

# Smyth County mourns native son

## Dowell's smile, character and passion for helping others remembered

BY STEPHANIE PORTER-NICHOLS  
Staff

A few weeks ago, Trooper Lucas Dowell was participating in instructor training in Richmond. Each student had to pick a topic of his choice and deliver a speech on it. When his turn came, Dowell turned on his PowerPoint and informed the group that he'd be speaking about snowboarding.

"Everybody laughed." Adam Blevins, a friend of longstanding, recalled the moment gratefully Tuesday as he thought of his fallen fellow trooper and Smyth County native.

Trooper Dowell's smile and the laughter he sparked were on the minds of so many people Tuesday as they mourned the 28-year-old's line-of-duty death.

Mike Sturgill, who was Dowell's principal at Chilhowie Elementary and Chilhowie High School remembered that when the

child and then young man walked into a room "it lit up."

Jeff Robinson, who coached Dowell in football and baseball and taught him history, said virtually the same words, reflecting, "He always had a smile on his face. His smile will forever be something I remember about him. He would light up a room with his outgoing personality."

While that smile will live on in his loved one's memories, those who loved Dowell were grieving for a life cut short.

Trooper Dowell was a member of the Virginia State Police Tactical Team that was assisting the Piedmont Regional Drug and Gang Task Force with executing a search warrant at a Cumberland County residence, just north of Farmville.

According to the Virginia State Police, the tactical team made entry into the home shortly before 10 p.m. Monday when a man

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**Professor Stephen Owen, Ph.D**

Radford University department chair for the criminal justice program

inside the residence began shooting at them. The tactical team members returned fire, fatally wounding the man, 44-year-old Corey Johnson, of Cumberland County. He died at the scene.

Trooper Dowell was transported to Southside Community Hospital in Farmville, where he succumbed to his injuries.

Johnson was the only individual inside his residence at the time of the shooting. The search was being conducted as part of an ongoing narcotics investigation.

Trooper Dowell is the department's 66th line of duty death.

Blevins contemplated Dowell's courage. "He's the kind of guy who just wanted to be the first one in and the last one out," he said.

Reflecting that it takes a measure of courage to put on the uniform, Blevins said, "Lucas was just a courageous guy."

In addition to his bravery, Blevins said Dowell was a good person. No one, he said, could say anything bad about him.

Blevins would know. He and Dowell were county rivals in football and baseball with Blevins playing for Marion Senior High and Dowell for Chilhowie. Blevins, who transferred to Smyth County last summer, was grateful for the time the pair recently had together in Richmond. He asked Dowell about coming home too.

"I can't believe it happened. It's a dark day for sure," Blevins said.

Sturgill, who spent much of the morning with educators who remembered Dowell and teach with his mother, agreed. Sturgill also concurred about Dowell's character. "The word 'outstanding' doesn't touch Lucas Dowell," he said, citing his work ethic, his character and his morals.

As a student, the long-



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**Trooper Lucas B. Dowell was killed in the line of duty Monday.**

time principal said, Dowell was the kind of child who made coming to work every day a joy.

Dowell's personality shone as an athlete, Sturgill said, saying he would always do whatever the team needed.

Robinson noted that Dowell was a strong athlete. "Lucas was a standout defensive end and tight end on the 2008 Region C Runner-up team that finished 10-2. " In baseball,



# Mourns

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“he was a two-year starter in centerfield on two District Championship teams in 2008 and 2009.”

Robinson last saw Dowell at the funeral of Will Walker, a teacher, coach and farmer, who was close friends with the trooper. “It’s been a tough last several months for this small community. We have lost two bright young men that were in the prime of their life, both of them doing great things for society. They were making a real difference.... I am crushed once again by the news of this tragedy.”

Robinson described Dowell as a leader and could easily envision him becoming a state trooper. “He was your classic servant leader as a young athlete.... He was a team player, who was always more concerned about others than himself. Those types of people seem to go into professions where they serve others. As a coach, you always want your players to go on and become good people, good husbands, good fathers, productive members of society. Lucas was an example of one of those players that you were so proud of for what they had made of them-self after high school.”

Robinson shared the Warriors’ baseball media guide from 2009, Dowell’s senior year. Looking ahead 10 years, Dowell saw himself “being a U.S. Marshal or in the FBI.”

Sturgill talked with Dowell when he was home visiting his family – parents, Mike and Becky Dowell, and sister, Erica -- at Christmas. He told Sturgill that he loved his job and the work it entailed.

When Dowell graduated the state police academy at the age of 24 in November 2014, he said he became a trooper to “...test my limits...” and for a career “... with a department of high reputation.”

On his path to the state police, Dowell earned a bachelor’s of science degree at Radford University.

Professor Stephen Owen, Ph.D., department chair for the criminal justice program, said when he and other faculty members learned of Dowell’s death their thoughts immediately went to his family and law enforcement around the commonwealth.

Owen didn’t believe that such a loss can be put in perspective, but, he said, “we can remember... we can remember his passion, we can remember his service that he so willingly gave to the commonwealth.”



