

# The Police Officers Journal



VOLUME 28, NUMBER 1 • WINTER 2018



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## POLC, GELC thank Union members for their efforts to Protect the Protectors

— By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

**P**olice Officers Labor Council (POLC) and Governmental Employees Labor Council (GELC) joined forces with public employees statewide to voice their opposition to bills that would have allowed the state to impose changes to local government control of health care and pension benefits.

The POLC and GELC, through its affiliation with Michigan Association of Police Organizations (MAPO) and the Labor/Management Coalition of Michigan (consisting of police, fire, and public employees and managers) was successful in maintaining pensions and retiree health care for all first responders throughout the state.

Most State Legislators did not support original House Bills 5298-5313 and Senate Bills 686-701, which would have allowed more state control of public employees' benefits upon retirement than Responsible Retirement Reform for Local Government Task Force recommendations. The revised bills, passed Dec. 7, 2017, follow the Task Force recommendations that the coalition supported.

The diligent efforts of Union Representatives and Employees combined with strong support from the majority of State Legislators led to the successful outcome.

"We want to thank POLC and GELC members for participating," said POLC/GELC Director Rob Figurski. "Your unending calls, sending e-mails, and contacting your representatives voicing your concerns and positions on these issues made a significant impact."

The goal of the coalition was to "Protect the Protectors." POLC and GELC Representatives and Members were an integral part of achieving that goal. ♥



### SPRING STEWARD SEMINARS 2018

**L**ocal Stewards are encouraged to attend one of two free POLC/GELC Spring Steward Seminars, depending on where their employer is located, on the east or west side of the state.

Both March seminars may include some or all of these topics: information on pensions, steward responsibilities, Garrity, interviews, union representation, legal updates, critical incidents, Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), health care, supplemental insurance and financial strategies. Lunch will be provided.

The west side seminar is scheduled for 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, March 2, 2018 at Kosciuszko Hall, 935 Park Street, SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

The east side seminar will be held from 8:15 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday, March 23, 2018 at Warren F.O.P. Hall, 11304 E. 14 Mile Road, Warren, MI 48093. ♥

Please call Cindy Gallego at the POLC/GELC office to reserve your spot today at (248) 524-3200 or e-mail your name and department to [polc@aol.com](mailto:polc@aol.com).

## LOD deaths are lowest in 4 years

— Excerpted from National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF)

**L**aw enforcement line-of-duty deaths nationwide over the past year were lower than they've been the past four years, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF), a nonprofit group that has long tracked officer fatalities.

The NLEOMF announced in its 2017 Preliminary Law Enforcement Fatalities Report that 128 federal, state, local, tribal and territorial officers died in the line of duty. That's the lowest annual figure since the 117 officer deaths in 2013 and a 10 percent decrease over the 143 officers who died in the line of duty in 2016.

"After three consecutive years of rising deaths in the law enforcement profession, this year's decline offered some encouraging news," said NLEOMF CEO Craig W. Floyd. "Sadly, though, the 128 officers who lost their lives in 2017 reminds us that public safety comes at a very steep price and we must never take the service and sacrifice of our policing professionals for granted, nor should we ever forget the officers who died and their families."

Traffic-related fatalities have been the leading cause of officer deaths for the past 15 of 20 years and 2017 is no exception. The number of officers killed in single-vehicle collisions rose from 11 in 2016 to 14 in 2017. Single-vehicle crashes accounted for 42 percent of all fatal officer crashes in 2017.

However, the total number of traffic-related deaths declined from 54 officers in 2016 to 47 officers in 2017, a 13 percent drop. There were 40 percent less officers struck and killed while outside of their vehicles last year, with nine in 2017 compared to 15 in 2016.

There was a significant reduction — 33 percent — in law enforcement personnel shot and killed in the line of duty. Forty-four officers were shot and killed across the country in 2017 compared to 66 officers who died from gunfire in 2016. Seven officers were killed responding to domestic disturbance calls — the number one circumstance for gunfire fatalities.

Thirty-seven officers died from other causes in 2017 including:

- Sixteen attributed to job-related ailments, mainly heart attacks (10).
- Seven officers were beaten to death.
- Five officers drowned while working during hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria.

- Four died from an illness contracted during 9/11 rescue and recovery efforts.
- Two officers died in a helicopter crash.
- Two were killed in boating accidents.
- One officer was stabbed to death.

Texas had the most officer duty deaths in 2017 at 14; followed by New York and Florida with nine deaths; California with seven officers killed; and Georgia and North Carolina, which each had six line of duty deaths. Twelve correctional officers died in the line of duty in 2017. There were five federal officers killed in 2017; five officers who served with territorial agencies; three with tribal agencies; and two who served with university departments.

Nine of the fallen officers in 2017 were female, an increase over the seven who died in 2016. Among the officers who died this past year, 42 was the average age and the average length of service was 13 years.

Floyd said that while there has been a spike in officer fatalities since 2013, the overall trend since the 1970s has been downward. In the 1970s, our nation averaged 234 law enforcement line of duty deaths each year, Floyd said. During the 10 years prior to 2017, the average annual fatality figure for officers dropped 34 percent to 153 per year and the 128 deaths in 2017 was even lower.

Floyd said reasons for the overall decline in officer fatalities include: better training; improved equipment; a greater emphasis on officer safety and wellness than ever before; and stronger relationships between law enforcement and the public.

There are currently 21,183 names of officers killed in the line of duty inscribed on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, DC, dating back to 1791. That number will increase this spring when new names are added to the national monument. The deadliest year on record for line of duty deaths was 1930, when 307 law enforcement officers were killed. The last time officer fatalities dipped below 100 for a single year was 1944. ♥

*The statistics released are based on preliminary data compiled by the NLEOMF and do not represent a final or complete list of individual officers who will be added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in 2018. For a complete copy of the preliminary 2017 Law Enforcement Fatalities Report, go to: [www.LawMemorial.org/FatalitiesReport](http://www.LawMemorial.org/FatalitiesReport).*

### Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP®)

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Lloyd Whetstone

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Jennifer Gomori



### The Police Officers Labor Council welcomes the following new units

#### Unit

**Arenac County Corrections**  
**Hamburg Township Command**  
**Hamburg Township Patrol**  
**Kalkaska County Command**  
**Kalkaska County Non-Supervisory**

#### Former Affiliation

**POAM**  
**MAP**  
**MAP**  
**COAM**  
**POAM**

# Macomb Academy graduate earns LEEP Award, hired by MSP

— By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

**D**erek Staelgraeve dreamed of becoming a Michigan State Police (MSP) Trooper, but after he applied, he didn't wait around to be hired. He paid his way through Macomb Police Academy.

So he was grateful when he received a Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) Award of \$2,000 to help with those costs.

"It meant a lot because, going through the academy, I didn't exactly have much time to work. I was running out of money," Staelgraeve said, adding that he wasn't able to maintain a job. "I figured I'd apply for some scholarships and maybe make up some lost time per se."

