

# An untimely death in Flint Hill

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Does ‘driving too fast’  
pertain to local and state  
law enforcement?

BY JOHN MCCASLIN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

The tragic death last week of Raymond L. Gooch, an 82-year-old former Washington town councilman who was involved in a serious two-vehicle crash with a Rappahannock County Sheriff’s Office deputy who was responding to an emergency call last month, has once again placed vehicular speed of first responders under the microscope.

Which isn’t to suggest that sheriff’s deputy Crystal Jenkins was driving at an excessive speed when answering the 911 call of Oct. 18 along a very busy stretch of Route 522 in Flint Hill. Still, is traveling even 20 miles above the posted speed limit going too fast in a congested village with a limited line of sight on a sunny Sunday afternoon during the height of tourist season?

Virginia Code § 46.2-920, last updated in 2006, provides that the drivers of local and state emergency vehicles operated in the performance of public service “and under emergency conditions”

# DEATH

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may “without subjecting themselves to criminal prosecution ... disregard speed limits, while having due regard for safety of persons and property.”

Included are law enforcement officers involved “in the chase” of suspected criminals or “in response to an emergency call,” fire and rescue personnel, prison and emergency management officials — even “environmental quality” authorities. The code, at the same time, sets no maximum allowable speed for first responders.

When Jenkins’ 2011 Dodge Charger cruiser came over an incline and struck the driver’s side of Gooch’s Mazda CX-3 her estimated speed was “45 mph,” according to Sergeant Brent Coffey, public information officer for the Virginia State Police Culpeper Division, quoting from an initial accident report of Virginia State Police (VSP) Senior Trooper S. Riddle, who is investigating the two-vehicle crash.

According to Riddle’s crash investigation, Jenkins was traveling north on Route 522 (Zachary Taylor Highway) when Gooch pulled out of a parking lot bordering Settle’s Grocery & Garage and attempted to make a left turn into the southbound lane.

“The deputy was unable to avoid striking the Mazda and the vehicles collided in the roadway,” says the state police. “The sheriff’s deputy was responding to an emergency call, and the vehicle had its emergency lights and siren activated.”

It wasn’t too long after the 12:55 p.m. accident that Gooch, after being extricated from his vehicle and transported by ambulance to Fauquier Hospital, was “charged with failure to yield right of way to an emergency vehicle.” Shortly after the crash a state trooper reportedly interviewed Gooch at the hospital, with a subsequent state police news release stating the Washington resident “suffered serious, but non-life-threatening, injuries.”

Gooch’s injuries, however, proved far more severe than originally believed and he was transferred within hours to the intensive care unit of Inova Fairfax Hospital. He died there nine days later on the evening of October 27.

“Hearts are broken on both sides of this unfortunate accident,” Rappahannock County Sheriff Connie Compton has told the Rappahannock News via email. She confirmed that Jenkins was not in pursuit of a speeding driver, as is often the case in and surrounding Flint Hill, but was answering a 911 call.

“Deputy Jenkins was responding to an emergency call,” said the sheriff. “RCSO had received a call for an unresponsive male sitting in a car. Caller could not determine if male was breathing or not. Fire & Rescue and Sheriff’s Office were dispatched.”

Compton chose not to address an additional question surrounding safe speeds for county emergency vehicles when proceeding through busy villages like Flint Hill, where the 25 mile-per-hour posted speed limit has been strictly enforced by her department.

The sheriff also didn’t say whether her department, as some other law enforcement agencies have done, has ever discussed or perhaps implemented a speed limit policy for those occasions when officers are in pursuit of motorists or responding to emergency calls.



BY RUTHIE WINDSOR MANN

**Raymond Gooch was a longtime fixture in the Town of Washington, seen here in front of Trinity Episcopal Church on Gay Street.**

## PATROLS CHANGE IN AN INSTANT

In protecting the lives of Rappahannock County citizens, sheriff’s deputies and Sheriff Compton herself put their own lives on the line every time they buckle into their police cruisers. In a split second a routine police patrol can become chaotic and life threatening.

This past June, for just one example, Compton and RCSO Captain Jim Jones suddenly found themselves pursuing the driver of a stolen pickup traveling east on Route 211 in excess of 100 miles per hour. The driver was a suspect in two Harris Hollow burglaries reported that same morning.

The pursuit started near Little Washington, after Compton had attempted a traffic stop, and ensued through three counties — Rappahannock, Culpeper and Fauquier — until the fleeing suspect crashed the truck into a stand of trees near the Warrenton line.

At one point during the chase, after spike strips were deployed by officers in Fauquier County, the suspect crossed the median and drove east in the westbound lanes of Route 211. He then reversed course and drove west in the eastbound lanes.

