

Hometown law enforcement officers killed in the line remembered

By **Jim Herr** - August 31, 2018



The 21st annual memorial service to remember fallen law enforcement officers was held Friday morning at Hitchcock Park on Como Park Boulevard. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)

CHEEKTOWAGA – The 21st annual memorial service to remember fallen law enforcement officers was held Friday morning at Hitchcock Park on Como Park Boulevard.

The service is to honor the officers who died in the line of duty and called Cheektowaga home. It is sponsored by the Friends of the Woods organization.

“Cheektowaga has eleven officers who lived in the Town of Cheektowaga when they met their death. We had two State Troopers, two Erie County Sheriff [Deputies], two from the City of Buffalo, four officers from Cheektowaga, and one from Dade County, Florida,” said Friends of the Woods member Robert Becker.

Founder Mike Papero was moved to erect the memorial near his home some years after he was assisted by the police in 1965.

“The man and his little son were out doing some work in the garden, and then they hit a beehive of some sort, and the bees got that kid like you wouldn’t

believe,” said Mr. Becker.

The Cheektowaga Police escorted the man to St. Joseph’s Hospital and his son’s life was saved.

“As time went on the father wanted to do something for the police. So the town let us have this little property here,” added Mr. Becker.

The first memorial service was held in 1997.

“It’s a family; when one gets hurt, they all hurt. When we started out, we had a few stones. We had to add a few through the years, and as you add a few, you start to recognize the names and faces. In the old days, it was hard to get up here and talk. When you add new names to be honored, it’s harder, because you know what their families are going through,” said Mr. Becker.

The eleven officers honored are:

Cheektowaga Police Department:

- Constable John Bauer
- Patrolman Robert Burgess
- Patrolman David Tolsma
- Detective Wasyl Potienko

Buffalo Police Department

- Patrolman Carl Reese
- Patrolman James Shields

Erie County Sheriff’s Office

- Deputy Sheriff Joseph Wachowiak
- Deputy Sheriff William Dillemath

New York State Police

- Trooper Paul Kurdys
- Trooper Jill Mattice

Metro Dade County Sheriff’s Office

- Deputy David Strzalkowski

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