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“Committed to Excellence”

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# A Night of Recollection for Our Heroes

By Brian Ballou



Deputy Director Alfredo Ramirez III of the Miami-Dade Police Department standing alongside other chiefs of local law enforcement agencies in south Florida, during the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Miami-Dade Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Ceremony at Tropical Park. (Photo by Anthony Nuñez)

A rain delay pushed the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Miami-Dade Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Ceremony back by about 45 minutes, but it didn’t dampen the spirit of the event. Approximately 1,100 people attended the two-hour ceremony. “Tonight we pay tribute to all the true heroes who made the supreme sacrifice of their tomorrows, so that we might live in peace today,” said Bal Harbour Captain Raleigh Flowers, through the intermittent rain.

After his speech, the rain stopped and an honor guard procession of various law enforcement agencies in Miami-Dade County (MDC) brought forth their departments’ flags. Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD) Chaplain Dovid Weberman gave the invocation, saying that the memories of the fallen officers should be honored in a recommitment to protect the public.

MDPD Director Juan J. Perez spoke, first recognizing the families of the fallen officers, and then thanking everyone involved in organizing the night’s event. He then recounted

separate, tragic events from 1998 in which five officers lost their lives. Their deaths sparked the founding of the Police Officer Assistance Trust (POAT), a fund to help the families of the fallen heroes. “Thirty years ago, this community dealt with unprecedented tragedy,” Director Perez said. “Thirty years ago, police leaders realized that we needed to do more for our fallen, our injured, our sick, our warriors, and their families.”

Director Perez’ comments were followed by the symbolic presentation of the riderless horse, which signifies the loss of the warrior who rode off to battle on horseback and never returns home.

On November 28, 1988, MDPD Officers David Strzalkowski and Richard Boles were two who never got to return home, killed by a convicted felon in the Aventura area. Officer Strzalkowski’s son spoke to the crowd. “Some people say when you lose a loved one, it becomes the new normal, but I never had the old normal,” said Broward Sheriff Deputy Sean Strzalkowski. “I never

met my father, I never had the chance to hear his voice, see his face, or hug him goodnight.” He recounted how he did share a beer with his father a couple of years ago, traveling to his burial site in Buffalo to down some suds. “It’s only right that a father and son share at least one beer together, and even though it was snowing and cold as hell...I couldn’t have enjoyed it more,” Deputy Strzalkowski said.

There were other stories told by the offspring of fallen soldiers, each one as poignant as the last, men and women who were in their infancy when their parent was killed. They learned about their loved one’s heroism through their family discussions, from cherished pictures, and from other police officers who served with them.

Ms. Erica Rakow-Reynolds, who at 30, is two years older than her father, Miami Beach Police Officer Scott Rakow,

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## A Night of Recollection . . . *Continued from page 1*



A combined Honor Guard carries out 'The Presentation of Colors' during the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Miami-Dade Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Ceremony at Tropical Park. (Photo by Anthony Nuñez)

was when he was killed. She paid tribute to the POAT, which helped fund her dream of college.

"He wasn't there on Christmas morning, but you were.

Santa came to my house every single Christmas...he pulled up on a motorcycle and he carried a huge bag with him," she said. "Inside was every gift I wrote on my wish list that year. Santa was my hero, and obviously Santa was a police officer sent by the POAT."

The most solemn moment of the night was the annual Pinning Ceremony, when the families of the fallen heroes are called from their seats to pin a carnation on two floral badges displayed at the base of the memorial. That was followed by another cherished tradition, the Roll Call of Honor, presided over by Captain Flowers.

A beam of blue light stretched from behind the memorial to the sky, and the bagpipers played *Amazing Grace* as Captain Flowers read out the names of 143 fallen heroes who served the residents of MDC, spanning from 1895 through 2017.

The event drew to a close with a booming 21-gun salute, the playing of *Taps*, and a flyover by several police helicopters. The lives of those who served our community will never be forgotten.