Fauquier Sheriff Robert P. Mosier credited multiple law enforcement agencies, including the Virginia State Police, that “worked together as a team and prevented injury to innocent persons travelling on the roadway during this pursuit.”

“A little exciting, a little scary,” Compton told the Rappahannock News later that day. “You don’t know what the other vehicle will do — you don’t know what your own vehicle will do. You have other people traveling on the road. You have to [pursue] in the safest manner you can. Fortunately nobody got hurt.”

## HAZARDS BEHIND THE WHEEL

Statistics compiled by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reveal that law enforcement pursuits like the one Compton and Jones found themselves involved in last June account for an estimated 300 fatalities in the United States each year. Thirty percent of those deaths are bystanders not involved in the chases.

In addition, 50 percent of all law enforcement officer deaths every year are the result of motor vehicle accidents

(police experience double the crashes of the general public).

All told, from 2006-2019, at least 809 officers died as a result of motor vehicle accidents (either in crashes or being physically struck outside of their cruisers), accounting for 43 percent of all “line-of-duty” deaths of law enforcement, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health is currently working to promote motor vehicle safety among law enforcement agencies with the hope of reducing the number of officer-related traffic deaths. This is being accomplished through the distribution of “officer-road-code toolkits,” as well as a variety of educational materials that call attention to the many stressful hours officers spend behind the wheel, increasing the risk of mishaps when

**Sheriff Connie Compton: “Hearts are broken on both sides of this unfortunate accident.” Compton confirmed that Deputy Jenkins was not in pursuit of a speeding driver, as is often the case in and surrounding Flint Hill, but was answering a 911 call.**

responding to emergency calls.

Although an anomaly, motor vehicle deaths of law enforcement officers in 2016 “came second to firearms,” NIOSH points out, arguing at the same time that motor vehicle-related deaths for law enforcement officers are “preventable.”

“It is important to promote motor vehicle safety among officers so they can stay safe while working to make communities safer.”

## ‘EXCESSIVE SPEEDS’ AND ‘UNNECESSARY’ DEATH

On Sept. 20, 2012, Amissville resident Jan Makela penned an emotion-

al letter to the Rappahannock News recalling the untimely death a decade earlier of her father, Emmett G. Hackley.

Virginia State Police Sgt. Todd Taylor was responding to a crash on eastbound Route 211 when a pickup driven by Hackley reportedly pulled in front of him. Ejected from the truck, Hackley was flown to Inova Fairfax Hospital, where he died that same evening.

Headlining her letter, “Why are excessive speeds still allowed?” Makela wrote in part:

“The front-page story in last week’s Rappahannock News regarding the high speed chase through Rappahannock County, on heavily traveled U.S. 211, dredged up horrific memories of an accident 11 years ago ...

“Granted, the speeding motorcyclist in question ... should have been punished. No doubt. My issue is with the regulation that allowed the officer to pursue him at speeds reaching 140 miles per hour (by his own admission), putting all of us at risk. No clear ‘life or death situation’ was at stake. This was not an isolated case. I recall a similar high speed chase through the back roads of Rappahannock a few years back; an equally, if not more, dangerous event ...

“Our family has — I always have — held law-enforcement and other first-response personnel in the highest regard. I still do,” Makela continued. “Theirs is a close community who generally hold each other to a higher standard. That’s why I don’t understand why these excessive speeds are still allowed.

“When my father was killed by a state trooper driving at a dangerously high rate of speed through the county 11 years ago, the officer was racing from Sperryville to an accident in Fauquier County, approximately 25 miles from his starting point. It was so unnecessary ...

“At the very least, I would like to see Rappahannock County push to restrict the speed of responding officers in our county ... unless, as I have stated, it is in fact a ‘life-or-death situation,’ and no one else is available to assist. Sometimes that’s a judgment call. In the event of the speeding motorcyclist, I believe that both parties used poor judgment, and both were irresponsible ...

“The citizens of Rappahannock,” she concluded, “when using the county roadways, deserve to feel safe.”

In the 911 response that early afternoon of Oct. 18, another life potentially was in danger — a life that a trained first responder like Deputy Jenkins, herself seriously injured in the crash, could potentially save.

To their well-deserved credit, countless lives have been saved by the men and women of the Rappahannock County Sheriff’s Office. Sometimes lives are saved by deputies in the county without this newspaper even being made aware of it.

“Tough times,” Sheriff Compton said of last month’s fatal accident, a “very delicate situation” for all involved.

Gooch, a lawyer, was a resident of the county seat for nearly 50 years, serving on the Town Council from 1987 to 1998. In addition, he spent time as president of the Rappahannock Historical Society. At the time of his death he was on the town’s Board of Zoning Appeals.