Staelgraeve, 22, graduated Macomb Police Academy Dec. 13, 2017 and along the way was accepted into the 134th MSP Trooper Recruit School, which began in January. Once he completes the 22-week program, he will be assigned and start field training.

"They hired him so they are going to pay him to be in the police academy," said Macomb Police Academy Director Raymund Macksoud. "He put time and effort to prepare himself for (the academy). He made the right decisions for himself. All around, he had no areas of weakness."

Macksoud said Staelgraeve showed his willingness to work hard to go to the next step.

"I wanted to work in a bigger department with more room for advancement," Staelgraeve said. "My ultimate goal is K9 unit. Even if I do something else, I think I have a better chance of advancing my career with them as opposed to a smaller department with only a few positions you can work up to."

"State Police is where he'd really like to be first, but if that doesn't work out for him, he can work anywhere he wants. He's got a backup plan," Macksoud said. "Having gone through our academy should make life a little easier at the State Police academy."

Staelgraeve has a family background in public safety. His father, Ken Staelgraeve, is full-time faculty with Macomb's Fire Science Program and retired Fire Chief from Harrison Township and Bruce Township/Romeo. "My uncle worked for the (U.S.) Border Patrol and he's an instructor for the federal government at their (Federal Law Enforcement Training Center) facility in Georgia right now," Derek Staelgraeve said. "Growing up and seeing both of them in public service, just listening to the things they had to say made me want to get into the public service area," he added. "I wasn't the kind of kid who would be happy behind a desk. I wanted to actively get out and help people."

So Staelgraeve got his bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice at Grand Valley State University and has career aspirations of changing the negative public mindset about law enforcement. "Some



Photo courtesy of Macomb Police Academy  
POLC Executive Committee Vice Chair Brian McNair (left) presents Macomb Police Academy graduate Derek Staelgraeve with a \$2,000 LEEP Award Dec. 13, 2017.

people aren't really too fond of police. What I'm hoping to accomplish, at the end of each day, is that I made at least one person safer, that I helped at least one person," Staelgraeve said. "Hopefully that way, I can help restore the relationship between the public and police."

"He's got a promising career," Macksoud said. "He was a very well-rounded cadet for the program. He came well-prepared and it showed."

The class of 39 graduating cadets overall was pretty successful. "We started with 19 non-sponsored, but they got jobs during the academy," Macksoud said, adding only nine remained unsponsored. "We had good placement this time."

"There were others that probably could've satisfied the (LEEP) requirements, but I think he earned it based on what he'll have to still face," Macksoud said. "He comes from a family of public service ... and he is continuing on with those legacies." ❤️

## LEEP AWARD REQUIREMENTS

The LEEP Award is given twice yearly to police academy graduates with the highest overall achievement who have not been sponsored by any police agency. To qualify, the cadets had to pass the MCOLES certification test and meet MCOLES employment standards to become certifiable as law enforcement officers in Michigan. LEEP Awards were presented to four police academy graduates this winter from: Law Enforcement Regional Training Academy, Macomb Police Academy, Oakland Police Academy and Wayne County Regional Police Academy. More LEEP Awards on Pages 6-7.

# Oakland Police Academy graduate earns LEEP Award, hired as Deputy

— By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

**T**homas McClure has no previous law enforcement experience, but his proven abilities at Oakland Police Academy earned him a \$2,000 Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) Award and a full-time Deputy job immediately after graduation.

"He worked very hard in the academy and was well-liked by his peers," said Oakland Police Academy Director David Ceci.

McClure was one of 36 pre-service cadets to graduate the Oakland Community College (OCC) academy Dec. 15, 2017 out of a class of 51. Pre-service cadets must pay their own way through the academy.

When McClure began academy training, he was working as a bartender at California Pizza Kitchen in Farmington Hills. "The first few weeks I was working on weekends because I wasn't sponsored," he said. "But I decided to quit that job and (focus on) the academy full-time because it was really exhausting mentally and physically. It's tough. I said, 'I've got to stop and keep the weekends (for myself) to get some sleep and study up on material for the academy.'"

McClure was thankful he could live with his parents to save money, but still had to pay tuition, gas, car insurance and maintenance among other expenses. "I could not have done this without their support," McClure said of his parents. "These people that are doing the academy pre-sponsored, that's great for them. Not having that luxury, it's a lot harder."

The \$2,000 LEEP Award was a much-needed surprise. "I almost cried. I had no idea — it was a shock," he said after he was presented the LEEP Award at graduation. "It means a ton to me — everything I worked for going into the academy, having to pay for myself. It's a great feeling being recognized for the hard work of going to the academy without being sponsored."

"It was real emotional," McClure said of the honor. "I couldn't thank Director Ceci enough for everything that they did for me at the academy."

McClure graduated from OCC with a degree in General Studies and transferred to University of Michigan Dearborn to pursue a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice. He completed one semester in 2016, but when he found out he could get his police academy training with his associate's degree, he decided to finish the bachelor's degree later. "I just felt it was better for me. I could start my career now and go back and finish (my degree)," McClure said.

His choice seems to have paid off. The 22-year-old began classroom training for his Deputy position with Monroe County Sheriff's Office in January and was scheduled to begin road training with another Deputy Jan. 25.

"I couldn't be more excited to get started on my career with Monroe County Sheriff's Office," McClure said. "I will take (Criminal Justice) courses after I finish my training program and really dedicate myself to the career I've started."

Staff and cadets alike were impressed with McClure, who has a good demeanor. "He's a kind, gentle soul, but he's very firm," Ceci said. "When he was demonstrating police skills he was always very respectful."

"There were some people that excelled academically," however, Ceci said, "This guy just is overall well-rounded in all aspects. We have the students do a ranking of each other and we used that as part of our metric, plus his academics, plus his performance hands on. He was at a high level at both of those consistently. Very few recruits demonstrated this level of consistency."

Ceci said McClure likes to help others and enjoys variety in his work, two attributes which make him a great fit for police work. While McClure doesn't come from a family of law enforcement, his dad, Dennis McClure, shared his passion for police work with his son. "My dad was telling me when he was growing up he wanted to be a police officer. He grew up wanting to do it — he went on ride alongs with departments," Thomas McClure said. "He couldn't fulfill that. I wanted to make sure I was able to myself. Taking criminal justice classes got me even more interested." ❤️



Photo courtesy of Keith Tolman, KGT Photographic, Inc.  
POLC Executive Committee member Jeff Gormley (right) presents Thomas McClure a \$2,000 LEEP Award at Oakland Police Academy's graduation in December 2017.

# Police academy grad's dedication pays off with \$2,000 LEEP Award

— By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

John D'Amico took the necessary steps to prepare for and put himself through the Law Enforcement Regional Training Academy (LERTA) and his initiative showed in his academic and training performance.

"I already had my associate's in Criminal Justice from Oakland Community College," D'Amico said of the degree he completed in 2015. "I've been working security full time. I've been saving up money so I didn't have to get a loan and I could pay for the academy outright."

