

2015 Police Week: National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund

Voiceover

00:00

This is *The Beat*—a podcast series that keeps you in the know about the latest community policing topics facing our nation.

John Wells

00:08

My name is John Wells and, on behalf of the COPS Office, I would like to introduce you to Craig Floyd, chairman and CEO of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. In honor of this year's 2015 Police Week, Chairman Floyd is here today to discuss how the memorial honors the sacrifice of American law enforcement. Chairman Floyd, thank you for joining us today.

Chairman Craig Floyd

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Oh, it's my pleasure, John. Thank you.

Wells

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This year, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund will be adding the names of 273 fallen law enforcement officers, 117 of which are names of officers we lost in the line of duty in 2014. How does the memorial honor the sacrifice of the officers and families who have given so much for their communities?

Floyd

00:54

Well, I think the importance of National Police Week, which is the week of May 10th through the 16th, is take a moment and say thank you to the men and women serving us in law enforcement. Too often they're taken for granted. One officer is killed somewhere in America every 60 hours. There are some 60,000 attacks and assaults on officers by criminals each year. More than 100,000 officers are injured in the line of duty on an annual basis. And yet despite those very daunting statistics, there are about 900,000 federal, state, and local officers who go out each and every day, putting their lives at risk for our safety and our protection. And National Police Week is a time to say thank you. And we especially acknowledge during Police Week those who have given their lives in law enforcement service. And that's why this year we are so proud to be able to honor the 273 new additions to the memorial walls. We can't erase the tragedy that has befallen them, their families, their agencies, but we can certainly ensure that they are going to be forever remembered and honored by a grateful nation. And that's really what we really do at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. These men and women literally laid down their lives for this nation of ours, and now it's our responsibility to remember and honor them, to support their families who have been left behind, and to make it safer for those who continue to serve.

We're very proud to be a partner with the COPS Office at DOJ in promoting a number of safety and wellness initiatives that I believe are making a difference and making it safer for officers across this country.

Wells

02:42

In the wake of current events, law enforcement is under a microscope. Of all the conversations that we've had across the country, do you believe there is one topic that is not receiving the attention it deserves?

Floyd

02:54

I think for the most part what troubles me about the commentary about law enforcement going on in American today is we focus seemingly so much on the negative, the occasional misstep, or the perceived misstep that really law enforcement's great service, supreme sacrifice is being overlooked. We do take our officers for granted.

There was great story that happened to me years ago that I often relate, and I think it makes an important point. I did a radio show years ago and typically, I would ask a survivor as part of that show as to their experience and do they remember anything significant about the funeral for their loved one. And I asked this one woman that question. She had lost her husband in the line of duty. And she said, Craig, I don't remember much at all about the funeral. I was really in a fog that day. But I do remember one moment. She said a homeless man came up to me, introduced himself, and said you don't know me, but I'm here to pay my respects to your husband. He was a wonderful man. And you may not know this he said to the wife, but every night before your husband would go home to you and your children, your husband would stop and look after me, make sure I had a blanket in the winter, make sure I had food each night, and make sure I had money if needed. And the wife said, you know Craig, the interesting thing about that story is my husband didn't once mention that he had done that. It was really just the fabric of who he was, and I think that's true of so many law enforcement professionals in America today.

There's a great statistic that's totally overlooked, and that is 44 million contacts that law enforcement has each and every year with the public, whether it be a traffic stop or a call for service, of those 44 million contacts with the public, force is either used or threatened by law enforcement officers less than 2% of the time. So that means really well over 98 percent of the time that officers are out there serving and protecting us, they're not using force. And I'm not talking about lethal force; I'm talking about any force whatsoever. They're keeping the peace by their mere presence, by the tremendous training that they have, by the education that they have. They know how to deal with potentially volatile situations in ways that hopefully will prevent any violent acts from occurring and any injuries occurring to them or criminal suspects. That's what people lose sight of, I'm afraid. Only one out of five Americans has any contact at all with the law enforcement professional during the course of the year. That's based on DOJ statistics. That means that fewer than 10 percent of the American people have any positive interaction at all with a law enforcement professional because, out of those one out of five contacts, the majority are traffic stops, and that's often a negative experience for most of us. And so most people draw their

impressions of law enforcement officers from what they see in the media, what they see on television and in the movies. And unfortunately, often times that is sensationalized; it's not accurate. It makes for good entertainment, but it's not really true law enforcement as it is in America today.

And we need to get the other side of the story out, and that is why we built the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. That is why we're in the process of building a national law enforcement museum so that story can be told. And I often say that if every citizen in this country had the privilege that I've had over these past 30 years or so of meeting the officers and hearing their stories of great service and supreme sacrifice, they would have a much better appreciation for law enforcement in America today. And we need to tell that story, and we need to teach our kids at a young age about the vital role that law enforcement plays in our society each and every day.

Wells

07:00

That was a very powerful story you gave of the woman at the funeral who lost her husband. How would you share those stories, those personal insights, because so many people do not hear that?