His survivors include a sister and nephew.

# County Attorney castigates governor over Lee statue

Goff: 'Ralph Northam has managed to earn my complete and total hatred'

BY JOHN MCCASLIN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

Rappahannock County Commonwealth's Attorney Art Goff doesn't come close to mincing words when criticizing Virginia Governor Ralph Northam for ordering the removal of a 60-foot statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in Richmond, known as the Lee Monument.

"I have never despised another person until today. Ralph Northam has managed to earn my complete and total hatred," Goff posted on his personal Facebook account.

"His pandering and infantile historical presentism is nauseating," continued the commonwealth's attorney, who also serves as Rappahannock County Attorney. "His promise to take down R.E. Lee's statue on Monument Avenue is a slap in the face of all descendants of Confederate soldiers such as myself."

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# GOFF

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And then these sentences ending with a disparaging remark: “Robert E. Lee is second only to George Washington as the finest man Virginia has ever produced. Ralph Northam will go down in history as the slimy, pandering politician he is — dragged around by the pubic hair by the commie left of his party.”

Goff isn't the first commonwealth's attorney to level criticism against a sitting governor, although doing so in such derogatory language is rare.

Wise County Commonwealth's Attorney Chuck Slemp III, a member of the Virginia Association of Commonwealth's Attorneys legislative watch committee, made headlines earlier this year when taking issue with Northam's legislative agenda surrounding guns, parole and marijuana decriminalization, but he went no further than to label the governor's proposals “radical.”

Reached Wednesday, Goff stood by his remarks.

“This impulse is barbaric, you don't tear down memorials, plain and simple,” he said. “All people need to remember the lessons of the past. And we're not going to adjust the past. There are all kinds of monuments to lost causes, it's historic. And some beautiful art as well.”

Asked about a controversial Confederate flag displayed within public view at his Amissville house, Goff confirmed: “I have a Confederate flag flying out in front of the house. Here is the reason: I'm protesting, too. The destruction of these monuments is a symbol of my protest, taking them down, and vandalizing them as well.

“There were two Page County memorials, statues, vandalized and spray painted [on June 1]. That's not right.”

The primary duty of a commonwealth's attorney, established by the Constitution of Virginia and elected by voters of each county and city to serve a four year term, is to prosecute at their discretion felonies and misdemeanors charged under state code.

Criminal cases are brought in the name of the Commonwealth of Virginia, ie. “Commonwealth vs. Smith.”

Besides being the local county attorney (Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors Chair Christine Smith did not respond to a request for comment), Goff has served as Rappahannock commonwealth's attorney since January 2012, prosecuting criminal offenses in all three county courts. Prior to his service here he was assistant commonwealth's attorney for nearly seven years in Page County.

In his social media post dated June 4, Goff said the governor's directive — held up by a temporary court injunction — “is far from moving toward some sort of ‘racial equity.’ His promise to tear down such symbols of pride, sacrifice and valor will assure that any such pipe-dreams Ralph Northam has about ‘healing’ will go un-headed (sic) and unfulfilled.”

“We've been preparing for this for a year,” Northam said of removing Lee's monument. “This is a statue that is divisive; it needs to come down and we are on very legal solid grounds to have it taken down.”

Goff said Virginians should not tolerate the governor's “assault on our history and culture” and he wished that Republicans, should they win a majority in the next election, would “restore all monuments to their rightful exalted public places.”

Created in France by sculptor Antonin Mercie and displayed in Paris before being shipped to Richmond, the bronze Lee Monument remains a focal point for the former capital of the Confederacy. Its cornerstone was placed in 1887 and in 2007 it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Goff warned that statues of “Washington, Jefferson, Mason” and “WWII, Korean, and Vietnam memorials” will next be slated for removal by those who consider them “imperialist, racist, and oppressive.”

In fact, statues of Christopher Columbus in several states were vandalized or else removed in recent days, as protestors complained the Italian master navigator and admiral represents white supremacy and genocide.

# Enough is enough, chief judge says of carpenter's 58th criminal violation

Lawrence 'Junior' Wood  
'needs to get a taste of  
incarceration'

BY JOHN MCCASLIN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

Labeling him a "danger to an unsuspecting public," Rappahannock County Chief Judge Douglas L. Fleming, Jr. on Monday informed Amissville master carpenter Lawrence "Junior" Wood that he would be spending the next four years behind bars.

Upon his release, Wood will serve five years' probation, with the stipulation that any future contracting work the 45-year-old laborer enters into must be approved in advance and then monitored by his probation office down to the last finishing "nail."