D'Amico was honored with a \$2,000 Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) Award for making his mark among a class of 20 recruits who graduated Dec. 21, 2017 from the Mott Community College academy.

"The award is a scholarship presented to the highest scoring pre-service recruit," said Lt. David Livingston, LERTA Director.

The class itself had a lot of successes. "Starting out we had a split class, 10 sponsored, 10 not," Livingston said. While academy was still in session, police departments hired four of the non-sponsored recruits: two were hired by Flint Police, one by Ovid Police and another placed with Chesaning Police Department.

D'Amico is still working in security at Twelve Oaks Mall while filling out applications for employment with area police departments. "I had to cut back. I was actually a supervisor there," he said. "I would work every other weekend on a Saturday so it still kept me employed with the company. They cut hours and now I'm an officer there. I'm still part-time and will go back to full-time in January until I find a police department."

The 25-year-old seems to have been preparing for law enforcement from a young age. "I did martial arts since I was 14. I've been in it 10 or 11 years," he said. "I'm an instructor with Treger Studio of Martial Arts in Highland." D'Amico began teaching martial arts in 2009 and now works part-time, acting as an instructor for private lessons as needed for individuals ages four to 70. D'Amico is a third-degree black belt; many-time AAU State Champion in both Tae Kwon Do and Shotokan Karate; proficient in Brazilian Ju Jitsu; has numerous first place tournament finishes; teaches a special fighting class for tournament team members; and is one of Treger Studio's first black belt students, according to the Treger Studio's website.

"Once I started instructing marital arts . . . it helped show me I really wanted to help people and guide people in that way," D'Amico said.

While no one in his family is involved in law enforcement, he said, "Growing up, one of my friends' dad was an Oakland County Deputy. Based on the level of character he showed, it kind of inspired me to go into it."

"Between my friends' dad and martial arts, it made it clear I wanted to go into law enforcement," he said.

The LEEP Award was one more nudge toward his future career. "It's definitely going to kick start everything. Not making any money while you're going through academy definitely puts a strain on your accounts," D'Amico said. "It was a pleasant surprise for sure. It's going to help out with bills and some other things."

While D'Amico searches for a law enforcement position, it's easy to see his strong work ethic as he juggles security work and rental properties. D'Amico is staying with friends in Brighton, an arrangement made to help him save money during academy training. "I had a place in White Lake that I'm renting out now and we're getting the Brighton place ready to sell," D'Amico said.

He's hoping to start his police career nearby. "I'd like to stay more local with my family being in Milford and me being in Brighton," he said. ❤️



Photo courtesy of LERTA  
POLC Executive Committee member Collin Birnie (left) presents a \$2,000 LEEP Award to Law Enforcement Regional Training Academy (LERTA) graduate John D'Amico at the Dec. 21 academy graduation.



# Wayne County Police Academy grad receives first LEEP Award

— By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

This fall, the Wayne County Regional Police Academy selected their first LEEP Award recipient, providing the pre-service cadet with \$2,000 to help pay for her academy training.

The Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) Award was presented to Jennifer Ratliff during the Nov. 9 graduation ceremony at Schoolcraft College in Livonia.

"This is the first one we gave out to Schoolcraft. I actually went to Wayne County Regional Police Academy," said Police Officers Labor Council Chairman Steve McInchak. "I reached out to them and . . . I went out there and presented the award and a check to her. She graduated as one of the class Lieutenants."

"She's a natural leader and she is a consummate team player . . . that was evident from day 1. Academically she's very strong. She ranked 15th out of 57 people," said Academy Director Gregg Brighton.

In recent years, including 2017, LEEP Awards have also been given to graduates of police academies at Macomb, Mott and Oakland community colleges. (See pages 4-6)

"You know it caught me totally off guard. Steve walked in here cold and said, 'How come we've never been a part of your academy,'" Brighton said. "He made this happen and we worked together with him and satisfied . . . the criteria that was needed."

Of the 57 cadets, 32 were non-sponsored. "I pulled out the scores for the 32 pre-service and I took the top 10 for the academic side. And that got them into the competition for this award," Brighton said. "Then I went on the practical side, the evaluation side, in firearms, emergency vehicle, defensive tactics and physical fitness, each considered a skill by MCOLES." Brighton asked the instructors for those practical areas to rank the top five cadets. Ratliff made a good impression from the start.

"Our orientation day is a training day — they walk in expecting to have a nice orientation. We put them under a tremendous amount of stress in the first 30 seconds and we watch to see who helps other people, who leads, who looks like they are going to handle this well and Jennifer was one of those people we spotted right away," Brighton said. "You need to understand . . . she was a Military Police Officer in the Marines so she's an experienced individual in stressful situations."

Ratliff, 26, served in the Marines from 2009-2014 and comes from a family of public safety and military service. "I joined when I was 17 years old," she said.

"My uncle was a Police Officer and my mom was actually Military Police in the Air Force. Both of my grandfathers were in the Navy and Firefighters. My brother was a Firefighter and EMS. My grand-



Photo courtesy of Gibraltar Police Department  
POLC/GELC Executive Committee Chairman Steve McInchak (left) presented the first LEEP Award at Wayne County Regional Police Academy to graduate Jennifer Ratliff.

father was the former Chief of Gibraltar Fire Department."

Her fellow recruits quickly recognized her leadership abilities. "Her class picked her for the Recruit of the Week the first week," Brighton said. "The class has to write up a memo nominating an individual that is their standout for the week and it has to have substance."

"For the first three quarters of the academy, the staff picks the Captain and two Lieutenants. We pick that on leadership and the Sergeant's position rotates," Brighton said. "Day 1 my staff picked Ms. Ratliff out of a group of 57 as being one of the three leaders."

Ratliff was able to make this impression despite her dad being hospitalized at the time. So Brighton told her he would postpone her leadership duties until the last quarter. "It was pretty rough for a while there. He was in the hospital for over a month," she said. "I'd do my day at the academy and pretty much shoot right over to the hospital and see him for a few."

Her dad has stage 4 kidney cancer and went into in-patient rehab until he regained his strength after being hospitalized so long. "He's doing a little bit better right now, that's a blessing. Everything was so hectic at home and I really needed to focus on that," Ratliff said. "My best friend was killed while I was in the academy. It was the hardest 17 weeks just because of all the added personal stuff I was going through too."

Ratliff said her military background gave her an incredible work ethic and drive to succeed. "It just completely sets me up for the

Continued on page 9

# Four-time LEEP scholar gets her first job with paid training

—By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

**L**ena Illig was the first Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) Dream Scholar to receive a scholarship each of her four years of college. Now that she graduated, Illig reached out to LEEP to give thanks for helping her achieve her dream of becoming a Police Officer.

"I wanted to inform you and the scholarship committee that I was finally hired as a Law Enforcement Officer in Florida," Illig wrote in an email to LEEP. "I wanted to thank you for all of the years of awarding me scholarships, as it really paid off. I finally achieved my goal of being a police officer."

