

Police Appreciation Week

Giving Thanks to the Men and Women in Blue!

‘That’s what we’re here for’

Saving lives, chasing drug suspects and solving bank robberies is part of the job for this Heflin police officer



Heflin Police Officer Danny Turner and his dog “Beni”. Turner recently received a national award for most illegal guns seized. Photo by Bill Wilson

By Bill Wilson
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Not a day goes by that Heflin Police K9 officer Danny Turner does not recall the events of Sept. 19, 2019.

On that day, Turner responded to a horrific accident on Interstate 20 in Heflin, in which a United Parcel Service 18-wheeler truck crashed into two ALDOT trucks, killing the UPS driver and starting a fire.

Turner pulled Randy Character from one of the ALDOT trucks before it was engulfed in flames, saving the man’s life.

Turner said that due to a detour on a nearby highway, his daily commute now takes him past the spot on the interstate where he saved a life and made a friend just over a year ago.

“Every day I drive by that spot, it brings back some kind of memory of what happened and the events that unfolded that day,” Turner said.

Last October at a city council meeting, Heflin police Chief A. J. Benefield presented Turner a Lifesaver Award. At the presentation, the chief read from the official letter attached to the plaque during the meeting: “An Alabama D.O.T. worker who had been seriously injured was inside the truck screaming in pain. Officer Turner began telling the injured D.O.T. worker, ‘Hey buddy, I know you are hurting but we have got to get you out of this truck because it’s on fire!’” Benefield said.

“There is no doubt that if Officer Turner had not gotten the injured D.O.T. worker out of the truck that was on fire, we may have had another fatality at this already deadly wreck scene,” said Benefield, quoting from the letter.

Character was at that meeting and hugged Turner for saving his life as tears streamed down Turner’s face.

Character did not remember the events from that day.

“I remember us starting a shift and three weeks later I woke up in the hospital,” he said.

“I think he’s extraordinary,” Character said last year of the police officer. “He went above and beyond. He could have left my butt in there and let me burn but he didn’t, he drug me out and we’re family from now on. He’s part of my family.”

Today, the two are friends and talk weekly.

Said Turner: “It’s surreal to a degree to see the aftereffects, to learn so much about him from the time the incident happened to the time of the award, to meet his wife, to know that he is a grandfather, a father, a husband and to know about who that person is. There are so many days that you go through life that you don’t get to know what place a person has in this world.”

Turner recalled in hellish and vivid detail the events from that day.

“When I pulled up, we had a couple of the DOT guys kicking the windshield trying to make access to it because the driver side was pinned up against the tree,” said Turner.

The airbags had deployed on the passenger side, so Turner cut through them to get access to Character. Turner pulled him to the door and yelled for help, extracting him from the burning vehicle. Once Turner and the others had Character out of the vehicle, the fire from the scene of the accident was spreading fast.

“My escape route, the way I just came, was on fire. It made it extra hard because we had to go up the hill instead of down the hill, I felt like the fire was chasing me, I mean every time you turned around the fire was right on your heels,” Turner said.

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‘He’s a tremendous dog’

Jack the rescue puppy is the newest member of the Anniston Police Department

By Mia Kortright
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Anniston police swore in a new officer this summer. During the ceremony, the new officer was told to sit and shake Chief Nick Bowles’ hand. It took him a while, but he finally did it.

It was a lazy day for the new officer: Jack, a dog who was rescued in late August by an Anniston Public Works employee.

Officers told The Star then Jack was found chained in a yard on Johnston Drive. Police said he had been there so long the chain was becoming embedded in his neck.

Bowles said that Sgt. Michael Webb had the idea to adopt Jack and make him an honorary police dog. Jack’s job, Bowles said, is “fostering good will and positivity despite his difficult past.”

“It is our hope that men and women, adult and child, can hear Jack’s story and see his scars,” Bowles said. “In doing so, they realize that they, too, can pull through their own hard times, use their own stories and scars to help others.”

Webb, who keeps Jack at home with him, said he had a relaxed demeanor, perfect for a dog that spends a lot of time around different people.

“We want him to be calm, relaxed and just enjoy being around people,” Webb said.

Webb said Jack is already well loved at the department. Recently, he said, an investigator bought him a Serta dog mattress to rest on



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Jack the Police Dog was rescued by Anniston Police earlier this year from a home on Johnson Avenue. Since then he has been hired onto the Community Task Force. Photo by Tucker Webb

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This was not the first time Turner, 45, a 24-year law enforcement officer, saved someone from a burning vehicle.

Working in Newnan, Ga., in 1997, Turner responded to a traffic accident where a Mustang had run off an embankment, rolled and caught on fire. The gas tank was spewing fuel as Turner broke the window while someone else kept the flames at bay with a fire extinguisher.