## Employees Get Their Kicks Giving to the United Way! *By Allison Bishop-Cooner*

MDPD's champion soccer team won the Open Division of this year's 11<sup>th</sup> United Way/Miami-Dade County Soccer Challenge. More than \$5,400 was raised for the United Way of MDC.

The idea for the event began when Administrative Officer 2 Ronald Rojas, from PortMiami, organized a small competition between several departments to raise money for the United Way. Shortly afterwards, MDPD Major Christopher Carothers bumped it up a notch by offering assistance to expand the magnitude of the event.

Every year since, this competitive Soccer Challenge boasts tremendous employee participation. More than 200 MDC employees, from nearly every department, raise thousands of dollars for the United Way. "It is truly a unique event since all of the participants are County employees, and everyone benefits from the camaraderie and competition," says Major Carothers. "Most of all, we are happy to help thousands of less fortunate people in our community."



Back row, left to right: Officers Alfonso Ponce, Carlos Silva, Alberto Diaz, Major Christopher Carothers, and Criminalist 1 Facundo Torino. Front row, left to right: Officer Guerry Leonard, Police Records Specialist 1 Jose Lopez, Officer Richard Martinez, and Officer Enrique Lagunas. NOT PICTURED: Lieutenant Joel Bello, Sergeant Hugh Oliphant, and Officers Marcelo Carvajal, Marcos Asorey, and Larry Laverde.

## EDITOR'S NOTE



*Brian Ballou, Information Officer.  
(Photo by Gaston De Cardenas)*

Chief Hector Llevat would like to introduce the Public Information and Education Bureau's newly hired Information Officer, Mr. Brian Ballou.

As a newspaper journalist for more than 25 years, Brian worked for the Los Angeles Times, New York Newsday, the Boston Globe, and most recently, the South Florida Sun-Sentinel. He covered crime issues and the judicial

system throughout his career. Brian also has experience as the Director of Media Relations for the Boston Public School System.

Brian grew up in Sierra Vista, Arizona, and in 1992 attended the University of Arizona in Tucson, where he received his bachelor's degree in Journalism. Then, he moved to New York in 1998 and obtained his master's degree in Journalism at Columbia University, in New York City. Currently, Brian lives in Pembroke Pines with his wife and two children.

Brian writes articles for the Alert Newsletter and other MDPD publications. He will also assist with the Department's many special projects. As a writer, Brian wishes to highlight notable accomplishments made by MDPD employees, as well as feature initiatives or programs that illustrate the great work of the Department.

We encourage any suggestions and story ideas you may have to offer Brian as we welcome him to the MDPD! Please visit Brian in the Special Projects Section or contact him at [BRBallou@mdpd.com](mailto:BRBallou@mdpd.com).

## Following Childhood Dreams . . . Rookie, Tactical Flight Officer Seeks to Become Pilot

*By Brian Ballou*



*Tactical Flight Officer Teddy Alvarado demonstrates the use of the remote control unit for the high definition camera and the thermal imaging camera. (Photo by Brian Ballou)*

The chatter of police codes and call signs were mixed with the hum of the helicopter's main rotor as it rose from the tarmac at the Miami Executive Airport in Kendall.

After some good-natured ribbing of rookie Tactical Flight Officer (TFO) Teddy Alvarado, veteran MDPD Pilot Patrick van Gils headed east to a neighborhood where a developmentally disabled teen dressed in khaki pants and red shirt had been missing.

From 5,000 feet above during a clear day, stretches of undeveloped land flow into farmland. Farther east, the landscape transitions into endless rows of single-family homes, tightly-packed condos, strip malls, and highways. The people are easy to spot, down to the color of their clothing, but on this search, the teen was nowhere to be found. Fortunately, officers on the ground did eventually find him on the same afternoon.

