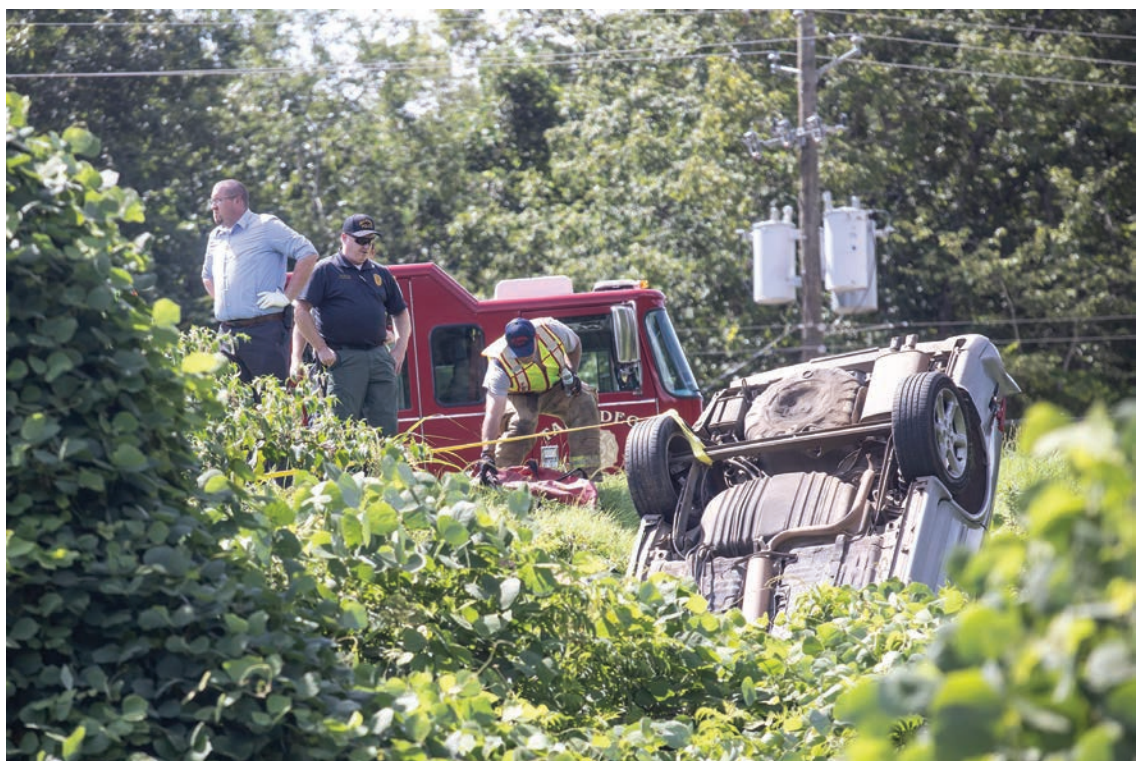




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The first responder lifestyle is 'its own form of church,' Sylacauga LifeSaver crew member says

BY KRISTI SELLERS
Daily Home/St. Clair Times correspondent

In emergency medicine, every second matters. For flight nurses like Morgan Cantrell, those seconds often begin long before a patient ever reaches a hospital. As part of a LifeSaver flight crew serving communities across Alabama and the United States, Morgan works in one of the most demanding and emotionally intense areas of healthcare, bringing critical care directly to patients during some of the worst moments of their lives.

Whether responding to severe car accidents, medical emergencies, or rural trauma situations where time is critical, flight crews operate under pressure that most people only see in television dramas. The difference is that for Morgan Cantrell and her team, the stakes are very real. Each flight requires quick thinking, advanced medical knowledge, and the ability to remain calm in unpredictable situations, all while working inside the tight quarters of a helicopter.

Morgan experienced a lot in her career before she began as a flight nurse, which is a huge feat in itself.

