



Fraternal Order of Police

FLORIDA STATE LODGE



President James Preston's address at the 25th Anniversary of the
Florida Law Enforcement Memorial Service
Tallahassee Capitol
May 7, 2007

“The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God. There shall no evil happen to them for they are in peace.”

What a beautiful morning we have been given. I am James Preston, President of the Florida Fraternal Order of Police. This year marks a milestone in our Memorial Service. This is our 25th Anniversary, marking 25 years that we have gathered together here in Tallahassee on the Capitol grounds in solemn remembrance of our fallen heroes. In 2006, we lost 9 law enforcement officers in Florida in the line of duty. Today, in 2007, already 4 more have been called home.

Welcome and thank you for joining me today here on the grounds of our State Capitol as we pay our respects and honor the lives and memories of our brothers and sisters in law enforcement. I especially welcome the families, loved ones, survivors. What an honor it is that you allow us to share this day with you.

The officers gathered around you here today, represent but a small number of the thousands of law enforcement officers and officials that will forever be part of your extended family. We come together to pay our respects and demonstrate our support for the families and survivors.

We embrace you as part of our larger law enforcement family, to let you know you do not grieve alone.

Your heroes serving on the thin blue line received hundreds of hours of training, they were given the best tools and equipment; they knew the dangers they may face and readily accepted the job they loved as they put on their uniform and went to work for their final shift. They died as they lived, committed to duty.

The families have no formal training. There is no required “in service training” for the families. They worry each time you walk out the door.

Nothing could ever prepare our families and loved ones for that tragic knock on the door, or for the pain and the deep sense of loss they must now bear.

We all share this loss with you and stand shoulder to shoulder with you to help you carry this heavy burden.

Craig Floyd, Director of the National Law Enforcement Memorial remarked last year that “you do not have to die to become a hero.”

If you have never been to Washington, D.C on law enforcement officer memorial day, you must go once in your career to witness the unity and love of the many thousands of officers gathered together in a common purpose to support the survivors and each other. I believe a simple reflection inscribed on the National Law Enforcement Memorial says it so well; “It is not how they died that made them heroes but how they lived.” We have already mourned their death and today we celebrate their life.

Through your many years as a law enforcement officer each of you may come to know loss and recognize a name on the wall as a friend, co-worker or partner.

You will suddenly remember a name and their face pops up in your mind. As I recall the name, Juan Serrano, a clear vision comes to mind of a smiling, bright Tampa Detective. Always ready with kind words and encouragement. A friend to everyone he would meet. A dedicated detective, proud of his profession and a life too soon over. Juan was a friend of mine at the Tampa Police Department. He died last year.

Just as so many of the other names on the wall mean so much to many of you, his face, that image, will never age. In my memory he will never grow any older. He remains the same as the last time I saw him always with a smile.

Just as my good friend and partner Gary Pricher remains in my mind as a young promising officer who was lost to a drunk driver in 1983, so many years ago.

Our lives go on. *They* remain ageless in our memories. Take just a moment now to think of *your* hero and remember them as you see their face.

As you remember the faces and memories of our fallen brothers and sisters, those you knew and worked with. Your memory keeps them from forever fading away. It has been said that so long as someone remembers you, you will not die.

An ancient king once sought immortality throughout his life. So preoccupied, he wasted his life, until he finally realized at the end that so long as he would be remembered by those who loved him, he could live forever. Now thousands of years later, when his story is told, he is alive still in memory.

Albert Pine, an English author wrote “what we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others remains and is immortal.” What remains are our memories and the love we shared with them during their time on earth.

These are not just names we engrave on these walls today. The names represent our friends, family, co-workers. Each name represents an individual life with so many stories to share. Each with a tragic ending. But today, we celebrate the lives that we were so blessed to have them share with us.

The names added here today unite together our heroes forever through the common bond of being a Florida Law Enforcement Officer. Together in life they served the citizens of Florida. Together in death, they rest peacefully while we continue the watch and pledge that we will “**Never Forget**” the sacrifice they have made to make Florida a better place.

As you stroll these grounds and visit the memorial walls, I encourage you to read the names, imagine the stories and the lives that are represented by those names. To some walking quickly by as they go about their business, they are just names. To us, each one is a life cut short.

Because of how they lived, these are our heroes. We choose to remember them, honor them and “**Never forget**” the lives these names represent.

Introduction of Governor Crist:

Governor Crist as a legislator and Florida's Attorney General and now our Governor has consistently honored and supported the law enforcement profession. **He gets it.** Governor Crist is genuine. He truly cares for and respects those who wear the badge. As Florida's Governor, Governor Crist has made it a point to attend each of the memorial services for our recently fallen officers and offered support and kind words to the families. Governor, your small gesture means so much to the survivors, for the families and officers to know their leader in Florida recognizes their sacrifice and shares their grief at such a tragic time.

Thank you for being here with us this morning as we honor those who have given the ultimate measure while serving the cities, counties and communities of Florida. Thank you for your leadership and vision for our great state. Ladies and Gentlemen, Governor Crist.

Following Governor Crist's Keynote Address:

Governor Crist, one of my *responsibilities* as President of the FOP is to recognize those individuals who by their actions and deeds support our law enforcement officers.

One of my *privileges* as President is to bestow membership to those deserving individuals who have consistently demonstrated their dedication to our organization and the law enforcement profession. Today, it is my honor to recognize your contribution to our profession and to the thousands of law enforcement officers serving our great state. It is my pleasure today to welcome Florida's Governor Charlie Crist as a member of the Florida Fraternal Order of Police and call you our brother in law enforcement.

Please accept this plaque as a token of our appreciation. We hope you will display it proudly. Here is your membership card and a 25th Anniversary Memorial Challenge Coin commemorating this occasion.