Illig, who is from Alaska, was hired by Escambia County Sheriff's Office in Pensacola, Florida as a full-time Police Cadet Oct. 9. In November, she began her police academy training to become a certified Police Officer. The Sheriff's Department is paying for the academy and providing her a full-time salary during her training.

"I was looking for positions in the lower 48. I've been in Alaska for so long that I wanted to venture out. My significant other is also down here in training for the military," she said. "He's an Officer with the Marines and luckily I was offered a position here. It's a very ideal situation."

Illig graduated University of Alaska in December 2016 with a Criminal Justice bachelor's degree and began working as a legal assistant at Pradell and Associates in Anchorage, a law firm that specializes in domestic violence and divorce. She also worked for Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska on her campaign, gathering voter information. When her boyfriend, Alphonzo Allen, whom she met in college, moved to Florida to attend flight school for the

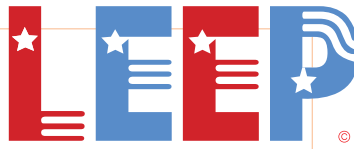
Marines, Illig decided to pursue her police career in the South.

Moving from Alaska to Florida had its challenges. "I moved here at the hottest part of the year — the beginning of July," she said. "It was unbearable some days. It would be up to 103, 104 (degrees). I can't wear most of the clothes that I wore in Alaska. They're too hot. I have to redesign my wardrobe."

The culture was also a bit of a shock. "It's kind of hard to adapt to the culture in the South. It is so different. The food here is much less healthy than it is in the North," Illig said. However, the people are very welcoming to the former Northerner. "I noticed people in the South want to talk about their families and their pets and their home life. They're very talkative and hospitality is a big thing. In the North, people want to get their business done and move forward with their day. They're in a big hurry," Illig said. "Everybody here wants to invite you in their home and talk for an hour. I'm used to getting to the point and moving forward."

Another big difference is the pay for Police. "The biggest frustration about living in the South is the pay is much lower than in the North, but also the cost of living is much lower," she said. "Police make \$15 an hour, where in Anchorage it's about \$30 an hour. I think that's kind of shameful. Police Officers put their lives on the line every day and they make \$15 an hour. It just blows my mind."

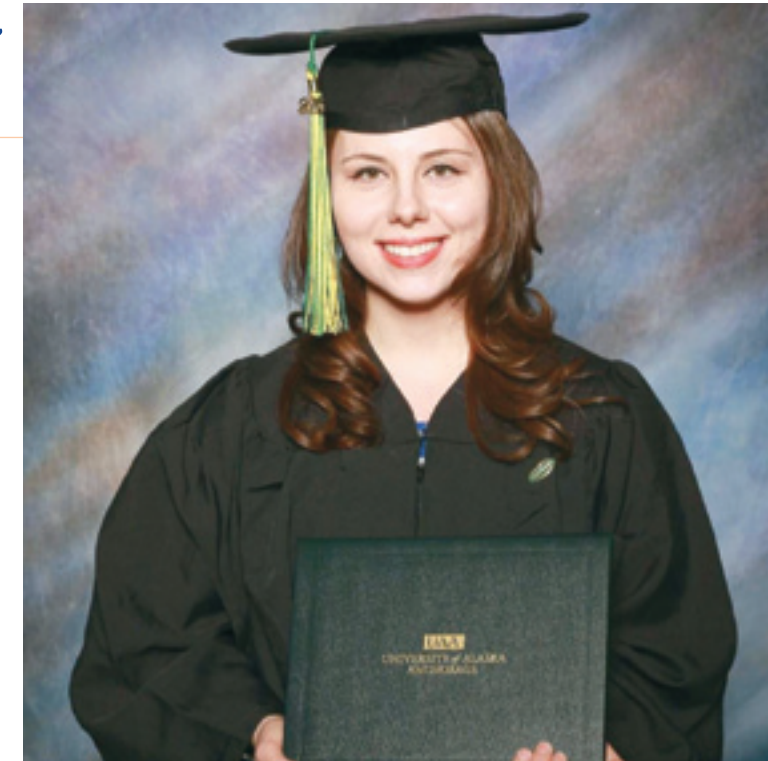
Illig accomplished a lot in her college years, gaining ample law enforcement experience as: a University of Alaska (UAA) Army ROTC cadet; a member of Anchorage Police Citizens Academy,



American Criminal Justice Association Lambda Alpha Epsilon, Women in Federal Law Enforcement, UAA Justice Club, Alaska Peace Officers Association, Women Police of Alaska and a UAA Emerging Leaders Program, organizing numerous justice events. She represented National Guard Youth Foundation; worked at Aviation Medical Services of Alaska and Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest; was an on-call volunteer with Anchorage Police Search and Rescue Team and a Crisis Hotline volunteer for Standing Together Against Rape. She also graduated Alaska Military Youth Academy; participated in police ride-alongs; and served as an underage buyer for Alcohol Beverage Control Board in Anchorage.

She realizes not everyone pursuing a law enforcement career will be able to participate in as many programs and organizations as she was able to and said no matter how much experience they have, the most important thing they can do is, "Keep their nose out of trouble. It's huge in this field," Illig said. "Police departments in the United States have a hard time finding people to hire. Really be careful about the people you associate yourself with and always make the decision with the most integrity because it will pay off in the long run."

The 25-year-old is happy to be employed and enjoying learning the ropes, going on ride-alongs and working in records and dispatch. "I'm getting a feel for it because I'm going through different units in the department," Illig said. "The best part of the job is just being able to pursue the goal that I've been chasing so long and still be-



Four-time LEEP Scholar Lena Illig graduated from University of Alaska and was recently hired by a Florida Police Department.

ing able to come home at the end of the night and getting paid for what I do rather than having to pay for the academy. It's just a really ideal situation right now and I couldn't ask for any better."

Now that she's met her goal of being hired by a police department, Illig is onto her next pursuit . . . to do the best job she can working as a law enforcement officer. ❤️

## Ford urged to recall Explorers, including Police Interceptors, for carbon monoxide concerns

—Excerpted from WDIV ClickOnDetroit and Fox61

**T**he National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has launched an investigation into Ford Explorer model years 2011-2017 and many consumer groups are urging Ford Motor Company to recall more than 1.3 million Explorers over carbon monoxide concerns.

The move comes after several owners reported incidents of exhaust odors entering the vehicles' cabin. In August 2017, Ford agreed to pay specific repair costs following complaints from police departments who use Police Interceptor versions of Explorers. The repairs were "related to unsealed holes from the installation of police equipment by third parties after their vehicle was purchased."

The Center For Auto Safety stated it sent a letter to Ford CEO Jim Hackett, requesting the automaker recall all Explorers sold

during the timeframe, suggesting the odors are from suspected carbon monoxide leaks which have led to over 80 injuries. In October 2017, Ford agreed to inspect and repair vehicles for concerned owners free of charge through the end of the year. However, owners have complained to consumer groups that they took their vehicle in for several repairs, but the exhaust smell remained.

Ford has said that its investigation into the complaints have not found carbon monoxide levels that exceed what people are exposed to everyday and the alleged affected vehicles are "safe."

