



Vol. 40, No. 3

July - September 2024

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We started out the quarter with a press conference on Thursday, July 1, 2024, announcing the results of a joint initiative that focuses on our top priority, protecting our children. As part of the nationwide initiative, "Operation We Will Find You," and together with the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office, and our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners, we were able to rescue 31 "critically missing" children from May 20 through June 24, 2024. In the U.S., one in three teens are recruited for commercial sex within 48 hours of running away. I am extremely proud of the efforts of our officers in helping to reunite these children with their families.

The summer months in South Florida bring increased boating activity, and once again, we were proactive in getting the message out to the public about boating safety. Through our social media channels and press conferences featuring members of our Marine Patrol Unit, we reiterated the message to the public that it is okay to have fun, but to do it respecting the law and other boaters. Additionally, we got the message out to the public about the importance of never leaving a child unattended around water, not even for a second. The threat of drownings doesn't go away after the summer, it is something that we should be vigilant about year-round as we are blessed in South Florida with glorious weather throughout the year. Once again, it is about protecting our youth.

Also, of critical importance to South Florida, is hurricane preparedness. We are in the midst of the hurricane season, and I am proud of the job that this Department continues to do in terms of reminding residents of the steps they should take to be better prepared in the event of a storm or hurricane. Through our internal training, we are prepared to respond to natural disasters, through a coordinated effort with other County departments and regional governmental agencies.

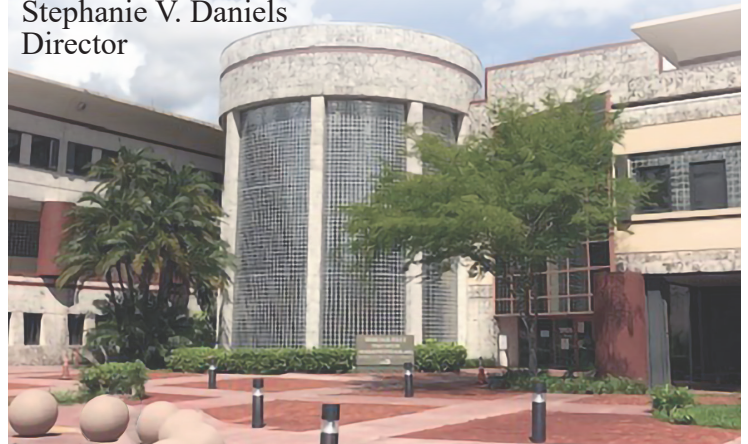
Speaking of training and coordinated efforts, we joined with the Broward Sheriff's Office as they conducted training exercises as part of Operation Heat Shield V, a large-scale training exercise to reduce the region's vulnerability to complex, coordinated terrorist attacks. The exercises included training on land, sea, and air. Additionally, members of our Special Response Team, along with Miami-Dade Fire Rescue, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the Miami Police Department and the Miami Fire Department, participated in live demonstrations as part of the 2024 National Homeland Security Conference, again showcasing this Department's abilities on land, sea, and air. We are as good as our training and will continue to focus year-round on our preparation.

Our community engagement was in high gear this summer, with our Youth Athletic & Mentoring summer camp and National Night Out activities. As a bookend to those efforts, our Midwest District held a Back-to-School bookbag giveaway, and our Robbery Intervention Detail, along with other members of the Department, the Police Officer Assistance Trust, and Bleeding Blue, came together to conduct a bookbag giveaway in honor of our fallen brother, Officer Cesar "Echy" Echaverry.

As the largest law enforcement agency in the Southeastern U.S., we will remain committed to our community through engagement, and will learn from our experiences as we go forward in our mission to protect and serve all of our citizens!

Sincerely,

Stephanie V. Daniels
Director



Midwest District Launches Initiative to Crack Down on Vehicle Crash Fraud

By Brian Ballou

The Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD) has launched a pilot program designed to root out fraudsters who commit staged car crashes, a white-collar crime that siphons billions of dollars from the insurance industry and drives up premiums for honest motorists.

The program, operated out of the Midwest District, began with training in December 2023. On its first day in effect, on March 1, 2024, detectives responded to two reported accidents that were determined to be staged car crashes upon further investigation. By mid-July, officers had arrested 52 individuals involved in orchestrating fraudulent crashes to scam insurance companies.

