



## THE BLUE FAMILY TREE

### Newsletter article May, 2019 special edition

The Blue Family Tree was founded in the fall of 2016 and this was the first year we had a presence at Police Week in Washington, DC. Police Week is an experience unlike any other you will have in your police career. The trip started for me about six months ago when a former co-worker from the Grand Junction Police Department came to visit. He now works for the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (1) in St. Louis. We affectionately call him the “Moon Cop”. He told me that TBFT needed to be at Police Week. It’s a gathering of tens of thousands of police from around the globe who are there because they care about and support families of fallen peace officers... and the camaraderie atmosphere is unmatched. He found a steal of a deal on an AirBNB and we were in!

I started planning. I wanted to bring some items with our logo for sale, so that we could get a little better known around the country. I invested in lots of neat stuff, from t-shirts to tumblers. The only problem was I was flying to the event and I couldn’t see myself traveling with boxes of merchandise. I jumped on Facebook and put out a request for a DC officer who would let me ship to his or her address. A sergeant with the New Carrollton Police Department (2) stepped up to the plate almost immediately. We filled his office with a dozen boxes and he even came down on a Saturday afternoon to help us pick them up. The merchandise had been delivered and it was almost time to go. I discovered an officer from Troy, IL Police Department (3) who has ownership in a local brewing company, 4204. They have a brew made for police called “Off Duty” I reached out to him to buy some so I could give one away with each tumbler sale... instead he just gave the beer to us. Then, while preparing for my trip and finalizing the details, I was contacted by a Denver Police officer (4) who had made special arrangements to fast track Colorado LEOs flying in and out of DIA for Police Week.

It was time to travel to DC. I live four hours from Denver, and the commuter flight is super costly, so I had my family drop me at a former co-worker’s house minutes from DIA. He’s a Federal Air Marshal now (5). In the morning he took me to the airport and the adventure began. Once in DC, my first assignment was to man a booth for TBFT at Kelly’s Irish times (6). Kelly’s gave me the space for free, and anyone who has ever been to Police Week knows they are tremendous supporters of law enforcement. At Kelly’s on Saturday night I quickly connected with a member of The Wounded Blue (7), an organization that does what we do for the fallen, only they work for the injured. We quickly recognized we could help each other through the week. I referred people to them, and they referred people to TBFT. We met so many people at Kelly’s and the feedback for our organization was incredible. Many people came to the table and told us they were there that night because of our promotion of the event!

Starting Monday, TBFT was to man a booth 15 hours a day for three days. Traveling from Colorado, I was the only representative of the organization that could come. These were going to be tremendously long day for me, but my friends at LEO Weekend (8) heard that I was going to be there and sent help. Officers from NYPD (9), New York Port Authority (10), New York State University at Cortland (11) and the Springdale, AR Police Department (12) came in to help man the booth and spread the word about The Blue Family Tree. This group of volunteers were absolutely amazing! But even with the help, the days were long and the motivation would dwindle. The booth next to us was the New Providence NJ PBA (13). These guys never ran out of fuel, I’m guessing at least not until they got home to their couches. When they saw us begin to slow, they stepped in and supported our booth, grabbing foot traffic and guiding it to our booth

because they believe that much in what we were doing. As the week continued we made a new partnership with National Police Wives Association (14) who helped at our booth, and a new friend from St. Louis Police who founded projecthurt.org (15) who is helping to improve our officer survival class.

Tons of new friends and help along the way...but it wasn't over. There was remaining merchandise we couldn't travel home with. We needed a solution. A DC Metro officer (16) answered the call and picked up the items from me near Dulles just before I dropped off my rental car.

There were **sixteen** different agencies, organizations and businesses that partnered with and worked for TBFT, all without costing us a dime. This is a small part of what Police Week is all about. Police supporting police however they can just because they are police. It was amazing.

I had the honor of meeting widows and family members from around the country. Some lost their officer decades ago, and others, this year. It was certainly a somber reminder of why we do what we do. I even found a few moments to sneak away from the booth to go to the National Police Officers Memorial. I had been there before, but not during Police Week. Of course, it had an impact on me the first time, but nothing at all like during Police Week. The temporary shrines, made of photos, flowers, beer cans, and Copenhagen, were shrouded all over the memorial, and the clusters of people standing around their loved one's names and praying made the scene overwhelming. I visited the names of several of my co-workers from the last five years as well as my good friend who was killed in 2016. I couldn't believe I knew names on a wall in Washington, DC. I had been going to funerals since my career began in 1998 and I knew of many officers on the wall, but now I had friends and co-workers on the wall - a startling realization that was etched in stone in front of me. "A wall I wish never to join you on my friend." is all I could muster from my lips after a silent visit.

When I came back home it was straight to work. The job must go on. We can reflect on our fallen brothers and sisters and honor their lives, but at the end of the day, we must go back to work. We must endure the pain of our losses, and fight to lose no more. Keep our heads about us and be forever prepared for what may come next. My first night back I stopped a woman with dark tinted windows. I asked her to roll down the back window and she refused. She had no reason to refuse. She was very innocent of anything except a traffic violation, but she had obviously never given our job a moment's thought. She could not understand why I didn't want to walk past that window. Even after I explained it to her, she only argued, "I'm a female. Why would I hurt you?" Remember to treat everyone the same. Soccer moms and OMGs alike, because you don't know who is going to hurt you.

Thank you to everyone who came by our booth and visited. Thank you to all of you who stayed home and protected the flock. Stay strong and continue to fight crime. It's the best way to honor the lives of those gone before us.