Floyd

07:12

That is the problem that we face, and that is why I think we have some of the divisiveness that we see in America today between the public and law enforcement, that too few Americans have that knowledge of who these officers are, what they do, why they do it. And we need to tell those stories. And again, if everybody had the opportunity that I've had—I've never worn the badge, okay? But I've been the chairman and CEO of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund now for 31 years. So during that 31-year period, I've had the opportunity, the privilege, of meeting the men and women who serve. I hear their stories each and every day. I get to meet the family members, especially the survivors of those who've died in the line of duty. So I get to hear the stories, get to meet the people, get to know what's in their heart, get to know who these people really are and why they do what they do.

I mean, how many of us are willing to go out every day in our jobs and literally put our lives at risk not knowing if we're going to make it home at the end of our shift to see our family. And yet these men and women do it. They do it every day with that knowledge in the back of their minds, and they do it because it is a calling for most of them. If you ask any cop in America, I guarantee about 90 percent of them will tell you the reason they became a law enforcement professional is so they could help people.

9/11 is probably the most dramatic of all examples we could give. Seventy-two officers died that day. I went up to Ground Zero in New York City about a week after the terrorist attacks at the invitation of the New York City PBA. And they wanted me to meet with the rescue workers and the recovery workers. And I'll never forget that during that time, my police escort said to me afterwards, he said Craig, I lost a lot of great friends on 9/11. But I will tell you this. They were right where they wanted to be doing exactly what they wanted to be doing at that particular time they lost their lives. He said that's what they lived for. And so I think that tells us something. And unfortunately, as much as I remember those poignant moments and those memories of 9/11, I'm afraid too many Americans have forgotten and

remember how we all felt about law enforcement officers right after 9/11 when we saw them running into those burning buildings and trying to help these innocent people who were devastated by the attack.

Wells

09:46

This year, Police Week 2015 is from May 10th through May 16th. For those who can't participate in the many activities here in the Washington, D.C., area, what can they do?

Floyd

09:56

I'd like to encourage people to visit our website at the very least, and they'll find these amazing stories of men and women who've done courageous acts, some who died in the line of duty, others who are officers of the month we've so designated because they've done exceptional deeds to help their communities. Some of them do death-defying acts. Others simply have contributed a lifetime, a professional career to making their communities better, to mentoring young kids, disadvantaged youth, for example.

We had an officer from Newark, New Jersey, that we honored recently. He had coached little league football so he could help mentor these disadvantaged youth and give them a better chance at life and not just teaching them football but teaching them life lessons and would take them into his home and talk to them and mentor them. This is what law enforcement officers do. They're leaders in their community. They're our neighbors, but they take responsibility for the state of their communities. So those stories and many more will be told on our website. You'll also see some wonderful photographs of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in all its glory. I often tell people that, you know, you need to visit National Memorial especially during National Police Week when the walls literally come alive with these mementos that are left there from young children whose mothers or fathers have been killed in the line of duty, and they write notes to their parents, and they display photographs of who these people were in life and newspaper clippings and you name it. You realize that this is about more than just a name on a wall or a statistic. This is about lives that have been torn apart as a result of supreme sacrifice of law enforcement service. And a lot of that will be felt when you visit our website. We have blogs we do every day about the various events that occur here in Washington.

One thing that we do that I really encourage people to take advantage of is that we have a live simulcast of the candlelight vigil that occurs on May 13th at the National Memorial. It's an 8 p.m. start and lasts about an hour and a half. We have some speeches from major government leaders, from the president of our survivor group, as well as some wonderful music. Then at the end of the ceremony, we light candles in honor of the fallen. More than 20,000 people attend, so it's an amazing sight to see. We shine a blue laser light skyward to honor the thin blue line of protection that our officers represent in America. And we also read the names of the new additions to the memorial walls on this particular year. And this year again, that will be 273 names that we'll be reading at the end of this year's ceremony. So all of that can be found on our website. You simply register. Indicate that you would like to see the simulcast. It's

free of charge, and then you can sit in the comfort of your home or at a neighbor's house and view the candlelight vigil from wherever you are while we're actually having the vigil here in Washington, D.C.

The final thing I would encourage people to do: there is often times local ceremonies or state ceremonies that you could take advantage of during National Police Week, either right before or maybe right after in some cases. And, you know, at the very least, go up to a police officer the next time you see one—if not any other time of the year, do it during National Police Week, May 10th through the 16th—and thank that officer for their service and so many of their sacrifices that they and their colleagues have made.

Wells

13:50

To learn more about the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, please visit their website at www.nleomf.org. Chairman Floyd, thank you for your time and expertise.

Floyd

14:03

Thank you, John. I appreciate the interest and letting people know what we're all about.

Wells

14:08

Thank you.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

14:09

The Beat was brought to you by the United States Department of Justice, COPS Office. The COPS Office helps to keep our nation's communities safe by giving grants to law enforcement agencies, developing community policing publications, developing partnerships, and solving problems.

Voiceover: Disclaimer

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