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Fallen deputy honored by highway named as a memorial The Ellzey Family



A few people in this photograph are unidentified; however, included here are ancestors of the late Levy County Sheriff's Deputy Atticus Haygood Ellzey, who died in the line of duty on Jan. 28, 1945. Seen here are Nina Jenkins, Sandra Ellzey, John Ellzey, Mary Ellzey, Logan Ellzey, Jimmy Ellzey, Jimmy Willis, Brooke Willis, Doug Hill, Wilma (daughter), James Ellzey, Lynn Ellzey, Buster Ellzey, Jessie Ellzey, Doug Ellzey, David Ellzey, Ann Ellzey and Sierra Nazario, and others.

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LEVY COUNTY -- The only deputy with the Levy County Sheriff's Office to have died in the line of duty was honored Thursday (Jan. 25).

Sheriff Bobby McCallum speaks with **Chiefland City Manager Mary Ellzey** shortly before the start of the ceremony.

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Sheriff Bobby McCallum speaks about the sacrifice given by the only Levy County deputy to die in the line of duty. Among the many law enforcement officers present in addition to the sheriff were Undersheriff Brett Beauchamp, LCSO Col. Mike Sheffield, Williston Police Chief Dennis Strow and Williston Deputy Chief Clay Connolly.

Levy County Commission Chairman John Meeks speaks about the Ellzey family and its long tradition of being oriented toward service to the public. Other county leaders present were County Commission Vice Chairman Mike Joyner, County Commissioner Matt Brooks, County Commissioner Lilly Rooks, and Property Appraiser Oz Barker. Former Levy County Commissioner Chad 'Cracker' Johnson was present with his wife Angie. They said Brooke Willis used to babysit their children, and then-Commissioner Johnson had attempted to initiate this memorial recognition in the year 2010.



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Brooke Ellzey Willis (in gray sweater at left) stands and listens during the ceremony. She led the effort in the past three years to have this highway designated in honor of her ancestor.



Jimmy Willis, Brooke's father and Mary's husband, thanks everyone for attending the event. FDOT Government Liaison Ed Seifert is seen to the left.



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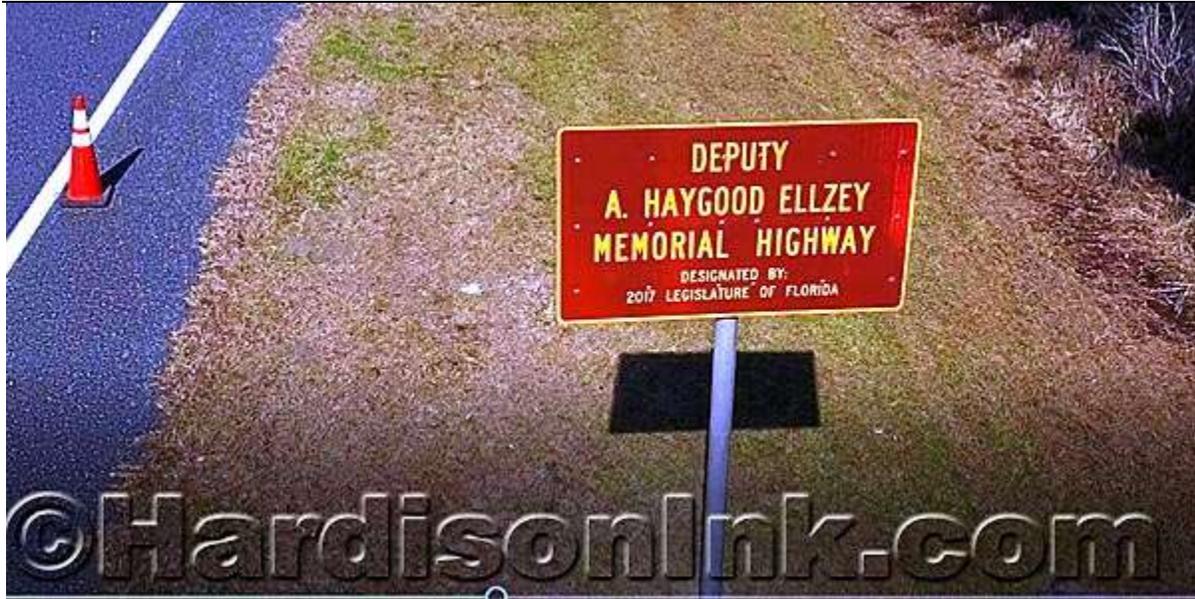


Moments after receiving their very own half-sized memorial signs to take home, Atticus Haygood Ellzey's last surviving daughter Wilma and Brooke Ellzey Willis show the signs they received.



The sign is unveiled.

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The sign designating the Deputy A. Haygood Ellzey Memorial Highway is photographed from the air for the first time on Jan. 25.



The Future

All but four members of the newly-revived Levy County Sheriff's Office Explorers program are seen here below the sign on Jan. 25. Seen here are LCSO Deputy Trish Horne, Dalton Florance, Sara Bulson, Kayla Regueiro, Justin Summerhill, Evan Gray, Kylie Plemmons, and Advisor and Deputy Al Horne and Deputy Julie Girona.

Levy County Sheriff's Deputy Atticus Haygood Ellzey was shot and killed in the Town of Otter Creek after being lured into a wooded area by two men on Jan. 28, 1945.

More than 70 years later, his sacrifice in the line of duty was honored by a section of U.S. Highway 19 in Levy County being named in his memory. That road has a couple of other names, including U.S. Highway 98 and State Road 55.