The insurance industry estimates that vehicle fraud exceeds \$2 billion annually in the U.S. The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), reports over 600 “questionable claims” filed each year in Florida, with approximately one-third originating in Miami-Dade County. The number of such dubious claims would decrease if more law enforcement agencies developed specialized training to weed out fraud.

“As we all know from having to pay thousands in high insurance premiums, this is not a victimless crime,” said Midwest District Lieutenant Lazaro M. Torres, who developed the plan to create the Staged Crash Investigation Initiative, leading to the pilot program. Before joining the Department in 2009, he worked as an insurance investigator, specializing in vehicle fraud.

“I decided that we could put my knowledge in that area to use,” he said. He recruited two members of the District’s Hit and Run Unit: Detectives Douglas Melendez and Alfredo Gonzalez. The Unit’s partners include NICB, the Department of Financial Services’ Bureau of Insurance Fraud, the Special Investigative Unit, and the Miami-Dade County State Attorney’s Office Insurance Fraud Unit.

Training focused on how to spot a scam. Staged crashes come in various forms, including rear-end, single-vehicle,

roll-overs, emergency braking, pre-existing damage, and hit-and-runs, according to investigators. The Department’s Public Service Aides (PSAs), play a major role, because their workload is predominately responding to traffic accidents. If a PSA or a road patrol officer suspects foul play, the

next step is calling a detective to the scene. The signs of fraud that PSAs, patrol officers, and investigators have been trained to look for include; favored locations such as isolated residential or commercial areas, crashes occurring after 9 p.m., multiple occupants per vehicle, a driver who is not the vehicle owner, crash logistics inconsistent with the incident, minor damages to both vehicles, demand for crash reports despite minor to no damage, and complaints of possible injury with a refusal for medical attention on scene.

Often, the participants of a staged crash will rehearse together. They will gather near the scene, to go over the details, and will conduct a dry run or two before actually carrying out the crash. Sometimes those rehearsals are captured on nearby home or commercial surveillance cameras. Detectives say the typical person who decides to participate in such deception are desperate for money, and are told by organizers that it

is an easy scam that goes undetected and pays thousands. But the math does not typically work out in favor of the person attempting to cheat their insurance company, as their premiums will increase over time, way beyond the one time check they received for being part of the scam.

“I feel that we, as first responders, have the best opportunity to make a huge impact by responding to the scene and stopping the fraud before it takes off,” said Lieutenant Torres. “This is a highly-orchestrated type of crime, with many levels and players involved. Doctors, physicians, body shops, tow companies, and even attorneys are soliciting people to participate in this type of crime.”



Staged car crash investigations aimed at reducing fraud.
(Photo provided by Midwest District Hit and Run Unit)

Crack Down on Vehicle Crash Fraud *Continued from page 2*

On Thursday, July 18, 2024, Lieutenant Torres and members of the unit met at the Midwest District with partner agencies, to discuss the progress of the initiative and how to improve sharing of vital information across all involved agencies.

Mr. Miguel Sanchez, a Special Agent with NICB, attended the meeting, and lauded the pilot program, saying that it has already helped prevent the filing of dozens of scam claims, which has likely saved insurers tens of thousands of dollars. “Once there’s a claim, the insurance companies have to put a certain amount of money per person in that car, sign and cover that claim, and they spend all kinds of money. These people who they arrest on scene, never file a claim, so the companies are saving a lot of money,” he said.

Headquartered in Oak Brook, IL., with regional offices throughout the country, the NICB is “the nation’s leading

not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to combatting and preventing insurance crime,” according to NICB’s website.

The Department is likely to expand the Initiative, as the Unit has received numerous calls from officers in other districts requesting their presence at accident scenes, but unfortunately because there are only two detectives assigned to the unit, they cannot respond to the majority of those requests.

“We’re confined to our budget and our area, but this is something so widespread, involving so much money, that we’re just scratching the surface,” said Detective Gonzalez. “We know what we are up against, they are very organized, we’ve seen cases where the same people own a clinic, a body shop and a tow truck business, they’re like one-stop shopping.”