The Center For Auto Safety advises concerned drivers to place monoxide detectors inside their vehicle and record any instances where levels are elevated. They urge owners who think they are affected to contact them and the NHTSA. ❤️

## Wayne County Grad

Continued from page 7

rest of my life having the outlook that I do and the work ethic," she said.

Ratliff obtained an associate's degree in General Studies from Schoolcraft and has a semester left to finish her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Wayne State University.

A single mom with a four-year-old daughter, she wanted to get to work as soon as possible. "My mom is absolutely fantastic, she's my rock. I wouldn't have been able to do anything without her," Ratliff said. "She watched (my daughter) every time I had to go into the academy. I'm very lucky."

Ratliff plans to pursue a police career and finish her schooling. "My major was Criminal Justice and a minor in Psychology," Ratliff said. "A lot of departments have programs for continuing education. Once I've established myself and get a good routine down, I'm just going to chip away at those classes. I want to go back and finish my bachelor's as soon as I can."

Brighton said the academy is very appreciative of LEEP's generosity, helping offset the approximately \$7,000 academy cost. "It's a huge help," Brighton said of the \$2,000 LEEP Award. "She was very successful and we were just excited that she got this LEEP Award."

Ratliff was also honored with a \$1,250 Patrick O'Rourke Memorial Scholarship, established in honor of the Schoolcraft police academy graduate and West Bloomfield Officer who died in the line of duty in 2012.

"I have no doubt in my mind she's going to be hired shortly," Brighton said. "As a command staff, we saw the dedication to her team. She has gone above and beyond her duties as a Sergeant. She was always encouraging during PT and an active recruit in the classroom."

"I just really want to get established in a good department and, within that department, get exposed to all the different disciplines — K9 or undercover or SWAT," Ratliff said. "I want to be the most well-rounded officer that I can be."

One thing is certain — Ratliff is off to a great start. ❤️

## South Lyon PD grows beards to help kids through Pigs 4 Wigs

—By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

Residents may have wondered why South Lyon Police all seemed to be sporting beards in November and Officers were counting on residents asking them why. It's because they joined forces with nine area police departments to benefit Wigs 4 Kids of Michigan, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that helps children suffering from ailments that affect their appearance.

Wigs 4 Kids Wellness Center provides wigs and social and psychological support services at no charge to children and young adults, ages 3-18, experiencing hair loss due to cancer, alopecia, trichotillomania, burns and other disorders. Maggie Varney, Founder & CEO, is a cosmetologist who has worked with adult patients through the American Cancer Society's "Look Good, Feel Better" program for 28 years.

"We've serviced over 4,000 children since we started this program 14 years ago in 2003," Varney said. "We opened the Wellness Center seven years ago and Pigs 4 Wigs came on board two years after that."

South Lyon Command Officers, a POLC unit, and Patrol posted information about the Pigs 4 Wigs No-Shave November fundraiser on Facebook, inviting community members to come to the station with cash, check or credit card donations. "A lot of people have been dropping in and donating for a good cause," said Lt. Christopher Sovik in November.

Since Police Officers are expected to maintain a professional public appearance, they cannot grow their hair out to make the wigs. So Lt. Sovik and other male officers from South Lyon along with POLC-represented units in Brighton, Ferndale and Hazel Park, grew beards instead. "This is the first year we've been doing it," Sovik said of South Lyon Command and Patrol. "It's the longest I've been without shaving in my life."

"What was really great, not only did it raise funds, but we're not used to seeing officers with beards. It stirred conversation," Varney said. "It gave them the opportunity to constantly talk about it, whether at family gatherings or in the community. This was just remarkable."

Each officer donated a minimum of \$50 to participate in the campaign. South Lyon PD raised \$1,050. "Apparently, some other departments have over \$3,000 and \$5,000," Sovik said. "I think it's going to be record breaking for them this year."

Sovik was right. The 10 departments raised \$38,984 compared to \$10,559 in 2016. "We doubled. I think last year we had five or six (departments). Now we have 10," Varney said.

Village of Wolverine Lake Police Chief John Ellsworth went head-to-head with Reserve Officer Steve Grunwald, a celebrity DJ at country western radio station 99.5 WYCD. Ellsworth raised \$6,895, but Grunwald gathered donations from his celebrity friends total-

ing \$14,525 and Wolverine Lake officers donated another \$400.

"The Chief ended up having to shave his head," Varney said. It started as a joke, but combined with their department, that ended with a serious donation of \$21,820.

While Varney has a brother, son-in-law, cousin and uncle active or retired from law enforcement, that's not how police became involved in Wigs 4 Kids. Milford Police began working with the program five years ago. "My whole family has dedicated their whole life being a servant of the community and they didn't even know my family was in law enforcement," Varney said. "It was Detective Sgt. Scott (Tarasiewicz) who spearheaded it and Dan Caldwell took it over."

The Milford Officers found out two students in their area were using Wigs 4 Kids services. "Some of the officers' children went to school with those kids," Varney said.

South Lyon Sgt. Doug Baaki, found out about Pigs 4 Wigs through Lakes Area Citizen's Police Academy in Milford where he is a liaison. "It kept growing every year," Varney said. "Not only are we about raising funds but raising awareness for kids in need of our services."

Baaki brought the fundraiser to the attention of the City Manager and Chief of Police Lloyd Collins, who approved it. But Chief Collins drew the line at putting his razor down. "He said, 'Some-



Photo by Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

Lt. Christopher Sovik and other South Lyon Police Command and Patrol Officers grew beards to benefit Wigs 4 Kids of Michigan.

one's got to look professional around here," Sovik said.

Wigs 4 Kids not only helps children with the appearance related challenges of their illnesses, the program continues to provide services to families who have lost a child.

"We charge nothing for any of the services we provide for our children," Varney said. "Even after, when they lose their child and they're picking up the pieces of their life and still putting it back together. All the therapy, that's what this money is raised for." ♥

For more information on Wigs 4 Kids, please visit <http://www.wigs4kids.org/>

## Cheboygan County Deputy recognized for helping save a man trapped in burning car

—By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

When Cheboygan County Sheriff's Deputy Jeremy Runstrom arrived on the scene of rollover crash involving a 71-year-old man trapped inside his Ford Explorer, his quick response made all the difference in saving the victim's life.

"The vehicle was on fire already and two individuals were trying to kick the front window out. They confirmed someone was inside," Deputy Runstrom said of the Dec. 5 accident.