VIRGINIA STATE POLICE

The Cumberland County residence where the fatal shooting took place Monday night.



FILE PHOTOS

Lucas Dowell playing baseball and running for a touchdown his senior year with the Warriors.

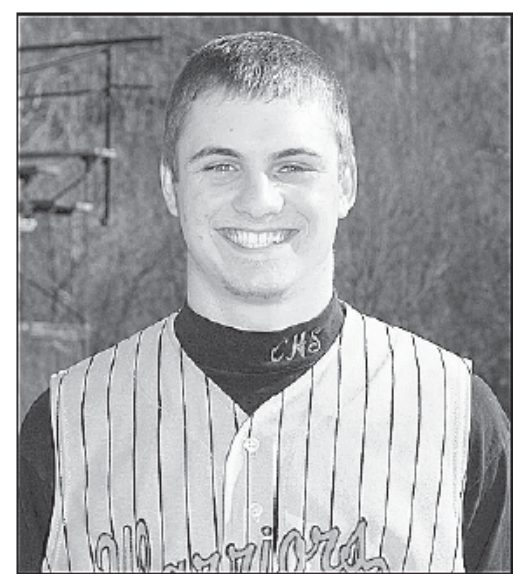
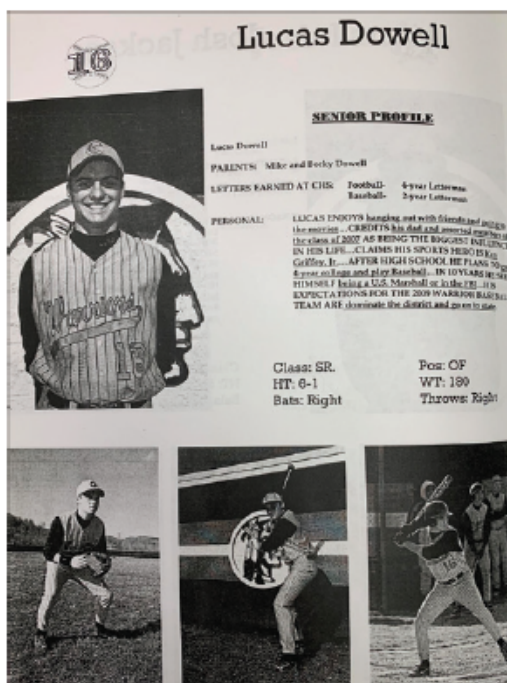
Dowell’s professors, Owen said, had clear memories of Dowell even though he graduated in 2013. They remembered an engaged student “who was really passionate... and was looking forward to being in a profession helping people.”

Caitlyn Scaggs, associate vice president of university relations at RU, said, “Trooper Lucas Dowell embodied the true spirit of a Highlander during his service to the commonwealth and his time on Radford’s campus. Within the criminal justice program, he made an impact on his professors and fellow students, and did the same after graduation through his service as a Virginia State Trooper. Our Highlander family is deeply saddened by his death in the line of duty and will be forever thankful for his contributions to our community both on campus and beyond. Our sympathies are extended to Lucas’ family, loved ones, Virginia State Police colleagues and all impacted by his passing.”

The commonwealth was remembering Dowell.

In a prepared statement, Gov. Ralph Northam said, “The passing of Trooper Dowell is a great loss to the commonwealth. My heartfelt condolences go out to his family and friends who knew Trooper Dowell best. We are grateful for his dedication to the safety of our communities, and for all of those who put themselves in harm’s way to protect others.”

Dowell’s hometown, the town of Chilhowie, also issued a statement. “We are so saddened to hear of the tragic loss of Trooper Dowell, a Chilhowie native. Our thoughts and prayers



are with his family and friends.”

Those thoughts were echoed by law enforcement around the state. Smyth County Sheriff Chip Shuler echoed the sadness and prayers of others. He said, “We may wear different badges and uniforms, but we’re all truly under one badge. We’re all fighting the same fight.”

Marion Town Manager Bill Rush knew Dowell. His daughter and Dowell were in the same CHS class. He reflected how everyone hears the news about officers being killed in Houston or other cities, but then the stories disappear from the news. “Chilhowie will have to live with this for a time,” he said, adding, “It brings home what these guys are facing every day.”

Dowell graduated the Virginia State Police’s

122nd Basic Session in November 2014. Since graduation he has been assigned to the Virginia State Police Appomattox Division; his latest assignment was on patrol in Area 20, which encompasses the City of Lynchburg and Amherst and Campbell counties. He has been a member of the Appomattox Division Tactical Team - the equivalent of a SWAT Team – since 2015.

The Virginia State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation’s Appomattox Field Office is continuing to investigate the shooting.

No other troopers were injured in the shooting.

Funeral arrangements for Lucas Bartley Dowell are pending. Please check [www.swatoday.com](http://www.swatoday.com) for updates.

Linda Burchette contributed to this article.