National Night Out

National Night Out is an important event for fostering strong community bonds and enhancing public safety. By inviting residents to gather in local parks or other public venues, and engage with their local law enforcement agency, this event promotes open communication and mutual understanding. It provides an invaluable opportunity for citizens to learn about the efforts of officers, share concerns, and collaborate on strategies to create safer neighborhoods. This interaction helps to build trust and cooperation between the community and the police, making it a vital step towards preventing crime and fostering a supportive, secure environment for everyone.

On Tuesday, August 6, 2024, the MDPD held ten such gatherings, throughout Miami-Dade County, and met with hundreds of residents. The venues ranged from the front of a supermarket in Cutler Bay, to a senior center in the Northside District, to a park in Hialeah. All of the venues were chosen because of their proximity to neighborhoods, allowing residents to walk to the events.

At one of the larger gatherings, in South District, there were numerous food trucks, a deejay, a bounce house for kids, and the Sunshine Corvette Club showed up, with 11 corvettes, from a sleek 1966 model, to a red 2024 version. At least 30 officers mingled with the crowd, and listened to the concerns of residents from nearby neighborhoods.

The MDPD was joined by other County departments, including the Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation Department, the Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department, and the Miami-Dade Department of



Once again, National Night Out brought together the community and the Department. (Photo by Brian Ballou)

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National Night Out *Continued from page 3*

Regulatory and Economic Resources.

National Night Out is held annually on the first Tuesday in August, according to the non-profit National Night Out organization, which is sponsored by the National Association of Town Watch. The event was first held in 1984, and involved 2.5 million residents in 23 states. Since then, it has grown to include over 38

million residents in every state in the U.S. The mission is a “community-building campaign that promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie to make our neighborhoods safer, more caring places to live,” according to the organization.

Assistant Director Buchanan Retires After More Than Four Decades *By Brian Ballou*



Assistant Director Thomas Buchanan enjoyed the company of co-workers during his retirement party. (Photo by Leannet Gonzalez)

Assistant Director Thomas Buchanan considered retiring twice before, as a Sergeant after 30 years on the Department, and then as a Major, at the Intracoastal District. But he loved the work, and so he stayed, for 42 years, following in the footsteps of his father, who was on the Department for 40 years.

“I was able to do a lot, but there’s so much more,” he said. “I could be here until I’m 70 and there would be more. The work I’ll miss, and there’s a lot of good people

here who I will miss.”

He finally retired on Monday, September 30, 2024, without the type of fanfare that would be typical of such a long, distinguished career, but that was his wish, and it came as no surprise to the many men and women who know him as an unadorned and straightforward figure. Inside the third-floor break room at the Fred Taylor Headquarters Building in Doral, he gathered with a smattering of command staff members and administrative assistants, and over coffee, bagels, doughnuts, and fresh fruit, they reminisced. Some of his co-workers grabbed small retirement cards and pens that had been placed on the tables, and wrote well-wishes for the Assistant Director.

When he started at the Department in 1982, the vehicle fleet was mostly 1980-1982 Chrysler Lebarons and Dodge Diplomats, no anti-lock brakes, three channels on the radio, one button for lights, and no computers. The Department’s fleet now includes electric vehicles with navigation, pre-collision assist, and automatic emergency braking; and DNA testing, as a law enforcement forensics tool, was in its infancy.

“That’s the thing, the technology has changed a lot in 40 years, but policing, problem solving, the job, it’s the same job,” Assistant Director Buchanan said.

He worked many years at the Intracoastal District, first as a road officer, and then as a sergeant, continuing to

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Assistant Director Buchanan Retires . . . *Continued from page 4*

spend a lot of his time on the road, and finally as a Major. In the early years, his job often led him into dangerous situations. Once, while carrying out a search warrant at a house in Liberty City, he encountered a man stretched out on a bed. The man's arms were extended, towards a pillow. "He kept staring at the pillow, and looking back at me," Assistant Director Buchanan said. "I pulled my gun out and yelled at him 'don't do it, don't do it!' I went over to the pillow and there was a gun underneath it. He was just waiting for a chance to grab it and shoot me. During my career I have been shot at, and have been in many dangerous situations, and afterwards, when everything is over, you say to yourself, holy crap!"

