be successful or sitting in this position if it wasn’t for my team,” he said.

Buckner specifically thanked his training safety officers: Andre Grace, Calvin Huggins and Jessten Mullis. He also thanked his command team: Deputy Chief of Administration Jason Mock, Deputy Chief of Operations Ned Dixon and Fire Chief Albert Wright.

Overall, Buckner is proud to work with a world-class fire department.

“We have some of the best instructors, the best leadership,” he said. “We are well respected within the fire service as a whole, and we are well respected within our community. Everyone has a very positive vibe when it comes to the fire department.”



# Warner Robins Police Department – Kimberly Houck

NEVER TOO LATE TO LEAP INTO LAW ENFORCEMENT

By BRIANNA SMITH | HHJ Managing Editor



Officer Kimberly Houck is proof positive that it is never too late to follow your dreams and make a positive impact on your community. She and her trusty K9, Pepsi, are a dynamic duo at the Warner Robins Police Department.

She has been in the patrol division from the start and is also a field training officer. However, her favorite promotion was her most recent when she was paired with Pepsi.

“She is the best dog in the K9 group, but I think we’re all partial to our partners,” she said.

Each day on patrol is a new opportunity.

“Every day is a new day. There’s always something new, always learning and growing,” she said.

From a young age, Houck was always the peacekeeper in her family, a natural fit as the middle child of three.

Police work was in her sights, but as a young single mother, she didn’t have the resources at the time.

Instead, she worked for a civil law firm in Macon. Once her children were older, she decided to pursue her career in law enforcement.

Houck has been with the department since November 2019; after her hiring, she went to mandate in January 2020. Although she had a later start, she didn’t let her age stop her from chasing her goals.

“If I could do it at 40, anybody can do it. I like to take that as a learning experience not to give up on the dream that you have. Go until you achieve it. ... It took me four times to pass [the physical agility test,] but I came back every time because this is what I wanted to do,” she said.

Houck admits working with Pepsi is her favorite job within the department. She describes her as a joy and a calming presence during the stress of police work.

“It’s the best just to know she is there. It’s comforting. If I’m having a bad day, all I have to

do is take her out, throw her ball, talk to her, do a little work with her. It makes that [bad day] go away. It centers you and brings you back to yourself,” she said.

Houck’s day starts with Pepsi, where she gives her attention before they go into work. Then, they proactively patrol the streets and answer various calls.

Pepsi provides pep and the unpredictable nature of police work provides perspective.

“Everything’s different. Nothing is ever going to be the same. Even if you go to the same house a dozen times, there’s always going to be something different, something new, and something you can learn and grow from,” she said.

That mindset contributed to her growth as a patrol officer, especially in her working style and interpersonal skills. Houck always strives for self-improvement and enjoys working with her second family at the department.

“It’s very family oriented, family first. Everybody that you work with becomes your family as well,” she said. “We all work so closely together ... from admin, to the chief down, everybody is very supportive and encouraging. If you want to do something, they’re going to help you do that.”

With a heart for people, Houck said her main focus is positivity for everyone she comes in contact with. She strives to do what Pepsi does for her.

“We’re there for a reason and it’s not my job to beat anybody down, bad guy or not. We’re there to do what we can to help, and I try to live that. I’m a helper. I’m a peacekeeper. I’m a servant. That’s what I want people to be able to see through me. I’m not there to bring anybody down, I’m going to lift everybody up as much as I can,” she said.

Police Chief Wayne Fisher agrees, saying she is incredibly caring and committed to the well-being of her coworkers and the community. He said her working at the department is a privilege and they’re excited to see her continue to grow.

“Kim’s done a fantastic job, not only in her professional but in her personal life, keeping things in balance, and she’s truly a positive role model for those who are coming into law enforcement and those who have been here for an extended period of time. She’s an inspiration to us. This is the legacy for the generations coming up behind us that will be running the department in the future,” he said.

Houck’s secret to balance? Finding a way to keep work and home stresses separate. She has found success in reading, working out, and, of course, hanging out with Pepsi.

“Take a deep breath and center yourself, whether you’re going home or coming into work,” she said. “Whether it’s reading, therapy, running, exercising, [find] something that helps you center yourself and leave the stressors of each where they are.”



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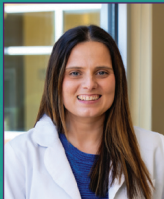
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