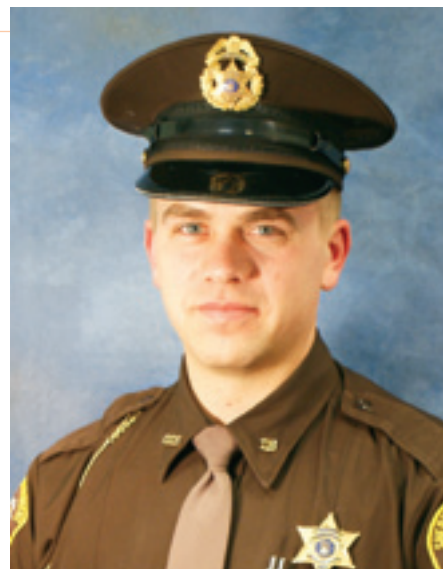
"Deputy Runstrom was already on I-75 policing several accidents due to the inclement weather brought on by the snow storm that Tuesday," said Cheboygan County Sheriff Dale Clarmont. The vehicle was on its side in the median on I-75 northbound at the 296 Mile Marker. Deputy Runstrom was only a couple miles away when he responded.

"There was somebody else trying to put it out with a fire extinguisher, but it was way too large for a fire extinguisher already," Runstrom said when he arrived at 6:30 p.m. "The rear half of the car was engulfed in flames ... from the backseat to the back hatch."

Charles Woollard, a 31-year-old Indian River, Michigan man, was driving by with his father when he noticed the accident and smoke coming from the vehicle, Sheriff Clarmont said. Another man, whose vehicle had slid off the road into a ditch on the other side of I-75, ran from his vehicle over to the Explorer to help the victim, identified as John Stenback of Pleasant Ridge, Michigan.

The fire department was on their way, but there was no time to waste with the flames near the gas tank.

"I was able to use my window punch to pop the moon roof out of the vehicle and myself and one of the passersby were able to



lift him out and pull him away from the vehicle," Runstrom said.

"Charles assisted Deputy Runstrom in getting Mr. Stenback out of the vehicle. The second gentleman, who helped by attempting to kick out the front window, left the scene before he could be identified," Clarmont said.

"It did cross my mind, the chance of it exploding," Runstrom said of the need to get Stenback out of the vehicle immediately. "We kept on pulling him toward the woods away from the vehicle. He had a six-inch laceration to the head. He was conscious but disoriented."

The icy roads made the situation even more dangerous. Deputy Runstrom had to watch out for other vehicles losing control near the accident scene. "There were five other cars in the ditch in that area when I arrived on scene," he said.

As soon as they were a safe distance from the burning vehicle, Runstrom looked back. "By the time we got him out it was fully engulfed," the Deputy said of the Explorer.

"There is absolutely no doubt these three men saved that man's life," Clarmont said. "They had about 10 seconds left before it

would have been too late."

"I eventually walked (Stenback) over to my patrol car to keep him warm inside and get him a gauze pad for his head while we waited for the ambulance," Runstrom said.

Stenback was taken to a local hospital where he was treated and released for his injuries. "I talked with Mr. Stenback who suffered a severe laceration to his head and a back injury. He said he knows his life was saved that day and is truly grateful to all involved," said Clarmont.

Clarmont said he plans to recognize Runstrom, who has been with the Sheriff's office for 10 years, and the two citizens who assisted him for their bravery in saving the life of Mr. Stenback. Sheriff's deputies located the second citizen involved in the rescue weeks later. He has been identified as Scott Doherty, a 33-year-old Harbor Springs, Michigan resident.

"Deputy Runstrom, Woollard and Doherty will be honored sometime in early spring in front of the Cheboygan County Board of Commissioners for their efforts in saving Mr. Stenback," said Undersheriff Tim Cook. ♥

## Arenac County Corrections joins POLC, Union Rep negotiates contract in a month

— By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

**A**renac County Corrections Employees existing contract hadn't yet expired, but they were more than ready to leave their former Union and become new members of the Police Officers Labor Council (POLC) in November 2017.

With their Police Officers Association of Michigan (POAM) contract set to expire Dec. 31, POLC representation ensured enforcement of the existing contract. But before it expired, the POLC had already negotiated a new contract, which became effective Jan. 1, 2018.

The POAM represented the 12-member group over two decades until Arenac County Road Patrol decided to part ways with Corrections. "They got an increase in the road millage and thought they would do better on their next contract without us," said Kirk Adams, vice president of the local Corrections union. "There were no hard feelings from us; they kind of had more members so, when it came down to a vote, it swung their way."

The split occurred in the fall of 2017. "It was approved by MERC and that's when we started looking elsewhere to get away from POAM," Adams said.

Adams said their POAM rep had a lot of other units to represent. "We just weren't getting the personal attention we thought we should," Adams said. "The road patrol had more members and he just went with the majority rules."

They decided a fresh start was in order and POLC Labor Rep. Jason Owen didn't waste any time getting to know the County's negotiations team. He held a meet and greet in November to introduce himself to the Employer.

"Our dispatch has POLC and they spoke highly of them and we called a few other counties and tried to get some information and we just heard great stuff about Jason Owen," Adams said. "Everything just kind of took off when we got a hold of him. He was one of the only representatives we could find that actually had a background in corrections too."

Owen retired as an Allegan County Sheriffs' Office Corrections Deputy, who served as a POLC local Chief Steward for eight years. He worked as a State of Michigan Department of Corrections Officer for seven years and was active in Michigan Corrections Organization.

"It's been outstanding just from the start," Adams said. "I sent Jason an email and within an hour he was on the phone and telling us what to do to get switched over to POLC. If it's 3 in the morning, he'll answer his phone. He's just very easy to get a hold of."

Owen helped the group negotiate a two-year agreement with increases to their Top Pay Step and a \$300 lump sum payment. Sergeants received an additional boost in pay with a change in their differentials. Instead of receiving a lump sum annual payment of \$800, their differential is now 5 percent above a Corrections Officer's salary. In 2018, this amounts to over \$2,000 extra and that amount increases again in 2019.

"When you change it to a percentage, it now increases according to wages," Owen said. "As the increases go with the Officers' pay increases, then that differential increases exponentially."

The Corrections Officers were also awarded 24 extra hours of Holiday Pay for a total of 120 hours annually; expanded family funeral leave; and the Employer shall convert Overtime to Comp Time upon Employee request. "They always had the ability to transfer (Overtime) over, but we changed it. It is not a discretionary thing,"

Owen said. "The Employer has to give it to them if they request it."

The group's biggest concern going into negotiations was maintaining good medical insurance. "Right now we have decent insurance. Our co-pays are minimal and our monthly payment is minimal," however, Adams said, prior to negotiation of the new contract, "Everything is going up and it doesn't sound like the County wants to pay or can pay anymore."

In the new contract, POLC was able to maintain the low co-pays with a slight increase in the Employees' monthly premium payment.

Owen was also able to negotiate zero Employee premium cost for dental and vision coverage. They also had a section of their old contract removed which required working spouses to maintain their own group health insurance. Now working spouses can join the health insurance plan without any penalty charge just because other health coverage is available.

Only two months in, Owen proved he possesses the knowledge and experience needed to represent Arenac County Corrections Employees and, most importantly, will make himself available to address their day-to-day concerns. ♥

## Kalkaska County Non-Supervisory Employees choose POLC to be heard

— By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor



**K**alkaska County Corrections, Deputies & Dispatch Employees have been patient and done their research. Now they just want a fair shake during contract talks. That's why they chose the POLC to represent them.