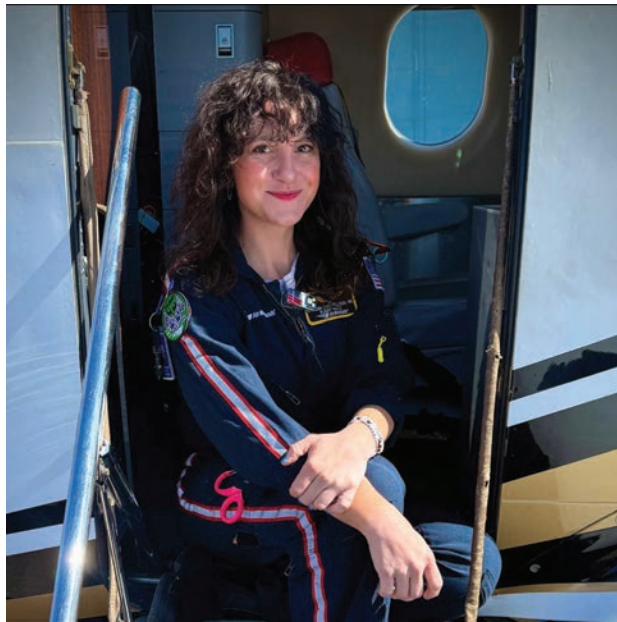
"I became very involved in my leadership roles at Coosa Valley Medical Center not only as an ER charge nurse, but also as stroke coordinator, a preceptor for new hires and students, and I also became an employee of Central Alabama Community College doing ER clinicals on my off days," she said.

Flight nursing combines emergency medicine with the challenges of air transport, meaning crew members must constantly adapt to weather conditions, landing environments, and rapidly changing patient conditions. Unlike a traditional hospital setting, there is no large team just outside the room. Flight crews rely heavily on one another, creating a unique bond built on trust, communication, and preparation.

Still, despite the intensity of the job, there are deeply meaningful rewards that come with the work. For many flight nurses, helping patients during life-threatening situations becomes more than a career, it becomes a calling.

"The lifestyle in general is its own form of church," Morgan said. "We get to serve our community, one another, utilize our skill sets, and be a symbol of faith. I save lives for a living. But the job is also what saved mine. I get to do it all over the country now, but when I come home, it's to my little home in Sylacauga."

The emotional side of emergency response can also be difficult. Flight crews witness trauma, grief, and high-stress situations on a regular basis. Balancing those realities while continuing to show compassion for patients and



families takes emotional resilience that often goes unseen by the public.

When she's not working with Lifesaver, you can find Morgan enjoying some well-earned porch time, riding in her Bronco, or attending a concert. "And I do still love sitting at the piano with my Songs of Faith and having 'my time'. I'll always be an old soul with my Southern gospel."

As communities across the region celebrate first responders this year, professionals like Sylacauga's Morgan Cantrell represent a

FIRST RESPONDERS *Our Heroes on the Homefront* 2026

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side of healthcare many people may never personally witness but are grateful it exists when emergencies happen. From the air, LifeSaver crews provide more than transportation. They deliver critical care, hope, and a steady presence when it matters most.



Local first responders deserve our appreciation

First responders – peace officers, firefighters, emergency services providers, 911 dispatchers – have been described as those who run toward danger rather than away from it to provide order and safety, life-saving medical care and comfort to those who have been affected by traffic accidents, crimes, fires, natural disasters and threats to public health.

Talladega and St. Clair counties are home to hundreds of dedicated, service-minded individuals who make up the first responder organizations in our communities and are serving on the front lines during the third year of an unprecedented global pandemic.

Some years ago, The Daily Home and St. Clair Times began honoring these local heroes with an annual special issue recognizing their contributions and crucial roles in our communities. We choose to do so during May because the month offers special opportunities to recognize the hard work and life-saving sacrifices of fire service, law enforcement and emergency medical services personnel, including National Wildfire

Awareness Month (May 1-31, with May 2 designated as National Community Wildfire Preparedness Day), International Firefighters Day (May 4), Public Service Recognition Week (May 3-9), National Police Week (May 10-16) and National EMS Week (May 17-23).

This special edition is a way for us – and the community-minded advertisers whose support for this publication has made it possible for us to bring it to you – to show our appreciation and gratitude for their courage, commitment, dedication, and willingness to put themselves in harm’s way to provide life-saving services to the seriously injured, ill, or endangered individuals they encounter when they are dispatched to the scene of an emergency.

Many are the demands on their time and attention, but they willingly accept that responsibility. They remain constantly on call, ready to provide assistance whenever and wherever it is needed. Many are volunteers, serving their communities without pay while working full-time jobs and caring for family responsibilities.



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- Alabama Forestry Commission
- St. Clair County Fire & EMS Association
- UAB St. Vincent's St. Clair



We are thankful for our first responders

BY SUSAN COOK
Daily Home/St. Clair Times
correspondent



“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

You probably remember being asked that question at one point or another.

In a survey of America’s Top 20 Childhood Dream Jobs, kids chose firefighters, police officers, and medical professionals as some of their topmost careers. While those selections might not come as a huge surprise, the occupation choice of superhero ranking in at 15th on the list might just raise an eyebrow or two.