"I crawled in the car, and he was wedged in and I pulled him out," said Turner, who had to be hospitalized for smoke inhalation.

Turner said that both wrecks where he pulled someone to safety were equally as intense and severe, but added that he would do again.

"If I'm put in that spot I'll do it, that's what we're here for," Turner said.

JEDI AND BENI

The Heflin Police department acquired Jedi, an 85-pound Belgian Malinois, to help with narcotic cases seven years ago. Turner became the K9's handler and partner because he had previously worked with narcotic dogs during his Georgia years in law enforcement.

"When I came over here I had made some large drug cases, and if you're making narcotic cases a dog is an essential tool that you have to have," said Turner.

Through public donations and other contacts, Turner said, the department acquired Jedi, who was a loyal member of the force until his retirement in 2017, when he was replaced by another K9, Beni.

Beni was donated from the Anniston IK9 facility because trainers there had heard about Jedi's retirement and wanted to "step up to the plate" to help with the department's successful narcotic endeavors, according to Turner.

"Recently and unfortunately, about a month ago Jedi passed away, which is never good especially when you're connected to a dog like that, but I was with him, it was the best circumstances possible for what happened," Turner said.

"I'm content with the way he passed. He was in my arms and I'm good with that," said Turner.

Jedi's contributions to the department were numerous, but one bust in particular involving a tractor-trailer stands out, said Turner.

"We deployed Jedi. He got in the sleeper area, where the person driving the tractor-trailer sleeps, and he was able to locate a false wall that was in the back of it, and in that false wall was over \$200,000 of illegal cash that was associated with a cartel," Turner said.

"We were able to seize that. Those funds went into our account, and we actually bought two brand new Tahoes at no expense to the city of Heflin," said Turner.

Turner said he currently drives one of those Tahoes with Beni, who has his own space in the vehicle.

"So that's his legacy," said Turner.

One of Beni's biggest seizures was due to his stubbornness during a foot pursuit.

Turner and officer Josh Nail were pursuing a car out of Mississippi and ended up performing a pit maneuver to end the chase.

"The guys had run and had taken a package with them," said Turner.

"So we began tracking them, and during the track we had found some clothing. The guy ran out of his shoes; his hat came off," Turner said.

As the officers pursued the suspects, Beni stopped and alerted Turner to the presence of narcotics.

"And I'm like, 'We're tracking somebody, you know,' and he wouldn't move, he was stuck to it," he said.

"I went over there and observed a large duffle bag. It was camouflaged in the bushes and it had 84 pounds of marijuana in it," said Turner.

BANK ROBBERS

The Heflin branch of the Small Town bank was robbed in 2018, and the four suspects were quickly apprehended by Turner, other Heflin officers and deputies from the Cleburne County Sheriff's office.

It was Turner who performed a "pit maneuver" on the suspects' vehicle, a gray Dodge Avenger, as it traveled east on I-20 at speeds over 100 mph.

Turner spotted the vehicle on the interstate after he received a description of the vehicle and the suspects over his radio.

"I swung around on the car. As soon as I spun the car around — I hadn't hit the blue lights yet — they stomped it," said Turner.

Miles ahead of the pursuit there was road construction, and Turner was afraid that the suspect's vehicle might crash into slower traffic, possibly causing death or injury.

Turner performed the pit maneuver which caused the suspect's vehicle to hit the concrete median that separates the eastbound and westbound lanes. The vehicle then crashed in the woods on the side of the freeway, and three of the suspects fled. One suspect stayed at the crash scene and was taken into custody.

"Their car crashed, we got all four suspects, recovered the money — a real successful day," said Turner.

On another occasion last year, a Regions bank was robbed in Anniston and the suspects were reported to have fled on I-20 toward Georgia in a white car with a Florida tag. Turner quickly spotted a vehicle matching the description and pulled

it over, which puzzled him at first.

"They pulled over, nothing like the first one. I said, 'I must have the wrong car,' because if you rob a bank who pulls over?" said Turner.

Turner said he and other officers strategically approached the suspect's vehicle.

"I walked up there and you can see the wig and the money and everything laying on the floorboard," said Turner.

Turner said Anniston police came and got the suspects and their getaway car.

"Another successful crime solved," said Turner.

THE FUTURE

Turner said he hopes to end his law enforcement career at Heflin and looks forward to working with the new police chief, Ross McGlaughn, when he takes office next month, replacing longtime chief A. J. Benefield.

Turner said that being a cop is something that he's always wanted to do.

"I really don't think I chose it. Honestly, I truly believe it chose me," said Turner.

"From the time I was knee-high, I knew two things: I liked the Dallas Cowboys, and I wanted to be a cop," said Turner.

