

Region's law enforcement honor the fallen at memorial breakfast

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

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Widow of slain VSP special agent offers poignant words to officers

VIRGINIA – Earlier this month, hundreds of police officers, sheriffs, deputies, and other law enforcement agencies descended on the City of Petersburg, but it wasn't an emergency that brought the agencies together but a collective desire to remember their fellow men and women in blue who lost their lives in service to their communities.

May 9 marked the 25th anniversary of the Tri-Cities Law Enforcement Memorial Breakfast, an event hosted by Colonial Heights, Dinwiddie, Hopewell, Petersburg, Prince George, and Fort Lee's law enforcement agencies annually where hundreds of police officers and other departments, some as far away as Amelia and Surry County come together to honor police officers who died in the line of duty within Southside Virginia.

This year's breakfast was held in a different venue as Petersburg's Good Shepherd Baptist Church opened its doors to the event after a fire at the Hopewell Moose Lodge, the longtime location of the memorial service, gutted the building in late February.

As in past years, images of fallen officers from across the region stand in silent memorial with candles as friends and family of those who perished look upon them, reflecting on the sacrifices made by those members of the law enforcement community.

The breakfast saw Jamie Walter, the wife of slain Virginia State Police Special Agent Michael Walter, deliver a poignant and impactful keynote address where she recounted the day her life and the life of her family was forever changed in May of 2017.



Jamie Walter, the widow of slain Virginia State Police Special Agent Michael Walter, delivered a heartbreaking account of the night she was told that her husband was shot and killed while on an investigation in Richmond. (Michael Campbell)

“Around 7:11 p.m. that night, I received a phone call from Mike, checking on me and making sure I got home okay,” she said to the room filled with police officers. “He was working down in Mosby Court down in Richmond. 7:26 p.m., I got a flash on my phone that there was a heavy police presence in Mosby Court.”

“Part of me said, ‘It’s okay. It’s not us, it can’t be us. It is not going to happen to us,’” Walter shared before being met by a knock at the door and the news no loved one of someone who works in law enforcement or public safety wants to hear.

“May 27 at 5:19, my husband passed away,” the mother of three shared. “That is where our story, at the time, we said ended but, it really didn’t end at all,” as she recounted having to live through the many court hearings of the man to fatally shot the husband and father in the head in Richmond’s Mosby Court, Travis Ball.

“Through the many motion hearings that we had over 17 months, I attended every single one,” Walter said. Eventually, a plea deal for Ball would have seen the man face a maximum sentence of a lifetime behind bars without parole but, she revealed she was shocked by the eventual outcome, where he received just over three decades behind bars for the murder of Special Agent Walter.

“An hour and a half was given to us,” she said, recounting the sentencing hearing. “I spoke... I poured my heart out. My children did not want to attend, it was too difficult for them understandably. I and state police poured our hearts out. Family and friends did, as well.”

Following their testimonies, along with the defense’s presentations from psychologists and family friends of Ball, the judge would render her sentence of 36 years in prison, leaving Walter stunned by the result and feeling as if the man who killed her husband hadn’t been held accountable for his actions that May evening.

“It angered me, disgusted me, and made me sick to my stomach because I knew I had to go home at that point and explain to my children, especially my 16-year-old, who is a very bright young man, that accountability was not held that day,” she shared. “That is what we raised our children on – when you are wrong and you do something, you are held accountable.”

“And that is when I knew something had to change. I knew I had to change this for our law enforcement,” the widow said.

Walter would turn that anger into action, working with Virginia State Senator Charles Carrico (R-40) and fellow members of the law enforcement community to get Senate Bill 1501 passed in both chambers of the General Assembly and eventually signed into law, which, “Provides that any person convicted of capital murder of a law-enforcement officer or certain other public safety officials who was 18 years of age or older at the time of the offense shall be sentenced to no less than a mandatory

minimum term of confinement for life.”As members of the law enforcement community assembled listened to Walter’s account within the hushed silence of Good Shepherd Baptist Church, the mother revealed that her husband remains with her and her family in their hearts and in spirit, even if he’s physically with them.

“He was such a big part of my life, I have three children that are his children as well,” Walter shared. “We talk about him every day. There are many stories that we share and things they do that reminds me of Mike. I still have his running shoes by the back door because that Friday, he ran with our German Shepherd Zeus and we as a family decided we are not moving those because he liked to run with Zeus.”

She also lamented that grief remains ever present in her life.

“It’s chronic. It isn’t curable. It isn’t fatal, though sometimes it feels like it,” Walter said. “While today I am standing here on two feet, there are days that I like to curl up on the couch and I cry or days where I don’t want to get out of bed, and that is okay, because the next day I will get up, I will take that step and that deep breath and I will find that joyful moment and I will move on and be strong because that is what Mike would want me to do.”

She continued, “What I do know is that I have three children. I know that Mike would want me to be strong for them and to raise them to be strong, kind, humble, responsible adults who are productive in life. I find those joyful moments to hold onto every day that I can say and smile when Austin or Mason says something or Addison smiles because, at eight-years-old, she is her daddy, up and down.”

As she prepared to finish her remarks, Walter committed to being a pillar of support for members of the law enforcement and public safety community.



Good Shepherd Baptist Church became the host venue for this year's breakfast after a fire at the Hopewell Moose Lodge in late February destroyed the longtime home of the annual memorial service. (Michael Campbell)

“I will continue to have all of you in my thoughts and prayers and if there is anything I can ever do, you can always message me on Facebook Messenger,” she said. “I will always be there to listen to help. If I can help in any way – be there, support, listen, meet you for coffee – I will be there to help because not only am I helping you, it will help me too.”

Walker continued, “I can't let my pride stand in the way, so I need your help. We need to stand together as a family and when you say those words, you have to mean those words so know I will always be here to help any of you, whether I am in Powhatan or Petersburg, or Chesterfield. I will

always be here and I appreciate everyone's support, your kind words, your thoughts, and your prayers.”

Before concluding, she left the room of men and women with a simple message.

“Please continue to support our law enforcement as they need the support as they go out every single day and put their lives on the line when they put that uniform on. I will also say, support all of our first responders, our firefighters, our dispatchers, our EMS crews. They are just as important,” Walter closed.

The breakfast took place during last week's National Public Service Recognition Week, where the nation gathers to honor those working in public service on a national, statewide, and local level.

Virginia State Police also held their annual law enforcement memorial service in North Chesterfield during the special recognition week.