But the kids have got the right idea. First responders may not fly around in capes, which I’m sure would make things a lot easier, but they are our nearest examples of real-life superheroes.

Police officers, firefighters, and EMT/rescue workers all willingly take on the role of guardians, providing our first line of defense. They always show up, acting with characteristic selflessness to take care of us.

First responders are essentially the immune system of a given

community. And like an immune system, we often take it for granted as it operates each day, humming along in the background, keeping us all healthy, happy and safe.

For a job devoted to the well-being of others and the protection of the community, it can be a thankless task and one that too often goes unnoticed. We can easily spot our community’s first responders by recognizable badges, uniforms or vehicles, but their most identifiable characteristic isn’t necessarily what they wear. It’s what they embody. We see their true, heroic colors when they rise to each occasion, taking on risks, reaching out to help in the darkest of hours and sometimes even making the ultimate sacrifice.

Being the first to take immediate action is part of the job description, but it’s not a job that just anybody can or will do. In fact, that’s why some kids don’t grow up to become the firefighters, medical rescue workers and police officers they once dreamed of being. It takes a certain kind of person to run towards trouble or the scene of an accident and come face-to-face with the horrors they might find there.

And for these everyday superheroes, we are truly grateful and blessed.

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Fallen law enforcement officers honored during 38th annual candlelight vigil this month in Washington, D.C.

Local officers join nation in observing National Police Week

Special to The Daily Home/St. Clair Times

Again this year, Talladega and St. Clair counties join communities across the United States in observing National Police Week (May 10-16) to honor and remember law enforcement officers who made the ultimate sacrifice, as well as the family members, friends and fellow officers they have left behind.

This year, the names of officers killed in the line of duty were added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, DC. These include officers who were killed during 2024, plus those officers who died in previous years but whose stories of sacrifice had been lost to history until now.

The names of all fallen officers nationwide were formally dedicated during the 37th annual Candlelight Vigil at the National Mall in Washington, DC, May 13.

The 2026 "Roll Call of Heroes" features the names of official line-of-duty fallen heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice. This includes 109 federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement officers who died in the line of duty in 2025. In addition, 254 officers who died in previous years will also have their names inscribed this year. Their sacrifice is now being recognized after NLEOMF's research staff confirmed the circumstances of their death and their record of law enforcement service.

"As we come together to honor the officers we've lost, we reflect



Locally, the Pell City Police Department joined the families of Officer Greg Surles and Lt. Richard Woods at the Pell City Police Department to remember the two brave officers who lost their lives in service to our community. "Let us leave here committed to serving better, leading better, loving our families harder, and never taking a single day in this profession for granted," PCPD Chief Justin Cooper said. "For these two men, and the many men and women who are currently serving, policing is not a career. It is a calling. Today, we honor their sacrifice, their service, and the legacy they leave behind."

not only on their sacrifice, but on the commitment that called them to serve," said William Alexander, CEO of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. "Their bravery and dedication leave a lasting mark on our nation and on all who follow in their footsteps. This is a moment to remember their stories, support their loved ones, and carry their legacy forward with enduring respect."

With these additions, there are now 24,775 officers' names

engraved on the Memorial, representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, federal law enforcement, campus and military police agencies.

The names of the 363 officers added to the National Memorial this year can be found at the Roll Call of Heroes, 2026 at www.LawMemorial.org/PoliceWeek.

In 1962, President Kennedy proclaimed May 15 as National Peace Officers Memorial Day and

the calendar week in which May 15 falls as National Police Week. Established by a joint resolution of Congress in 1962, National Police Week pays special recognition to those law enforcement officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty for the safety and protection of others.

National Police Week is a collaborative effort of many organizations dedicated to honoring America's law enforcement community.



The City of Talladega proudly salutes the first responders who work tirelessly to serve and protect our community.

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How First Responders can help one another cope with the emotional and mental challenges of their work

BY JAY FITCH, PHD
Special to The Daily Home and St. Clair Times

Many EMS/public safety team members are adept at concealing their internal struggle, especially in its early stages. The affected team member, as well as their peers, may dismiss the occasional signs and uncharacteristic behavior as simply a bad call, day or week. But, without resolution, these changes will persist and become obvious patterns and trends, such as:

- Apathy toward work and personal interests
- Expressions of sadness, loneliness or emptiness
- Irritability, anger and frustration (short-tempered behavior with clients, patients, colleagues)
- Decreased performance (chronic tardiness, absenteeism, forgetfulness, failure to complete tasks or maintain quality standards)
- Reduced focus and attention
- Difficulty making decisions
- Isolation or detachment from work-related activities
- Increased complaints and negative talk
- Poor hygiene or reduced self-care
- Chronic physical ailments

- Uncharacteristic, compulsive or promiscuous behavior
- Substance abuse
- Frequent talk of death, dying or saying goodbye

You may feel that reaching out to a struggling colleague is beyond your expertise, but remember – you don't have to fix the situation or have all the answers – you need only to be step one of their journey.