For Officer Alvarado, this daily birds-eye view is dramatically different from his previous police work. After joining the Department in 2008, he became a member of the Northside District's Crime Suppression Team and then a member of the Countywide Homicide Task Force. For eight years, he had a street-level view of some of the worst cases in MDC. In 2017, Officer Alvarado transferred to the Special Patrol Bureau's Aviation Unit.

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## Following Childhood Dreams . . .

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*Tactical Flight Officer Teddy Alvarado.  
(Photo by Brian Ballou)*

Officer Alvarado's childhood dreams always involved fast motors. His first taste of speed was with go karts and then car racing. He is working on his commercial pilot's license. He has logged 40 hours of airplane flight time at the Pilot Training Center and needs 210 more hours to complete license requirements. He hopes to become a pilot for the Department, but for now, he is happy serving as a TFO. "I still get to be proactive, still get to do patrols, and we handle hot calls for the District, like a burglary in progress," Officer Alvarado said.

The Aviation Unit is split between the Opa-Locka Executive Airport and the Miami-Dade Executive Airport. County coverage is divided between these two locations to accomplish the best response times possible. The Unit houses ten pilots, four TFOs, four helicopters, and two airplanes.

Officer Alvarado is based at the Opa-Locka Executive Airport, but spends considerable time at the Miami-Dade Executive Airport. When he arrives at work, he goes through a checklist that starts with washing the helicopters' windows. He then checks the mounted cameras to make sure they are working properly. There are two types of cameras, a regular high-definition camera and a thermal imaging camera that can track a suspect through their body heat. "Mostly, my equipment is the camera. My job is to assist the pilot in making sure everything is clear while flying, and ensuring that we aren't heading into any obstacles such as antennas," he said. "At night, when the visibility is low, pursuits of subjects are really tough."

Officer Alvarado estimates that he spends up to four hours a day in the sky. During searches and pursuits, he controls the cameras and a high beam search light through a handheld device that resembles a video game control console.

"He's doing great, he's been a go-getter since he got here. He's motivated, enthusiastic, and that really helps out when you're a new TFO and learning the equipment," said Sergeant Christian Robaina, one of three sergeants in the Unit. "You're learning a new language and you're in a totally new environment, so you must have that drive for it, and he's done a really good job."

TFOs primarily work during the night, when their expertise with the thermal camera becomes more important. Recently, Officer Alvarado used the camera to locate a suspect hiding under a trampoline. "He thought he was hidden, but we saw him clearly," Officer Alvarado said. "I hope to spend the rest of my career in the Aviation Unit. This is where my heart is, what I truly love to do, and I want to plant roots here," he said.

## Patrol Officer in Miami Lakes is in High Demand for Drawing Skill

*By Brian Ballou*

As a kid, Officer Christopher Rivera was occasionally sent to his room for time-out. Television and video games were off-limits, so he would doodle. He spent hours sketching action figures, planes, cars, toys, and people. And even when he wasn't sent to his room, he would draw.

His childhood hobby became his adult passion, and he considered a career as a comic book artist. However, he heard too many stories of starving artists, so he decided

to pursue a profession with more stability. He joined the MDPD in 2007 as a public service aide, and in 2010, became a patrol officer in the Town of Miami Lakes.

Officer Rivera is an expert in administering roadside DUI tests. If a driver is found under the influence, he will transport him or her to the MDPD's Northwest District

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# Patrol Officer in Miami Lakes . . .

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*Officer Christopher Rivera and his artistic renderings.  
(Photo by Brian Ballou)*

Station for processing and then to the Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center in Doral. He occasionally is called by other law enforcement agencies to administer DUI testing and handle prisoner transport as well.

Officer Rivera displayed some of his sketches at his workplace. His supervisor at the time, Major Vanessa Holden, noticed them and asked Officer Rivera if he could draw a portrait of her. It was Officer Rivera's first canvas drawing, depicting Major Holden standing in front of a police car. "The final product was a surprise because it was better than I could have imagined," said Major Holden, who now oversees the Personnel Management Bureau. "I hung it up in my office and everyone who sees it has nothing but positive comments to say about it. Chris is beyond talented and deserves recognition for his artwork."

