

Local Foundation marks 20 years of service to Delaware law enforcement.

The Ronnie Williams Foundation has served area police agencies since August 9, 2002 when Delaware State Police M. Cpl. Ronnie Williams was killed in an off-duty car accident on the Jersey Turnpike.

In his 16th year on the job as a Delaware State Trooper, M.Cpl. Ronnie Williams was traveling on the Jersey Turnpike with his family on what was his first day off in nine months. As an undercover detective with the State Police, he also served as an investigator with the DEA and Liaison for the FBI in their Gang Investigations units. A day off was rare and he was looking forward to seeing family. 10 minutes before the accident, he and his wife switched roles and she drove as Ronnie sat in the back seat of their minivan next to their daughter. As they traveled north, an accident occurred ahead of them and attempts to avoid it failed and they were struck on the passengers' side creating an opening in the sliding door. As they struck the grass berm, Ronnie's seatbelt disengaged. This was something that was found out later to be a common occurrence in that type of vehicle. Sadly, this allowed Ronnie to be ejected and receive fatal injuries as a result. Thankfully, his wife and daughter only had minor injuries, though a lifetime impact due to losing Ronnie.

In the wake of the accident, family and friends came together to figure out a way to best honor Ronnie's memory. As a 16-year veteran and active service trooper, yet off duty when he passed, it was a unique situation here in Delaware and called for a unique concept so The Ronnie Williams Foundation was born. For many years it was the only law enforcement support charity in the state, aside from Delaware Concerns of Police Survivors, a line of duty death survivors organization. Though different missions, both serve law enforcement across Delaware.

In its first thirteen years of operating on funds raised at annual events, the foundation awarded over \$100,000 in scholarships and hosted annual events that brought the community and law enforcement together.

"With the words, ideas, and hopes of Ronnie in mind, we set out to make the foundation an extension of his loyalty and dedication to law enforcement." Said Jennifer Hawkins, Executive Director, and youngest sister of Ronnie Williams. "His enthusiasm, work ethic, and concern for his fellow officers and their work was evident during his time as a trooper. We can only hope to carry that on to those officers who follow behind him."

Over the last 7 years, the foundation has become a support base for police agencies and events they host within the community. Working with New Castle County Police, Wilmington Police, Delaware State Police, Newark Police, Middletown Police, and local FOP lodges, the foundation has raised awareness, funds, and interaction between police and the community.

Col. Joe Bloch, New Castle County Police had this to say about the foundation and its work. *"The Ronnie Williams Foundation has become a household name in the Delaware Law Enforcement Community and is a fierce advocate for our profession and the communities we serve. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Jen, her family, and all of those involved with the foundation. There is rarely a law enforcement event I attend where the Ronnie Williams Foundation is not well represented and advocating for the support of all officers, Thank you!"*

5 years ago, the Foundation formed the Sirens & Shields Coalition, a group of law enforcement organizations and special units that partner together to raise funds for programs and special unit needs. These organizations include Delaware Crime Stoppers, the New Castle County Police Mounted Patrol, and the State of Delaware Fraternal Order of Police, and will soon add K9 units from several agencies to expand their training initiatives.

“The RGW Foundation has been a key partner with Delaware Crime Stoppers for the past several years by promoting our program in the community and assisting us with our fundraising efforts. We proudly commend the RGW Foundation and congratulate them on their 20th anniversary.” Said Michael Gallagher, Executive Director of Delaware Crime Stoppers

Melanie Litten, Executive Director of the Friends of the Mounted Patrol and foundation board member added, *“It has been incredibly powerful to collaborate with the Ronnie Williams Foundation over the last 20 years. Their commitment to the Friends of the Mounted Patrol and mission of providing for current and retired unit horses goes unmatched. We look forward to continuing our partnership in supporting Delaware Law Enforcement.”*

In addition to its annual Lights & Sirens Bash, Hero Days for the Police Unity Tour, and the Cops & Rodders Car Show coming up on September 11th, in 2021 the foundation added two outreaches; The Delaware Law Enforcement Thank You Ride held in September and the WPD Hero Fund. The Thank You Ride is the brainchild of a New Castle County Police officer and a Wilmington Police officer and has riders representing police agencies from across several states. The ride raises funds and awareness for police officer wellness. The Hero Fund began in 2013 after WPD officer Justin Wilkers was shot in the face during a foot pursuit. The fund was activated again after three Wilmington Police officers were shot in one incident in 2021. The WPD Hero Fund holds a golf tournament in May and supports officers injured in the line of duty and the family in the case of a line of duty death.

Adding to special events and support for youth programs and community outreach throughout the year, the foundation had the opportunity in July 2022 to support a 3-day K9 training program held in Middletown. This fits in line with the next project that the foundation is developing. As a member of the K9 unit himself, before becoming a detective, Ronnie’s dream since age 13 was to become a K9 officer. He even assisted then Col. Gravier with bringing back the DSP K9 unit in the early 90’s so it is fitting to bring to life a K9 training area open to all agencies. Located on a farm in Bear, the 1 - 2 acre area will be dedicated as a training ground. With the help of local trainers, the area will be designed to the standards and wishes of each agency.

With that mission in mind, the legacy continues. For the 12th year, the foundation will present Police Day at the Blue Rocks on Sunday, August 14th at 1:05 pm, Gates will open at 11:30 am for “Catch with a Cop” where kids in the local community will be able to participate in a game of catch with local officers from several agencies. There will be pre-game K9 demos, antique police cars, mounted patrol, and several displays on the concourse from police agencies and organizations. Hawkins added *“This event has become a tradition and stands to show that events like this bring together law enforcement and the community in a way that allows them to relate, get to know each other, and build trust. Concepts that have gotten overshadowed in recent years, but are now being welcomed back with open arms.”*

For more information on The Ronnie Williams Foundation, the Sirens and Shield Coalition or to get tickets to Police Day at the Blue Rocks visit The Ronnie Williams Foundation at www.TheRGWFoundation.org or find them on Facebook under “The Ronnie Williams Foundation”.

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