- Connect. If you're concerned about a caregiver, talk to them privately, starting by simply asking how they're doing and carefully listening to their response.
- Listen. Withhold judgment, suggestions and defensive speech, and allow them to say what's on their mind without censorship or fear of professional repercussions. Allowing team members to express their emotions in a safe environment can diffuse the speaker's apprehension and potentially lead to positive organization-wide change.
- Provide resources. Struggling caregivers need to know that they're not alone and that other EMS professionals grapple with similar experiences and issues. This can reduce feelings of isolation and provide practical, healthy strategies for

dealing with public safety's emotional challenges. Mental health initiatives such as first-responder Safe Call Now (206-459-3020) offer convenient access to numerous professional and peer-to-peer resources.

- Promote an open service-oriented culture. Two-way communication is critical for reducing workplace challenges, such as compassion fatigue and burnout. EMS professionals often don't feel that their employer hears their feedback, which, along with the lack of a supportive culture, can be correlated to increased EMS burnout. Help caregivers feel valued and appreciated with regular check-ins, team-building opportunities and events, and social support systems through regular, informal "open mic" team meetings.
- Prioritize well-being and team self-care. Set an example and protect yourself from compassion fatigue, burnout and depression by prioritizing your self-care. This can include simple changes, such as:
 - Coming to work well-rested
 - Taking appropriate breaks and resting when you can between calls
 - Using all allocated sick and vacation days
 - Not signing up for back-to-back

- overtime shifts
- Participating in non-EMS activities and hobbies
- Incorporating mindfulness practice into your daily workplace routine (meditation, quiet walks, yoga)

EMS/public safety professionals don't need to be in a leadership position to affect positive change. While management can create systems and policies to ensure caregivers get adequate meals and breaks during their shift, team members and support staff can lead by example and encouraging coworkers to adopt self-care practices, especially those whom they see struggling to balance their daily routine.

Mental health challenges are not new to EMS/public safety, but their persistence is a clear call for change on a system-wide level. Identifying and aiding struggling team members and fostering an emotionally safe organizational environment can help ensure more EMS professionals will request and receive the help they need, and will feel supported, valued and understood.

Jay Fitch, PhD, is a founding partner at the emergency services consulting firm, Fitch & Associates. He has nearly five decades of EMS/public safety experience and now serves as the executive director of the non-profit Fitch EMS Education Foundation.

Special day honors firefighters, promotes fire safety

BY JAY FITCH, PHD
Special to The Daily Home and St. Clair Times

International Firefighters Day is observed annually on May 4 internationally, and this year has been no exception. Fire is a powerful force and has a reputation for being destructive, but there's so much more to fire than that. It gives energy in the form of heat, and light that is critical for our survival.

However, when this element is out of control, it can be disastrous. It's important to remember though, that fire is only as dangerous as the person who

wields it. International Firefighters Day raises awareness of the importance and safe use of fire.

The date chosen for International Firefighters' Day was linked to the feast day of St Florian (the patron saint of all firefighters). St Florian was the first known commander of one firefighting squad in the Roman Empire. He lost his life, as well as those of his colleagues, for protecting the same humane ideas which firefighters all over the world share even today.

Firefighters in most of the European countries celebrate their day on 4th of

May as a 'Day of Fire Service' as well as St. Florian's Day. This date is also known as St Florian's Day worldwide and has been tradition for more than 150 years in Europe.

The ability to control fire dates back to the cavemen era. It resulted in a significant shift in early human behavior. Making fire to generate heat and light allowed people to cook food, increasing the variety and availability of nutrients while also reducing disease by killing organisms in the food. The fire generated would also assist people in staying warm in cold weather, allowing them to live

in cooler climates. Fire also prevented attacks from nocturnal predators.

Cooked food has been discovered dating back 1.8 to 2.3 million years, although evidence that fire was used in a controlled manner only appeared 1 million years ago. Fire was also used to create charcoal and control wildlife tens of thousands of years ago, and its use became increasingly sophisticated over time. People worldwide used fire as a tool in landscape management during the Neolithic Revolution. These fires were

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12D

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Appreciating Talladega and St. Clair counties' hometown heroes

BY KRISTI SELLERS
Daily Home/St. Clair Times
correspondent



First responders are the backbone of public safety, playing a critical role in protecting lives, property, and the well-being of the community. From firefighters and emergency medical technicians to law enforcement officers and dispatchers, these dedicated professionals and volunteers work tirelessly to ensure local residents receive timely and effective emergency services.