Moreover, he said, the fellow officers he works with are really an extended family.

"To walk beside people that will give their life for you and you give your life for them, you don't get to walk around people like that on an everyday basis," Turner said. "That's good



Heflin K9 Officer Danny Turner (right) embraces Randy Character. Turner had pulled Character from a burning ALDOT truck at a scene of a deadly accident in Heflin. Turner had gotten the Heflin Police Department Lifesaver Award for his efforts. Photo by Bill Wilson

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while at the station.

"He has a better bed than I do," Webb said.

Webb said he plans to take Jack to schools and events so locals can meet him.

"He's ready to go and we're ready for the community to be involved with him," Webb said.

"He's simply a pick-me-up," Webb said. "He brings a smile to people's faces."

When Jack was rescued, Webb realized he would need thousands of dollars' worth of surgery, which wasn't covered by the department's budget. So, with Bowles' permission, Webb set up an account on the GoFundMe fundraising website, hoping to raise \$2,000.

Within 24 hours, Webb said, the community had donated \$3,000. He said the remainder of the money will go toward Jack's vet bills and treatment for any abused or neglected dogs they find in the future.

"I wanted to make sure we could keep him here . . . so people can keep up with him and follow up on his story," Webb said.

Initially, Webb said, he thought Jack was a Jack Russell terrier, hence the name. Bowles said there might be some Jack Russell terrier in him, along with some pit bull, but they're not entirely sure what breeds he may be. Bowles estimated Jack was around seven or eight months old.

"He's going to be a big dog," Bowles said. "He's got some big paws."

Webb said Jack was learning the basics of obedience, but that was the extent of his training.

"He's a great-tempered dog, and he's so smart," Webb said.

Emotionally, Webb said, Jack is healing just fine.

"To not know where he's been and what he's gone through, he's a tremendous dog," Webb said.

A version of this story was previously published in *The Anniston Star*.



Jack the Police Dog was rescued by Anniston Police earlier this year from a home on Johnson Avenue. He was left tied by the neck and suffered lacerations that needed surgery. Photo by Tucker Webb

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'People expect police to be heroes'

Jacksonville police chief on how policing can be safer for police, communities

By Katherine Webb-Hehn
Special to the Star

When Jacksonville Police Chief Marcus Wood was a kid, he said, the neighborhood police hosted barbecues for his community, handing out sticker badges, teaching him and his friends to fish.

"I grew up in what you would call the projects," Wood said. "Those cops influenced my life in a very positive way."

Today Wood is the first Black police chief in Jacksonville. A native of Weaver, he previously worked as an Army police officer, a National Guardsman, a corrections officer, a fugitive investigator and a trainer for the

state's police academy at his alma mater, Jacksonville State University.

This year, as Black Lives Matter protests assembled in cities around the world in the wake of Minnesota police killing George Floyd, protesters gathered for days in Jacksonville to discuss police brutality and racism in the justice system.

At the time, in June, Wood told a local TV news station: "We appreciate [protesters] being a force for us, because we don't want bad cops in law enforcement."

Since then, the Black Lives Matter movement has gained momentum around defunding American police departments to reallocate tax dollars for community investment.

Like many police and military leaders, Wood said

more funding to reform policing would make it safer for both cops and the communities they serve. Wood answered questions about changes in policing.

Q: Do you think there are "bad apples" in policing or is the system failing cops?

A: Are there bad cops abusing their power? Yes, in some situations. I'm not saying using excessive force is OK, but I will say cops are human. We expect them to be 100%.

It baffles me that somebody who took an oath to go out and arrest people when they do bad things won't do what we ask of the normal civilian or citizen, that:

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Jacksonville Police Chief Marcus Wood. (Photo by Trent Penny/The Anniston Star)



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'Hey, when you see something, say something.'

We won't call out bad cops, the people who are in the same locker rooms, because we don't want to be labeled a snitch.

How do you begin to change that culture? That's troubling to me as a police chief.

Q.: How would more funding address that culture and the use of excess force?

A.: We're not providing cumulative stress relief for cops.

We all know there's a mental health crisis in this country because we've criminalized mental health issues. But there's this thing in police culture where if a guy starts talking about the hard things he's seen, people start calling him crazy.

People expect police to be heroes. Let's say you have a 15-year-old daughter, and you see your daughter in this dead girl who just got killed by her own father, and you got to work that thing. You have to leave that scene and perhaps go in to help DHR take kids from a bad situation. And that's the end of your shift, but it's just Monday. So you got to go home to try to sleep, try to disconnect from that. But guess what? You got to get back up the next morning and go back to work.

As department heads of police agencies, if someone raises his hand and says, 'Hey, I need help,' then we ought to be able to say, 'OK.' We're not helping cops be the best they can be.