Word of Officer Rivera's artistry has spread by word of mouth and through his Instagram page #thinbluelinedrawings. He estimates that he has produced about 150 portraits, mostly of Miami-Dade Police officers, but also of law enforcement officials in other states such as New York and South Carolina, and in other countries such as Spain and Sweden.

Officer Rivera says he has been able to accommodate everyone who has asked for a portrait so far, even though he was recently backlogged with 17 requests. "They send me e-mail messages with photographs," he said. The requests also come with some instructions on how the subject wishes to be depicted. Depending on how many people and objects are in the piece, it can take from three days to two weeks to complete. Some badges, that have intricate detail, can take more than a week alone. Drawings include motorcycles, helicopters, flares, and dolls, among other items.

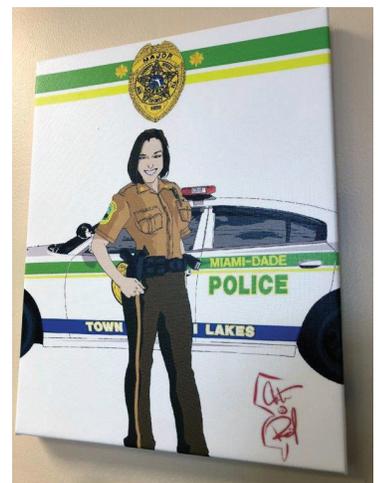
Officer Rivera's style is somewhere between a graphic

novel and a recruitment poster. The subjects are depicted in proud poses, sometimes with their chins slightly elevated and arms crossed, and other times, smiling with their hands resting on their belts. Occasionally, they are seated at desks and appear immersed in paperwork. Dogs, both the K-9 variety and family pets, are often included. Most of the portraits include a blown-up image of the officer's badge either to the top left or top middle. Some illustrations are superhero-like, such as one in which an officer suspends an entanglement of electricity between his hands, with his fingers stretched out as if he is trying to contain the powerful force. In at least two works, officers are depicted peeling back their shirts to reveal the iconic Superman logo underneath.

Officer Rivera's workspace at home is a secluded game room. He sits at an adjustable wooden table and is surrounded by comic books, collectible figures, toys, posters, and other items that he can acquire inspiration from or use to practice. After he sketches on paper, he imports the rendering to his iPad to continue drawing on that device.

Officer Rivera says his ability to draw feels natural. During the time he considered becoming a full-time artist, he took classes at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale, but stopped after a semester because he felt that formal instruction was too confining. "There are a lot of things that I do on my own, like shadows and perspectives; but, the instructors were telling me 'this is the way you have to do it,' and that wasn't for me," he said.

Despite all the hours that he spends creating keepsakes for his fellow officers, Officer Rivera has never charged anyone. "I've had people give me gift certificates . . . but I don't ask for anything. It's satisfaction enough knowing that I'm able to give other officers something they will cherish. I just do it for fun."



*Major Vanessa Holden depicted by artist, Officer Christopher Rivera.  
(Photo by Brian Ballou)*

# Early 2018 Shows Continued Drop in Crime, Led by 24 Percent Decline in Robberies

By Brian Ballou

Part 1 crimes continue to dip in areas patrolled by the MDPD. From January 1 through April 8, 2018, violent crime was down 19 percent and non-violent crime was down 12.7 percent, compared to the first quarter of 2017, according to the Robbery Bureau's Crime Data Clearinghouse.