Brooke Ellzey Willis, an ancestor, led the effort in the past three years which finally prevailed to recognize Deputy Ellzey through the naming of a section of U.S. Highway 19 in Levy County.

Florida Department of Transportation Legislative Liaison Ed Siefert started the program for the presentation and unveiling of signs.

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Seifert, a retired Columbia County Sheriff's Office deputy and former CCSO public information officer, introduced Levy County Sheriff Bobby McCallum.

The sheriff said 70-plus years ago there was not easy quick communication via cell phones. Portable radios or walkie-talkies were not commonplace in a rural county such as Levy County.

Even in Levy County today, Sheriff McCallum added, backup for a deputy can be some minutes away due to the size of the area that must be patrolled. There was no backup for Deputy Ellzey in 1945.

Deputy Ellzey had told two white men to leave an African American hangout to avoid having any problems between the white and black patrons earlier on that day in the Town of Otter Creek after they had caused a disturbance.

"Unfortunately," McCallum continued, "those two individuals then took it upon themselves to ambush Deputy Ellzey, because he was doing his job in providing safety and security to the citizens of this county, and of Otter Creek and this area in that point in time."

The sheriff said he is honored to be part of the effort to remember that sacrifice.

McCallum noted his appreciation for the work by Brooke Ellzey Willis, the Florida Department of Transportation, the Levy County Board of County Commissioners and State Rep. Charlie Stone (R-Ocala, Dist. 22).

Levy County Commission Chairman John Meeks captured the moment as well.

Commission Chairman Meeks said it was Brooke Willis' never-surrender attitude that resulted in the successful completion of this mission after three years of intensive effort.

Meeks said that when he first approached Rep. Stone, the districts representative in the Florida House of Representatives told him it would be relatively easy to have this job done.

It was during that Legislative Session, Meeks said, when the Florida Legislature went home three days early and the bill to name certain roads never passed.

The next year, with Brooke Ellzey Willis leading the effort, Meeks and Stone did what they needed to have it done.

As a result of new leadership – Speaker of the House Rep. Richard Corcoran (R-Land O' Lakes, Dist. 37) – however there was a change in how the transportation bill was adopted. In the new version of how to pass the bill, Meeks explained, "Each thing had to be individually adopted" rather than all at once, "... and it became a mess."

"So that put us into year three," Meeks said. "And again, Brooke's tenacity and her stick-to-itiveness is the reason we are here today," Meeks said. "And I appreciate that."

Chairman Meeks shared with listeners that he has been a friend of the Ellzey family since he was a boy, and the two families would hunt in Gulf Hammock Wildlife Management Area, and camp together in Camp E.

"I grew up with Jimmy, and Jesse and Buster, and some others," he said, "and they were really more like family than friends."

Like the Meeks family that has been in Levy County for generations, the Ellzey family has been in the county for a long time – for seven generations now.

Seventy years ago, Meeks said, the two families both were in the Otter Springs and Gulf Hammock area. There was interaction among the two families even back then, he said.

"These were pioneer families that worked together to build a community here," Meeks said. "I think back to where I attend church – at Ellzey United Methodist Church

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– named after the ancestors of the Ellzey family here today.

“That gentleman and his wife came here and they started a church,” Meeks said, “so that the folks in this community, in this sawmill community, could have an opportunity to learn about the Lord and have a place to worship.

“That don’t seem like a lot maybe to some folks,” Meeks said, “but to this community it was a huge blessing to have an opportunity to have a place to gather.”

Meeks said he sees the Ellzey family has always been community-oriented and willing to give to help everyone.

“And so if you flash forward to that fateful night when Deputy Ellzey gave his life,” Meeks said, “he was doing something that he didn’t have to do. He didn’t have to get out of bed that night and trod over there to the disturbance and break it up.

“He could have very easily have said ‘Aw, it’ll sort itself out’ or ‘I’ll deal with that in the morning,’” Meeks continued. “But he showed his bravery and he showed his caring for his community, to go out and do what he had to do.”

Meeks reminded listeners that in 1945, black people did not see equal treatment.

“He stood up for them,” Meeks said. “He was protecting them from the no-good antics of the two folks who would ultimately be his murderers.”

The people of Levy County can be thankful for the many gifts the Ellzey family has given to the people of this area – from the small Methodist Church in the Town of Otter Creek to the service of Deputy Ellzey, to the family members working for the Florida Department of Transportation, the Williston Police Department and Mary Ellzey as the deputy city clerk and now the city manager of Chiefland, Meeks said.

“These folks are folks that continue to give to this day,” Meeks said.

Jimmy Ellzey, Brook’s father and Mary’s husband, thanked everyone for attending. He said it means a lot to the family to see so many people at the unveiling of the sign.

The name of Haygood Ellzey is memorialized in Tallahassee and Eashington. D.C., Jimmy Ellzey said, adding “Now he’s home, with his name here.”

Jimmy Ellzey recognized “Aunt Wilma” the only one of Haygood Ellzey’s children that is still alive.

Then FDOT Government Liaison Seifert spoke again.

He said government can’t be personal very often. When the FDOT is able to put up signs as memorials, though, then it can take on a personal note.

Seifert said as a retired deputy from Columbia County, Deputy Ellzey is part of his law enforcement family, and with Ellzey family members as employees in the FDOT family -- there is that connection too.

On behalf of the FDOT, Siefert presented Brooke Ellzey Willis and “Aunt Wilma” (Haygood’s last surviving child of 13 children) with their very own, take-home, half-sized personal signs signifying the state’s action to memorialize the man who gave his life in the line of duty.

After that presentation, two FDOT workers climbed a ladder and unveiled it. There were many photo opportunities after the sign was opened for everyone to see.