I'm looking into peer support officers because cops are funny about talking to people outside of law enforcement.

Right now, from the beginning, we do a lot of building what I call combat skills for law enforcement officers on how to protect themselves and how to stay alive. I think the one thing that we do lack is telling them, 'Hey, look, stay in this job long enough, you are going to come across some very tough things. You're going to have some things to bother you. ... This is how you handle it. The important thing is to come talk to somebody. We're not going to ostracize you.'

Q.: If we defund the police to put dollars toward the root causes of violence, would there be less of a burden on police?

A.: I think it's a little foolish. I understand their train of thought, but the police are always going to be called when things go badly.

When DHR has to go out and take a kid, before they go, guess who they call? Law enforcement. Undoubtedly, people are not going to want to willingly give up their kids. That's one example.

America needs to decide what the police are for. Do we want cops to be social workers? Do we want cops to be mental health officers? Do we want cops to protect and serve? Because sometimes that's going to be ugly.

Q.: What changes need to happen, as you say, to make things safer for cops and their communities?

A.: An officer has to have 12 hours of [continuing] education a year, but guess what? [Cops] can go and pick 12 hours of fun stuff to do. They can play 12 hours of new gun training because that's fun or a stress relief.

There's nobody saying you have to have a certain amount of training in mental health or a certain amount of de-escalation training. Whether it be at the state level or federal level, there has to be Big Brother that says I've got to do so many hours, so much training.

We have to have something to ensure that police departments are following a model, whether it be a reform task force or the office of police Standards and Training Commission across the country.

Some people will disagree with me because they don't like Big Brother telling them what to do or how they should do it. But unless we have some of that Big Brother to do that for us, we're always going to have a difference of opinion. And right now we don't have that.

This story was previously published in The Anniston Star.



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'It was just a calling I had'

From welder to police chief in Anniston



Anniston Police Chief Nick Bowles poses for a few photos at the Justin Sollohub Justice Center in downtown Anniston. (Photo by Trent Penny/The Anniston Star)

By Phillip Tutor
Star Staff Writer

When he was 23, back before flakes of gray decorated his beard and his yearning to be a cop proved irresistible, Nick Bowles welded doors in a shop in Atlanta. The pay wasn't bad. Better than the foundry jobs and factory jobs and construction jobs he'd already tried. "Poor Southern jobs," he calls them. "That's just what you did, trying to make more money, keep going from job to job," Bowles said. "I ended up welding; it was good money — it's great money now."

But welding wasn't policing. And one hot Atlanta afternoon a chance glimpse of an older welder in his 50s spurred the man who in July became chief of the Anniston Police Department to follow his heart. "I'm not doing this for another 20 or 30 years; I won't be able to do that," he remembers thinking. "I said at that point that I'm going to go be a cop."

So the Cleburne County High grad quit his welding gig, applied to a bunch of Calhoun County police departments and was hired in 2000 by APD. His paycheck was \$2 an hour less than what it was at the Atlanta door shop. But at least he was a cop.

"I knew I was going to take a pay cut doing it, but it was just a calling I had," he said, and, yes, he admits it's so cliché to say that. It's true, though. "You know when you want to do something."

That's the touchy, feely part of Bowles' story. The Kansas-born officer rose through APD's ranks — his resume: patrol officer, training officer, SWAT team, investigator, patrol sergeant, patrol lieutenant, patrol captain — and in July was selected by City

Manager Steven Folks to replace the retiring chief, Shane Denham. And he thought welding was tough. In this summer's aftermath of George Floyd's murder at the hands of white cops in Minneapolis, perception matters. Bowles doesn't shy from that. He understands that whether in big-city Minnesota or small-town Alabama, the critical spotlight on officers and their tactics is at a fever pitch. There were rumors this summer about riots and violent, anti-police protests in Anniston, he said. APD looked into it. There were no riots to disperse. "A vast majority of this city — black, white, brown, yellow, purple — support this police department," he said. "I believe they know that they have a good police department, that they have a highly trained police department, and that we're out here doing the best for them that we can."

Twenty years ago, then-Chief Wayne Chandler asked Bowles about his career goals. He gave Chandler the answer he thought the chief expected. "I told him that I want your job," he said. But that wasn't altogether true. "If he'd asked me where do you see yourself in a few years, I probably would have said I wanted to be a state trooper, that's really why I'm here. They look good; they've got the cool hats; they've got the cool cars. "But once I got hired here I found out I didn't like working wrecks and I didn't like writing tickets, so I didn't want to be a state trooper any more."

And now he's Anniston's police chief, a former welder whose career change has turned out just fine.

A version of this story was previously published in The Anniston Star.



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