People who know Assistant Director Buchanan well, and those he has supervised, say he is a natural leader who always led by example. Officer David Greenwell, the Executive Vice President of the South Florida Police Benevolent Association, joined the Department the same year as the Assistant Director, and they have been close friends since.

"He is a worker and always cared about his troops," Officer Greenwell said. "I was tremendously proud of him when he became Assistant Director, because he worked his way up the chain. His superpower is getting the job done, he was in charge of Police Services, which is the largest part of the Department. He doesn't back down from something he knows is right. And he still listens to his police radio, up in his office, and sometimes he will get on it."

As for retirement, Assistant Director Buchanan has a lot of things to occupy his time. He is an avid motorcyclist, has two motorcycles, and loves to go on long trips. He also has a boat, and homes in Inverness, FL, and in West Virginia.

"I will do some consulting work, because I still think there's more that I can contribute, and then I'll do some writing, maybe for motorcycle magazines," he said.

Department Holds First-Ever Civilian Promotional Ceremony

By Brian Ballou



The first-ever Civilian Promotional Ceremony included a wide range of professional staffers from across the Department. (Photo by Melanie Pacheco)

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First-Ever Civilian Promotional Ceremony *Continued from page 5*

For the first time in its storied history, the MDPD held a ceremony to honor civilian employees for their promotions. Twenty-five civilians were celebrated, on Friday, August 9, 2024, for their achievements in a ceremony that drew enthusiastic applause and the proud presence of family, friends, and colleagues.

The promotions were held inside the Fred Taylor Headquarters Building, second-floor auditorium. The event had the feel of a graduation ceremony, as each honoree made their way to the stage to receive a certificate and pose for photographs with Deputy Director Christopher J. Carothers. The room reverberated with cheers as loved ones and coworkers acknowledged the hard-earned accomplishments of the promoted civilians.

In his remarks, Deputy Director Carothers acknowledged that this recognition was long overdue, signaling a new era of appreciation for the vital roles civilians play within the Department.

“As mentioned earlier, traditionally, the Department has not held this type of recognition for civilian staff members, and it was not because we didn’t like you, or appreciate you, or need you, because all those things would be untrue,” Deputy Director Carothers said. He said that with regard to the sworn side of the Department, there is a formalized time frame for eligibility for promotion, and an established routine to the process. The civilian equivalent ceremony “kinda’ fell to the wayside,” he said, but the Department will use the first ceremony as a springboard to continue to acknowledge civilian promotions. He then thanked Chief Scientific Officer Stephanie L. Stoiloff, who oversees the Forensic Services Division, for bringing forth the idea to have a civilian promotion ceremony.

In a speech, Chief Stoiloff told the civilian staffers, “Your work is the backbone of everything we do in this Department, I know that I don’t need to tell you that.”

Chief Stoiloff named all of the areas within the Department that were represented by the civilians recently promoted. Within Investigative Services, the Crime Laboratory, and Homicide, Special Victims, Homeland Security, Organized Crimes, and Crime Scene & Evidence Bureaus were represented. Within the Fiscal & Departmental Services, the Information Technology Services Division, Fiscal Administration, and the Central Records, Communications, and Personnel Management Bureaus were represented. Within the Compliance and Standards Division, the Police Legal, Professional Compliance, and Mental Health &

Wellness Bureaus were represented. And within Police Services, the South District and the Community Affairs Bureau was represented.

“As you’ve heard from that long list, our civilian staffers are inextricably linked to every part of this amazing agency,” Chief Stoiloff said.

The ceremony was the first of four to celebrate civilians promoted since January 2023. The second ceremony was held on Tuesday, August 13, 2024, and included 33 civilians. The third ceremony was held on Friday, September 20, and included 27 civilians. The fourth ceremony is scheduled for Friday, October 4.

The Department’s Human Resources Manager, Dena Kelly, explained that there are two avenues to promotion within the non-sworn, or professional side, of the Department. “Sometimes it might be a position from a Criminalist 1 to a Criminalist 2, and in that case, it’s a little bit different, because those are automatic promotions. Someone who is hired as a Criminalist 1, they go through a year, maybe a year and a half of probation and training, and once they pass their phases as a Criminalist 1, they’re reclassified to a Criminalist 2, so some of the promotions are in classifications. But most promotions, in the true sense of the word, is when a job is advertised, people apply, they’re interviewed, and the best candidate is selected.”

