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News

PONTIAC: Slain Taylor officer's name added to memorial

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By Dave Phillips
Journal Register News Service

PONTIAC -- During a ceremony held under gray, rainy skies, the names of seven police officers were added to the Michigan Fallen Heroes Memorial on Saturday afternoon.

"It's important that we come out no matter what the weather is," said Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard, who served as master of ceremonies for the event. "(The honorees) would have done whatever it took regardless."

On Saturday, the names of Detroit Police Officer Brian Huff, Jackson Police Officer James Bonneau, Taylor Police Officer Matthew Edwards and Wayne County Sheriff's Office Cpl. Jammie Smith were added to the memorial. All four died in the line of duty during the past year.

"Unfortunately, every year we've had to add to this wall," Bouchard said of the memorial wall, which was unveiled in 2002.

"Very unfortunately, this year we're adding seven names."

The names of former U.S. Border Patrol agents Franklin Wood, Earl Roberts and Charles Inch — all of whom died in the 1920s and 1930s — were also added.

Bouchard also touched on the recent death of Lt. Dan Kromer of the Taylor Police Department. Kromer was killed Sept. 7 in a hit-and-run accident while he was assisting a motorist on Interstate 94.

"Very sadly, there's been another recent loss we're all aware of," he said. "We'll be adding another name next year."

U.S. Border Patrol Chief Patrol Agent Randy Gallegos described the three border patrol agents who were added to the memorial Saturday.

"Three young men died in the line of fire," Gallegos said.

Wood was 33 years old when he was killed in a boat pursuit in 1927 on the Detroit River. Roberts was 34 when he was shot and killed while attempting to arrest two liquor smugglers in St. Clair Shores in 1929. Inch fell under a train while attempting to arrest illegal immigrants in 1932. He was 34.

"The job is dangerous and always will be," Gallegos said. "This will not continue to be the land of the free without the dedication and sacrifice of the men and women in uniform."

Gallegos praised the bravery that so many emergency responders displayed during the Sept. 11 tragedy.

"We should never forget the horror of that day, but we should also never forget the heroes of that day," he said. "Law enforcement and firefighters risking their lives to rescue people they would never know."

Those aboard Flight 93, which crashed into a Pennsylvania field that day, are also heroes, Gallegos said, sacrificing themselves "in order to save the lives of people they would never meet."

"Those who say we are in a time where there are no heroes don't know where to look," he said. "I'm surrounded by heroes — the names on this wall, the people in uniform and the families (of fallen officers and firefighters)."

Taylor Police Cpl. David Ziegler was emotional when speaking about Edwards, who served six years with the Taylor Police Department after a stint as an officer in Detroit.

Edwards was "dedicated, kind and passionate," Ziegler said. "His attitude showed in his work and his personal life."

Ziegler said Edwards was a highly-decorated officer, having earned two awards for Police Officer of the Year in 2008, as well as an award from Mothers Against Drunk Driving in 2009.

"(Edwards was) a good police officer," Ziegler said. "He did his job well. He was the kind of guy you'd love to have as your partner. He had great faith in his creator and was active in his church. He loved his wife and his kids, and there wasn't anything he wouldn't do for them."

The emotional day continued as Amy Bonneau, the mother of James Bonneau, spoke about her son.

"(Bonneau) was an amazing young man," she said. "There was nothing difficult in bringing this child up."

Bonneau said her son was "without pretension" and was respectful.

"My fondest memories are of watching him in the backyard," she said.

The event was closed out by a 21 gun salute from the Oakland County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard, the playing of "Taps" by Detroit Police Officer Jay Danzler and a performance of "Amazing Grace" by the Metro Detroit Police and Fire Pipes and Drums.

During the ceremony, two upgrades to the memorial were unveiled. A weatherproof kiosk is now featured near the memorial wall, and signs directing visitors to the memorial have been placed in the area.

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