Your "history is profoundly sad . . . a history that makes everybody doubt you," Judge Fleming told Wood when it came time for his sentencing.

"I know I've done wrong," said

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# WOOD

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Wood, his arm in a sling from a recent ATV accident that left his collar bone fractured. "I know I'm due jail time."

Wood's longtime attorney, Frank Reynolds, requested that the judge place his client in a "work release" program so that he could continue to pay thousands of dollars in restitution that is still owed to some of his victims. The attorney also asked that Wood's jail sentence be delayed until his medical condition improves.

But Commonwealth's Attorney Art Goff cited the carpenter's "three decades of criminality" that allegedly targeted unwitting victims stretching from Rappahannock into four surrounding counties. Goff argued that Wood's modus operandi was not "borrowing from Peter to pay Paul, but stealing from Peter to pay Paul."

Monday's court hearing dealt with Wood's 58th alleged criminal violation in Rappahannock County, and he has faced similar if not more serious charges in Warren, Orange, Page and Spotsylvania counties, some of them still pending.

Goff detailed for the court how the Amissville contractor allegedly "takes money but doesn't do the work," telling the judge when recommending a tougher sentence that "it's time the chickens come home to roost."

Wood has "victims across the entire Piedmont of Virginia," observed the prosecutor. "He needs to get a taste of incarceration."



BY JOHN MCCASLIN

**Rappahannock County Sheriff's Lt. Cody Dodson escorts Lawrence 'Junior' Wood from the Rappahannock County Courthouse Monday morning after the Amissville carpenter was sentenced to four years in prison. In the doorway is Wood's attorney, Frank Reynolds.**

V. Brooke Farrell of Huntly, who hired the contractor to build two out-buildings and a barn, was on hand for Monday's sentencing. She said in her victim impact statement that "Wood did more than take my money. He took my trust and abused it. This is the lasting impact that his actions will have on me."

"I have been fully paid back and am thankful for this," she noted. "Others, however, may not be so lucky."

The Rappahannock News is told of additional county residents, two living within blocks of each other in the town of Washington, who recently hired Wood for contracting work — one paying him tens of thousands of dollars in advance — that was not

completed.

"Justice has been served," remarked Main Street resident Megan Smith, after Wood's sentencing to seven years in prison with three years suspended.

It had come up in court that Wood suffered in the past from a gambling habit, for which the defendant said he since received treatment. Regardless, Goff said the carpenter continued to write fraudulent checks on an account that he knew was closed.

"It's the same old story, isn't it?" the prosecutor turned to say to the defendant.

Going back to 2003, Wood has been found guilty in Rappahannock County Circuit Court of 14 charges of forgery, 14 charges of uttering (another form of forgery), 26 probation violations, entering property with intent to damage, and stealing checks.

The latest charges in Rappahannock — failure to perform construction after being paid, and issuing a bad check over \$500 — were brought by Farrell.

According to the criminal complaint filed by Rappahannock County Sheriff's Office Investigator James Jones, Wood and Farrell "entered into a contract for Mr. Wood to construct a 60' x 30' barn . . . for the cost of \$33,466."

Farrell advanced Wood the money, but the barn was never constructed. When Farrell demanded her money back, "Wood wrote a check to pay Brook Farrell for \$30,879, so that she would not pursue criminal charges against him concerning a construction fraud case," Jones wrote in a separate complaint.

However, the check was returned by the bank for "insufficient funds."

Farrell said she hired Wood, an otherwise talented carpenter and builder, on the basis of solid references from people she trusted who had employed Wood successfully. Despite his record, he had been able to garner references from some of Rappahannock County's highest public officials who included Sheriff Connie Compton, then-County Administrator John McCarthy, past Treasurer Frances Foster, and Beverly Atkins, former Commissioner of the Revenue.

For example, in 2008 Wood was sentenced in Rappahannock to 10 years and 10 months in the penitentiary, with five years suspended, plus two additional years for probation violations. One year later, a motion filed in Rappahannock County Circuit Court asking to suspend the unserved portion of that sentence included eight letters of reference from county officials.

The letters described Wood as dependable, respectful, trustworthy, and hard working. As a result, Wood was not moved to the penitentiary, rather was incarcerated in the former county jail where he worked as a trustee under the supervision of Compton. Besides construction projects for the sheriff's office and elsewhere within the Rappahannock County government, Wood was dispatched to Culpeper County to work as a trustee for the sheriff there.

In 2012, Wood's then-attorney Matthew Crowley entered a motion to modify Wood's sentence because "Defendant [Wood] has never been transferred to the Virginia State Department of Corrections."

Patty Hardee contributed to this report

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