The St. Clair County Fire & EMS Association, for example, exemplifies the county's commitment to coordinated emergency response. Comprising representatives from each fire and rescue department, the association promotes ongoing training, fire safety programs, and the establishment of improved services and procedures. This collaborative approach ensures that all residents and travelers in St. Clair County receive the highest levels of service and standard of care to help prevent loss of life and property.

Central to the county's emergency response is the St. Clair County Central Dispatch, located in Pell City. As the sole Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) in the county, it dispatches for 11 law enforcement agencies and 25 fire departments. Equipped with advanced computer-aided dispatch (CAD) systems, mapping, and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) access, the center ensures rapid and accurate

dispatching of emergency services. Dispatchers, all certified in Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD), provide pre-arrival instructions for medical calls, enhancing patient outcomes even before responders arrive on the scene.

Similarly, the Talladega County Dispatch Center works closely with multiple agencies across the county, including municipal police departments, the Talladega County Sheriff's Office, local fire departments, and EMS providers. Their coordination ensures a prompt and efficient response to emergencies ranging from medical incidents and traffic accidents to structure fires and public safety threats.

As the backbone of emergency communications in the county, Talladega County Dispatch plays a vital role in safeguarding residents and supporting first responders in their mission to protect and serve the community.

St. Clair County is equipped with two Hazardous Materials (HazMat) Response Teams, strategically located in Springville and Pell City.

These teams are prepared to respond to hazardous materials incidents anywhere in the county or region, ensuring swift containment and mitigation of potential threats to public health and safety.

The primary hazardous materials (HazMat) response team in Talladega County is operated by the Lincoln Fire Department. This team is the only designated HazMat unit within the county and is equipped to handle hazardous material incidents of all levels.

Both St. Clair and Talladega counties benefit significantly from their reserve deputy programs, comprising dedicated volunteers who assist the sheriff's office in various capacities, including patrol, prisoner transport, courtroom security, and special events. These reserve deputies undergo continuous training and are integral to the county's ability to respond effectively to emergencies and maintain public safety.

First responders actively engage with the community to promote emergency preparedness. Programs like the Safety Town Program educate young children on emergency preparedness and safety, fostering a culture of awareness from an early age. Additionally, digital volunteers assist first responders during emergencies by monitoring social media and providing situational reports to local officials, enhancing real-time decision-making.

The next time you see a first responder, a simple gesture like saying "Thank you" goes a long way. Supporting local responder initiatives – such as blood drives, safety campaigns, or volunteer programs – not only honors their work but strengthens the connection between citizens and those who protect them.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you, First Responders!

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8D

typically controlled burns, or 'cool fires,' instead of uncontrolled ones, which destroy plants and animals, damage the soil, and impact communities negatively.

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International Energy Agency, these sources supplied nearly 80% of the world's power in 2002.

Why International Firefighters Day is Important

It creates awareness International Firefighters Day creates awareness of the importance of fire safety. It informs the public of the destructive effects of an unattended fire.

It educates people

The holiday serves as a means to educate people on fire hazards and prevention. It teaches survival methods that can

save lives in the event of a fire.

Fire has a long history Fire has a long

history. Its use in meal preparation, warmth provision, and protection

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Thank You!



To All Of Our First Responders



Pell City CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Gateway to Logan Martin Lake

1000 Bruce Etheredge Parkway, Suite 105
(205) 338-3377
www.pellcitychamber.com

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THANK YOU TO ALL FIRST RESPONDERS!

WE APPRECIATE EVERYTHING YOU DO FOR OUR COMMUNITY!



C&B PIPING


8804 Parkway Drive
Leeds, AL
(800) 333-2270
www.cbpiiping.com

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In Honor of All First Responders.

Thank You

for all that you do!



FORD

Ford Meter Box

Pipe Products Division
815 Miles Parkway, Pell City, AL

205-884-4480 • www.fordmeterbox.com

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When the call comes, they answer.

Day or night. Calm or chaos. Our first responders show up when it matters most—bringing courage, compassion, and unwavering commitment to every moment.

The City of Leeds honors the ones who run toward the challenge, protect our communities, and remind us what true service looks like.

Thank you for being there — always.



CITY OF LEEDS ALABAMA

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**Bringing Help.
Bringing Hope.
Thank You
First
Responders!**

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