The trend reflects a sustained drop in crime in the MDPD's coverage area in each year from 2007 through 2017. Crimes steadily dropped, from 60,806 in 2007 to 41,069 in 2017, according to statistics from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

Among the Part 1 crimes categories, the biggest drop is in robberies - 24 percent. Part 1 crimes include homicide, forcible sex offenses, robbery, burglary, aggravated assault, and motor vehicle theft. "It's not just one thing, but a combination of things that have led to those results," said Major Rosanna Cordero-Stutz of the Robbery Bureau. At the top of her list though is, "good old fashioned Barney Miller police work," she said, referring to officers making daily contact with residents and being ever-present in communities.

The Bureau has specialized units such as the Robbery Intervention Detail, that conduct surveillance and work with other law enforcement agencies, and the Street Terror Offender Program, which targets people involved with illicit drugs and violent crimes. "Combining such police work, yields quicker arrests and in some cases, perpetrators are charged federally, which can carry longer sentences," Major Cordero-Stutz said.

Through the first quarter of this year, 35 percent of all robbery cases have been cleared. For 2017, 30 percent of robbery cases have been cleared, according to the Crime Data Clearinghouse. Clearance rates measure crimes that are solved by police.

"I know that the trend can't last forever, but we will continue to do those things that have proven to yield results," Major Cordero-Stutz said. "I am proud of our officers, and feel that we are providing the utmost service to our community."

# Miami-Dade Honor Guard Pays Tribute to Fallen Officers

By Brian Ballou



The Miami-Dade County Combined Honor Guard team recently participated in the Emerald Society Parade in Washington, D.C., an event that coincides with National Police Week. (Photo by Zoila Castillo)

As he took in all the pomp and circumstance of the Emerald Society Parade in Washington, D.C., last year—the flag teams marching in step, pipe bands belting out tunes, and vintage patrol cars rolling past thousands of spectators—MDPD Director Juan J. Perez turned to his Honor Guard Training Coordinator, Officer Marcos De Rosa, and asked "Can we participate in this parade, can we make it happen?"

The Emerald Society Parade is one of many events that coincides with National Police Week, an annual event dating back to 1982 that pays tribute to fallen officers, and is attended by tens of thousands of law enforcement officers and spectators.

Following Director Perez' request, Officer De Rosa went to work. He pulled together a multi-agency honor guard team consisting of 12 members from his own unit, and 18 honor guard officers from other police agencies in MDC, including the Miami Beach Police Department

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## Miami-Dade Honor Guard . . . *Continued from page 6*

and the Key Biscayne Police Department. The Homestead Police Department contributed an antique police car. The St. Andrews Pipe Band, which has a long history of participation in the Miami-Dade Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Ceremony, pledged its participation. A large red, white, and blue banner was the finishing touch.

In its first year of participation, the Miami-Dade Combined Honor Guard was the largest team, fielding 43 officers, to march in this year's parade. And, it did so in the lead position! "It was truly an honor for us to represent the Department," said Officer De Rosa, a 27-year police veteran who works in the Homeland Security Bureau. A former U.S. Marine, Officer De Rosa trains the MDPD's Honor Guard as well as honor guards from other law enforcement agencies throughout the County.

The commitment of the Miami-Dade Combined Honor Guard was tested. Rain fell, and there was a tornado warning during the half-mile parade, but the team marched proudly. A ceremony at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial followed, and the team continued to stand in place as the rain and wind intensified. After the ceremony, participants and spectators sought shelter in the subway below the memorial.

After the storm blew through, the team, soaking wet, returned to their hotel and spent hours drying their uniforms with hair dryers. The next morning, they attended the National Police Officers Memorial Service, held outside the U.S. Capitol Building. President Donald J. Trump was the keynote speaker, and he offered condolences to the families and the "brothers" and "sisters" of fallen officers. "I know today is filled with sadness and pain, but today is also filled with love . . . an entire nation has wrapped their arms around you," President Trump said. He also had a message for the children of those officers. "Young sons and daughters . . . your moms and dads were among the bravest Americans who ever lived . . . their mortal legacy

lives on in each and every one of you."