Among those recently promoted and acknowledged during the ceremony was MDPD Intelligence Analyst Simone N. Robinson, who has been with the Department for 14 years, having first served as a Police Dispatcher. She currently works in the Special Victims Bureau. Echoing Chief Stoiloff’s comments, she said, “We are like the backbone of the Department, helping to get subjects off the streets.”

She thanked Chief Eric L. Garcia, her former supervisor at the Hammocks District, for helping her out in her career path within the Department. “He believed in me and he always spoke positively of my future, so I am here today because he believed in me,” she said, holding back tears.

After the ceremony ended, and as families left the conference room, Chief Stoiloff said, “Just take a look at all those smiles, it was worth every single minute making it happen.”



OPERATIONALSHIELD *Devotional*

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Backpack Donations for Underprivileged Schoolchildren Continues to Grow in Honor of Cesar “Echy” Echaverry

By Brian Ballou



Robbery Intervention Detail Officer Nicholas Sacramento carts out dozens of backpacks that were later distributed to schoolchildren in Miami-Dade County. (Photo by Brian Ballou)

A gesture that was started by the family of Detective Cesar “Echy” Echaverry, to supply underprivileged schoolchildren with essentials for school, such as pencils and notebooks, and other necessities, continues to grow larger after his passing two years ago, with the assistance of the Robbery Bureau’s Robbery Intervention Detail (RID), of which he was a member.

Approximately 30 members of RID gathered on Wednesday, August 14, 2024, inside the second floor conference room of the Fred Taylor Headquarters Building, to stuff 213 backpacks full of the supplies.

Echy’s fiancée, Stephanie Vargas, an MDPD Victim Advocate, was also there, lining up next to the officers, assembly-line style, to stuff the backpacks. “I am very grateful, for these officers helping to continue the tradition,

to keep this going,” said Ms. Vargas. “He and his family collected supplies for kids to help them, but he never talked about that, that’s just the type of person he was, he did those things not to be acknowledged, but out of kindness to others.”

Echy was born in Hialeah on December 8, 1992, and after graduating from Basic Law Enforcement (BLE) Class 117, joined the Department in April 2017. Echy sacrificed his life on August 17, 2022, while protecting his community from a dangerous felon. RID often encounters dangerous suspects and situations. He was buried in Nicaragua, his parent’s homeland.

On Friday, August 16, 2024, at a memorial to Echy outside the east wing of Headquarters, RID gathered the backpacks and loaded them in a trailer to deliver to underprivileged children.

Echy’s older sister, Ms. Sandra Virginia Echaverry, attended the event, and expressed gratitude to RID and the Department for continuing the tradition. “It doesn’t lessen the pain, but it numbs it a bit, and it shows the support and love,” she said. “We always used to help kids back in the day, it’s been a family thing in different ways for a long time. We were raised seeing our parents, and grandparents, helping other people, they placed those values in us, and we hope to continue it for generations to come.”

Major Javier Ruiz, of the Robbery Bureau, said “Echy always remembered and supported his roots and would dedicate much of his time and money supporting a youth baseball team in Nicaragua. In order to honor his memory, his family began a tradition of providing and giving away book bags to underprivileged kids in need in the family hometown of Granada, Nicaragua, where his parents are today,” Major Ruiz said.

The backpacks will be divided between two locations, the His House Children’s Home in Miami Gardens, and the South Dade Center – Migrant Education Program in Homestead. His House Children’s Home is a “private non-profit, faith-based organization dedicated to bringing healing and hope to the lives of children from newborn to 18 years of age. The agency is licensed by the Florida Department of Children and Families,” according to the organization. The Homestead location is a public school that is part of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

Ms. Sandra Virginia Echaverry said that an additional 300 backpacks, provided through donations from Bleeding Blue Inc., and the Department, have been flown to Granada and will be distributed to schoolchildren there on August 18, 2024. Bleeding Blue, a non-profit, was founded by Homicide Bureau Detective Danny Morales and his brother,

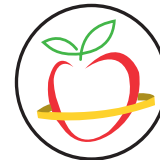
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Backpack Donations for Underprivileged . . . *Continued from page 7*

Northside District Sergeant Brandon Espinosa. Their organization holds an annual softball tournament in Echy's name, as a fundraiser to continue his charitable work.