"It had just been years of butting heads with them and we felt it was time to change and start new," said Kalkaska Dispatcher Todd Jones of time with Police Officers Association of Michigan (POAM). "We were not getting what we thought we should be getting as far as representation goes. We heard things about (POLC Labor Rep.) John (Stidham) from some of our neighboring departments."

Stidham's notable reputation as a responsive union representative among area POLC units is one of the reasons the group of about 40 became POLC members in September 2017, leaving the POAM after more than three decades of representation.

"We're just looking to be treated fair and be heard," said Jones, the local union president. "We're all set with John. He knows what we need and he's already given a (contract negotiation) proposal. John's been doing a good job."

Before POLC representation, Kalkaska County Non-Supervisory Employees conducted their own research. The Employees did their own comparisons of wages with other departments to demon-

strate they should receive pay increases. After all that work, they were told during negotiations that it wasn't possible to give them a pay raise, Jones said.

"We did all of our comparisons, went through county audits. We did all that on our own. We were never even allowed to present it," Jones said. "Everything that we did, as far as research, kind of fell on deaf ears."

Jones said the unit had 15 bullet points to present, but instead the County opted for cheaper insurance to save money. "This resulted in a loss of coverage, no out of pocket savings, and we didn't get any raises," Jones said.

This time around, with POLC representing them, Kalkaska County Non-Supervisory Employees are "just trying to get an honest contract," Jones said. "It's been a very long time since we've had wage increases. They always talk about the (in)ability to pay," Jones said. "They always wanted to make cuts."

"Their attorney does all their negotiations so we don't even get to talk to the County," Jones said. "All we want is an honest effort and we'll go from there. (John) has gone above and beyond what he's had to do so far." ♥

## Kalkaska Command seeks POLC help

— By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

**I**t's one thing to follow up with your Union representative about ratification of a tentative agreement. It's quite another to do their job for them.

That's the situation Kalkaska County Command staff increasingly found themselves in when dealing with their former Union, the Command Officers Association of Michigan (COAM), said Kalkaska County Det. Sgt. Scott Griffith. "We just felt like we weren't getting represented. It seemed like we ran into a lot of problems where it became very apparent that we weren't a high priority," Griffith said of the COAM, which represented them about 30 years. "We were doing almost all the work, and when we'd run into problems, they just wanted to minimize it."

"We felt COAM was not handling our needs up to our expectations," said Sgt. Dave Wagner, local union president. "We felt that we deserved better representation and that was why we went with POLC."

One big problem the five-member Command staff repeatedly experienced is not receiving the assistance they expected during contract negotiations. Kalkaska County Command local union representatives ended up reviewing the tentative agreement drafted by the County's attorney line-by-line. "The Union rep told us to go ahead and sign it," Griffith said, adding the rep told them they could

fight contract issues later. "Why try to put the horses back in the barn once they're out when you can keep them in there from the beginning? We realize we're not a big unit, so we don't bring a lot of money to the table, but give us a little representation."

Uncomfortable with signing the tentative agreement, local Command representatives had a meeting with the County's negotiation committee. "We were already past (contract) expiration and we were going to get a 1% raise (in the new contract) and weeks were going by," Griffith said. "... so we dealt with them ourselves to get the raises implemented."

"They (the negotiation committee) said, 'we will get that corrected right away' and then our Union rep called us and said, 'You guys had a meeting?'" Griffith said. "It was very obvious we were not of any importance."

Kalkaska County Command staff's experience with POLC Labor Rep. John Stidham has been anything but dismissive.

"It's going well and he listened to what we were looking to do and already drafted a contract proposal and contacted the County attorney and sent it to him," Griffith said in November. "We just got a phone call from (Patrol, Dispatch & Corrections local union president) Todd (Jones) that the County attorney wants to meet next week and start the process." ♥



## Contract Settlements

— As reported by POLC/GELC Labor Representatives

### City of Alma Sergeants

**New three-year agreement** expires July 30, 2020.

#### Wages:

2% effective July 1, 2017.  
2% effective July 1, 2018.  
2% effective July 1, 2019.

**Health Care:** Increase health care premium cost share to Employees from a flat rate to 20% premium co-pay.

**Bargaining Team:** Mark Williams and Jake Gulick aided by POLC Rep. John Stidham.

### Arenac County Corrections

**New two-year agreement** expires Dec. 31, 2019.

#### Wages:

16 cents for Top Pay Step from \$18.44 to \$18.60 per hour effective Jan. 1, 2018.  
20 cents for Top Pay Step from \$18.60 to \$18.80 per hour effective Jan. 1, 2019.  
Lump sum \$300 effective Jan. 1, 2019.

\*Sergeants will receive pay differential of 5% over Corrections Officers' pay. Previously, Sergeants received a lump sum \$800 differential. The change amounts to a pay increase of over \$2,000 in 2018.

**Fringe Benefits:** Holiday Pay was increased from 8 to 10 hours per day. Employees will receive 120 hours of Holiday Pay annually compared to the previous 96 hours. Funeral Leave expanded to include all members of the "immediate household." The Employer shall convert Overtime to Comp Time at the request of the Employee. Previously, the Employer had the option to deny this request.

**Health Care:** Active bargaining unit members will be permitted to cover their spouses with health insurance even if their spouse is eligible for another group health plan through their own Employer. There is no additional surcharge if the spouse has other coverage available. Employees pay no premium for dental and vision coverage.

**Retirement:** Employee contribution to DB increases by 1%, effective Dec. 31, 2019.

**Bargaining Team:** Kari Kroczaleski & Kirk Adams aided by POLC Labor Rep. Jason Owen.

### East Grand Rapids City Command

**New three-year agreement** expires June 30, 2020.

#### Wages:

2.25% effective July 3, 2017.  
2.25% effective July 1, 2018.  
2.25% effective July 1, 2019.

**Fringe Benefits:** Two new tiers for annual Vacation Time. Previously, Employees received a maximum of four weeks of Vacation Time annu-

ally after 20 years of service. New tiers:

- Four and a half weeks Vacation Time for Employees with 15 to 19 years of service.
- Five weeks of Vacation Time for Employees with 20 years or more of service.

**Health Care:** Increase health care premium cost share for Employees to 5% effective Jan. 1, 2018; 7.5% effective Jan. 1, 2019; and 10% effective Jan. 1, 2020.

**Bargaining Team:** Jeff Mettering, Eric Smith & Scott Kolster aided by POLC Rep. John Stidham.

### Marshall City Patrol Officers

**New three-year agreement** expires July 31, 2020.

#### Wages:

0% effective July 1, 2017.

Me too agreement to match wage increase percentages of non-union, Fire and DPW units effective July 1, 2018.

Me too agreement to match wage increase percentages of non-union, Fire and DPW units effective July 1, 2019.

**Manning & Safety:** 12-hour shifts were reduced from a total of 84 hours in a 14-day period to 80 hours.

**Fringe Benefits:** Holiday Pay increased from 96 hours to 120 hours annually.

**Health Care:** Employees hired prior to July 1, 2011 will pay a 12% premium cost share and those hired after July 1, 2011 will pay 22% premium cost share.