The names of 127 officers who died in the line-of-duty this year were added to the National Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial during National Police Week. Dedicated on October 15, 1991, the Memorial features two curving, 304 foot-long, blue-gray marble walls with the names of more than 21,000 officers who have been killed in the line-of-duty throughout U.S. history, dating back to the first known death in 1791.

For Officer De Rosa, one of the names etched on the Memorial, Officer Roberto Luis Calderon, still evokes deep emotion. They served together on the MDPD Honor Guard. Officer Calderon died on December 7, 1999, when his patrol car collided with a Miami-Dade Transit bus along U.S. 1, as he was responding to a call. Officer Calderon was only 27 years old.

Officer De Rosa recalled a moment the two men shared a year prior to Officer Calderon's death, as they stood on the steps of the Stanfill Funeral Home on U.S. 1. They had just finished folding a U.S. flag in the funeral ceremony of a former officer, and Officer Calderon asked Officer De Rosa if he would ever consider folding the flag and presenting it at "his" funeral. Officer De Rosa said he would, without hesitation, and he threw the same question to Officer Calderon who answered similarly.

Officer De Rosa followed through on his promise, helping to fold and present Officer Calderon's flag. A picture of that moment was captured by a Miami Herald photographer, and Officer De Rosa continues to use the picture on the first day of Honor Guard training. He calls the session, "The Longest Day."

The MDPD's Honor Guard was also invited by the National Association of Police Organizations to participate in its 2018 Top Cops Awards dinner, also held in conjunction with National Police Week. MDPD Detectives Terence A. White Sr. and Charles L. Woods were among the finalists for that award.

"Our overall experience, for the first time, was a great one, we were humbled to be a part of National Police Week, and we look forward to next year," Officer De Rosa said. "Being an MDPD Honor Guard member is not a job, it's a brotherhood. The pride we have for the families is the ultimate high for us."



*The Miami-Dade Combined Honor Guard led the half-mile Emerald Society Parade in Washington, D.C. The multi-agency team was comprised of personnel from various police departments in MDC. (Photo by Zoila Castillo)*



MDPD recently said farewell to 32 employees (22 sworn officers and 10 civilians) who retired after periods of service ranging from 11 to 42 years. Director Juan J. Perez, the Department’s Command Staff, and the entire MDPD family wish our colleagues many, many years of happy retirement.

**Sworn**

Lieutenant Marshall Gilreath Jr. .... 26

Lieutenant Neville Jenkins ..... 29

Lieutenant Timothy Peavey ..... 26

Sergeant David Comesanas..... 30

Sergeant Ronald Rodriguez ..... 25

Sergeant Neil West..... 30

Sergeant Jorge Yero..... 28

Officer Ruben Alvarez ..... 30

Officer Maritza Aschenbrenner..... 26

Officer Jorge Caceres II ..... 28

Officer Erika Carballo..... 25

Officer Daniel Escarra ..... 25

Officer David Graham ..... 27

Officer Jeffrey Gruendel ..... 25

Officer Damaris Hall..... 22

Officer Jean Janvier ..... 30

Officer John Loyal ..... 31

Officer Patricia Malone..... 31

Officer Isidoro Martinez ..... 30

Officer Eugene Szolis ..... 21

Officer Edward Tangredi..... 25

Officer Cynthia Tozzo ..... 28

**Civilians**

Executive Secretary Sara Chastain ..... 32

MDPD Court Support Specialist 2  
Jerome Cox ..... 42

Public Service Aide Magna Diaz ..... 11

MDPD School Crossing Guard  
Rigoberto Feliciano..... 20

Fingerprint Analyst 1 Claribel Hadgson ..... 35

MDPD School Crossing Guard  
Gwendolyn Johnson..... 25

Senior Executive Secretary Sonia Proenza ..... 33

Police Complaint Officer  
Samantha Sheffield ..... 18

Secretary Evangeline Watson..... 24

School Crossing Guard Supervisor  
Janice Wright..... 31



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