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Fallen officers memorialized



Levy County Sheriff Bobby McCallum (left) speaks with Rep. Dennis Baxley after the service.

Story, Photos By Jeff M. Hardison

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WILLISTON – A small crowd of people gathered Friday morning (May 20) at Heritage Park Pavilion on North Main Street in Williston to honor and remember law enforcement officers who died in the line of duty, especially a member of the Williston Police Department and a member of the Levy County Sheriff's office.

The specific officers who were memorialized are Williston Police Department Cpl. David Wayne Moss and

Levy County Sheriff's Office Deputy Atticus Hagood Ellzey, who both gave their lives in the line of duty.

The speakers for the day were WPD Chief Dennis Strow, WPD Deputy Chief Clay Connolly, Levy County Sheriff Robert "Bobby" McCallum Jr. and Rep. Dennis K. Baxley (R-Ocala, Dist. 23).



Family members from both fallen officers were in the audience.

WPD Chief Dennis Strow

Chief Strow served as the emcee, introducing other speakers and being the glue to hold together the whole ceremony. He also provided excellent closing remarks, including an update on how many officers in the nation and in Florida had died in the line of duty so far in 2016.

Deputy Chief Connolly spoke about Cpl. Moss and the fateful events of Friday, July 29, 1988. Connolly said that by doing the right thing, Cpl. Moss was a hero. It's not like an officer wakes up and says they plan to do something heroic on some day, Connolly said.

It is the daily actions of officers doing what they have sworn to do as they perform their duties that are heroic, he said.

Connolly read excerpts from a book by Traveler Wendell that told about that day and about Cpl. Moss. Williston has named a street after the fallen officer too.

Connolly told about the late officer telling his wife Lori, who was in the audience on Friday, that it was too hot to wear the bulletproof vest that night. WPD Officer Bruce Snyder had been hired only five weeks before that night in July of 1988.

While Snyder had known Moss for a short time, Connolly said as he read from the book by Wendell, Snyder had grown to like Moss.

David Jenkins, a 19-year-old who had just moved in with his mother and stepfather in nearby Bronson, Connolly said, had mental health issues and a long criminal record in Maryland before he moved to Levy County.

Jenkins had been off of the medication used for mental illness at the time of this event. Cpl. Moss, who had the 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift, made his rounds that night, Connolly said as he read from Wendell's book.

Cpl. Moss found a disabled vehicle at the corner of Southwest Sixth Street and First Avenue at 2:09 a.m. on July 29, 1988, according to dispatch records. Moss had spoken with Jenkins there the night before. Jenkins had told him of trouble at home and that he intended to sleep in the car that night, Connolly said as he read

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from the book.

The WPD deputy chief read the book, going through the points listed under times of that morning. Officer Snyder had noticed the lack of response of Cpl. Moss and he began searching for him. Eventually, Snyder found the cruiser.

He found Jenkins and Moss, both dead from gunshots. Jenkins had shot Moss with a stolen gun and Moss returned fire from his service weapon.

“It appeared to Officer Snyder that Jenkins had crouched down to hide, or to lie in wait, for Cpl. Moss,” Connolly read, “because there was some caked dirt on one of Jenkins’ knees where he had knelt on the damp grass.”

When Sheriff McCallum spoke, it was about a Levy County deputy who died on Jan. 28, 1945.



Rep. Dennis Baxley (R-Ocala, Dist. 23)

A legislative process for naming part of U.S. Highway 19, through the Town of Otter Creek, in that deputy’s honor was not completed in the most recent session of the Florida Legislature, according to records.

The sheriff reminded listeners about how long ago this event was. He said President Franklin D. Roosevelt was in office back then.

Unlike today, McCallum said, the Gulf Hammock and Otter Creek areas were relatively well populated with people back then.

Deputy Ellzey was on duty. He was trying to keep the peace at a bar occupied by African-Americans at that time, McCallum said. Two white men went into the bar and started causing a problem, McCallum said.

“Initially,” the sheriff said, “Deputy Ellzey wasn’t trying to arrest anybody. He was just trying to keep the peace, and have these two white men to be where they should have been and not create a problem.”

And so in his attempt to keep the peace 71 years ago, Deputy Ellzey lost his life, Sheriff McCallum said.

“He was shot and he was killed,” McCallum said. “But before he died, he was able to identify his assailant. And the two that

were responsible for shooting him.”

The sheriff said those two suspects were arrested, convicted and sentenced to prison.

To put this in perspective, the sheriff shared that there was no backup for the deputy. There were no mobile radios. Even today in Levy County, he said, it takes time to get backup for deputies; but back then the law enforcement officers worked under tougher conditions.

Just as back then, when Deputy Ellzey would have to ask a person to become deputized to assist him, McCallum said, the LCSO still depends on the public to help it enforce the laws of Florida and of the United States.

The sheriff said he knows there are Ellzey family members who never had the chance to know Deputy Ellzey because he died protecting the lives and property, and keeping the peace, in Levy County.

“We know his mark in the history of Levy County,” Sheriff McCallum said. “He gave his life under those circumstances for the people of Levy County.”

The sheriff said law enforcement officers today are targets for death, without even arresting people or trying to keep the peace. In the United States today, McCallum said, law enforcement officers are being killed just because they are wearing the uniform.

“Your life is always on the line,” he said. “It’s a tough balancing act for our law enforcement men and women.”

The sheriff said he wants to note his appreciation for the service given by Deputy Ellzey, and he wants to honor and remember this ultimate sacrifice given by one man, and the sacrifice of his family, for his county.

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Rep. Baxley was the keynote speaker. As Chief Strow introduced Baxley, he said he has known Baxley for 40 years, and while most politicians are politicians, Strow said Baxley is a public servant.

Every police officer pledges to serve and protect people, putting their own lives in harm's way, Baxley said. This is a noble calling, he added.

"But for the ones who respond to that call," Baxley said, "we have no order in our society."

Baxley said God calls some to this service of their fellow man. Families will never completely heal from that missing part of their family, who committed to the call for service to the point of it taking their life. And so, the honor and remembrance is for those families too.

"We should never grieve alone," he continued. "We should share in that sorrow, and in that gratefulness for their lives. We remember. We give thanks not just for them, but for their entire family for making that commitment for service and protection."

About 15 years ago, Baxley received a phone call from one of his five children – from his third son Damon.

Baxley thought his son was going to tell him that he planned to go into seminary or to begin ministry somewhere. Instead, his son told him that he felt called by God to serve people by being a law enforcement officer.

Since his son shared with him that he felt God calling him to service in that manner, Baxley said he was happy to help his son to seek that profession.

There is no greater peace, Baxley said, even if you must give your life, than to know the peace you will experience by knowing that you are that obedient servant of God's will. He said forever is a long time.

As Sheriff McCallum said, Baxley restated, law enforcement officers are targets just for wearing the uniform today.

Good and evil still press against each other. Anything can happen, he said. Peace comes from knowing that God wins, he said, and He will win every day. Baxley said individuals must hear and obey the word of God.

Chief Strow reminded listeners of the role of the men and women who are "the thin blue" line between civilization and chaos.

Glenn Robinson played taps. David Kreiton, a piper who is one of the 18 members with the Marion County Sheriff's Office Pipes and Drums Corps, played Amazing Grace.

The Rev. Charlz Caulwell, WPD chaplain, provided the invocation and the dismissal benediction.