**Bargaining Team:** Anthony Philpott and Sean Brown aided by POLC Rep. John Stidham.

### Marshall City Command Officers

**New three-year agreement** expires July 31, 2020.

#### Wages:

Sergeants receive 10% increase above Top Patrol wage effective July 1, 2017.  
Lieutenants receive 19% increase above Top Patrol wage effective July 1, 2017.

**Manning & Safety:** 12-hour shifts were reduced from a total of 84 hours in a 14-day period to 80 hours.

**Fringe Benefits:** Holiday Pay increased from 96 hours to 120 hours annually.

**Health Care:** Employees hired prior to July 1, 2011 will pay a 12% premium cost share and those hired after July 1, 2011 will pay 22% premium cost share.

**Bargaining Team:** Adam Ottjepka and Kristopher Ambrose aided by POLC Rep. John Stidham.

### Midland City Command Officers

**Wage Reopener for three-year agreement** which expires June 30, 2018.

#### Wages:

1.75% wage increase effective July 1, 2017.

\* Plus a lump sum payment of \$220 for Lieutenants and \$200 lump sum payment for Sergeants.

**Bargaining Team:** Chris Komaro, Matt Berchert, Chris Wenzell and Marc Goulette aided by POLC Rep. John Stidham.

### Missaukee County Supervisory

**New three-year agreement** expires Sept. 30, 2020.

#### Wages:

2.25% effective Oct. 1, 2017.

2% effective Oct. 1, 2018.

2% effective Oct. 1, 2019.

\* Detective Sergeant position received a \$4,000 wage increase above agreed upon wage increases.

**Fringe Benefits:** Meal per diem increases from \$30 per day to \$45.

**Health Care:** Eliminate \$400 annual prescription drug reimbursement.

**Retirement:** New hires after Oct. 1, 2017 will have MERS Hybrid Plan of a DB multiplier of 1.25% and DC contribution of 1% Employer contribution of 1% to DC Plan.

**Bargaining Team:** Edward Nettles and Tonya Trolz aided by POLC Rep. John Stidham.

### City of Norton Shores Command

**New four-year agreement** expires June 30, 2021.

#### Wages:

2% effective July 1, 2017.

2% effective July 1, 2018.

2% effective July 1, 2019.

2% effective July 1, 2020.

**Retirement:** Effective July 1, 2017, new hires will be under a MERS DC Plan with 7% Employer contribution.

**Bargaining Team:** Michael Kasher aided by POLC Rep. John Stidham.

### City of Norton Shores Patrol

**New four-year agreement** expires June 30, 2021.

#### Wages:

2% effective July 1, 2017.

2% effective July 1, 2018.

2% effective July 1, 2019.

2% effective July 1, 2020.

**Retirement:** Effective July 1, 2017, new hires will be under a MERS DC Plan with 7% Employer contribution.

**Bargaining Team:** Todd Swanker aided by POLC Rep. John Stidham. ♥

# New Units

## Hamburg Patrol, Command resolve to settle better contract with POLC's help

— By Jennifer Gomori, POJ Editor

**H**amburg Township Patrol and Command were preparing for mediation with their Employer six months after their contract expired when they decided to change directions, switching their Union representation in December 2017. Now with POLC, their New Year's resolution is to avoid repeating past negotiations practices.

"The Township representation wanted us to begin to pay more toward our pension plan and we already pay 7 percent toward that and we have for quite a long time," said Hamburg Township Police Det. Sgt. Gary Harpe, local Command Union President. "We went from 3 percent to 4 percent to 7 percent. Through our actuaries, we were able to figure out they weren't paying any additional money other than the minimum amount. We weren't willing to do any increase given past history."

Furthermore, Harpe said, the unfunded liability was caused by earlier decisions not involving existing employees. When the Township established the pensions in the MERS system years ago, Harpe said, some Employees already had 10-15 years of service. Those Employees did not contribute to a pension plan the first 10-15 years they worked, yet were given full pensions and benefits upon retirement, Harpe said.

"They wanted us to help them pay for unfunded liability that doesn't have to do with the officers that currently work there," Harpe said. "When we agreed to the increase, what we paid was supposed to be additional money above and beyond the annual (MERS) payment."

However, Harpe said, "As we increased what we paid, they would lower the amount they would pay by the same exact amount. So there was no additional money going into the plan. It was supposed to be a partnership to increase the funding of the plan. Over the years, we've attempted to address that. The Township has found a way to not cover their end of the deal."

The four-member Command unit and 11-member Patrol unit had been negotiating together through Michigan Association of Police (MAP) and the pension issue and health care stalled negotiations. Officer Justin Harvey, Hamburg Township local Patrol Union President, said the Township is seeking healthcare cost sharing. Currently the department does not contribute to health care premiums. "They were wanting us to pay a percentage (of healthcare premiums) and we haven't been able to see eye to eye on that yet," Harvey said.

The Township responded by filing for mediation and Union members became disheartened with their representation's lack of progress since the contract expired July 1, 2017. "We had been with

MAP for so long and we weren't moving forward as quickly as we were wanting to," Harvey said, adding that MAP has been their only Union representation since the inauguration of the department in the early 1980s.

"Much of the contract we were able to come to agreement, but when it comes to this we are sticking to our guns. They've been taking advantage of us," Harpe said of pensions.

"We ultimately decided we needed to change unions," Harpe said. "It was in our best interest to look elsewhere."

"I spoke with other friends who had POLC and wanted to see what they would say," Harvey said of officers from the Village of Orchard Lake and Wixom. One is a medium size department and one is smaller size. Both said POLC fought hard for both units regardless of the size.

"That's important. We have 11 people, but we don't want to be pushed aside because we're not a 200-man department," Harvey said. "I liked that and that they (Wixom) had been with POLC at least two or three decades and they had nothing bad to say about POLC."

Then Harvey did a little research of his own. "I went on the POLC website and I saw another agency our size had recently switched to POLC," Harvey said.

Sgt. Harpe invited the Union to meet with their negotiations teams in the fall of 2017. Lloyd Whetstone, POLC Membership Services, and POLC Research Analyst Nancy Ciccone came out and presented information on the Union to the Hamburg local negotiations teams.

"I passed it on to the members of our Patrol unit and the rest is history," Harvey said, adding that both units voted unanimously to join the POLC.

POLC Labor Rep. Scott Blackwell is representing the units and hoped to resume negotiations in January. "I did talk to the Township Supervisor about meeting," Blackwell said in December. "Both units were going into mediation, but it never got that far. Once the groups decided to terminate their relationship with MAP, all that got put on hold."

With POLC at the helm, they are optimistic about reaching a fair agreement.

"They (Township representatives) keep talking about having benchmarks. These are their own ideas — where they think the Township should be financially," Harpe said. "I would like to negotiate, if they're willing to. It's the Township that requested mediation. Ultimately, it's up to them." ♥





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