The WELLNESS CORNER



Suicide Prevention and Awareness for First Responders

Police officers and first responders as a whole face unique stressors and traumatic experiences that can have a negative impact on physical health, mental health, and overall well-being. The constant exposure to high-stress situations, violence, long hours, and pressures that come with the job can take a significant toll on an individual, potentially leading to severe emotional distress. These factors, coupled with managing personal lives, daily stressors and relationships, have resulted in a troubling trend: higher rates of suicide among law enforcement officers when compared to the general population.

Recent studies have shown that law enforcement officers face an estimated 54% higher risk of dying by suicide in comparison to the general population (Violanti & Steege, 2021).

What can we do?

September is Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month

Having a comprehensive understanding and awareness of the scope and impact of suicide among law enforcement personnel is crucial for addressing this pressing issue. Studies consistently show that law enforcement officers are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty. According to the organization Blue Help, 167 first responders died by suicide, whereas 136 were killed in the line of duty in 2023. When considering the rates of suicide among law enforcement personnel, there are multiple factors at play, one of which is the prevalence of mental health issues. A significant number of police officers experience mental health concerns including, but not limited to, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and substance abuse issues. Additionally, underreporting is a factor that significantly contributes to the suicide rate of officers. A recent study consisting of 434 police

officers showed that only an estimated 17% of officers who need mental health services sought out and received the necessary treatment (Jetelina et al., 2020).

Breaking the Barriers

Despite the prevalence of mental health concerns, many law enforcement officers are deterred from seeking treatment due to fears of negative impacts to their careers or the stigma of being labeled. Seeking help for mental health struggles is all too commonly perceived as a weakness in the field of law enforcement and is one of the biggest barriers to seeking mental health services within the law enforcement community. Promoting a culture of openness is one effective way of reducing the stigma surrounding mental health treatment. This can be done by encouraging open and supportive conversation as well as working together to validate the issues surrounding first responders and mental health. Together, the law enforcement community can shift the perspective of seeking help as a sign of strength, not weakness.

Recognize the Signs

A key factor in being able to prevent and reduce the suicide rate among law enforcement professionals is being able to recognize the signs. Some signs to recognize in yourself or others are as follows:

- Behavioral changes - noticeable shifts in behavior such as social withdrawal, decline in job performance or repeated absences.
- Emotional changes - feelings of hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness.

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Awareness for First Responders . . . *Continued from page 8*

- Verbal cues - talking about feeling trapped, being a burden to those around them or having no purpose in life.
- Risky behavior - engaging in reckless or self-destructive activities.
- Changes in sleep pattern - insomnia, excessive sleeping or persistent nightmares.
- Changes in appetite or weight - significant weight loss or gain because of changes in eating habits.
- Loss of interest - a sudden and unexplained loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyable.
- Giving away possessions - giving away cherished items or planning for their affairs.
- Increased irritability or anger - exhibiting frequent displays of anger that is out of character.

It is crucial for colleagues and supervisors to be vigilant and recognize these signs to assist in providing support, while creating an environment in which mental health is prioritized (National Institute of Mental Health, 2022).

Know Where to Seek Help

The well-being of first responders is paramount. The nature of the work can often encompass intense and traumatic experiences, making mental health support a

critical component of their overall health and safety. If you or someone you know is struggling, know where to seek assistance. The Psychological Services Section has licensed clinicians available to address concerns of suicidal ideation or other mental health related concerns. Additionally, the Backing Our Brothers and Sisters (BOBS) Peer Advocate Program offers support to Miami-Dade Police Department personnel.

For more information, call (305) 591-1106.

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Recent Retirements

MDPD recently said farewell to 27 employees (23 sworn officers and 4 professional staff) who retired after periods of service ranging from 10 to 42 years. Director Stephanie V. Daniels, the Department’s Command Staff, and the entire MDPD family wish our colleagues many, many years of happy retirement.

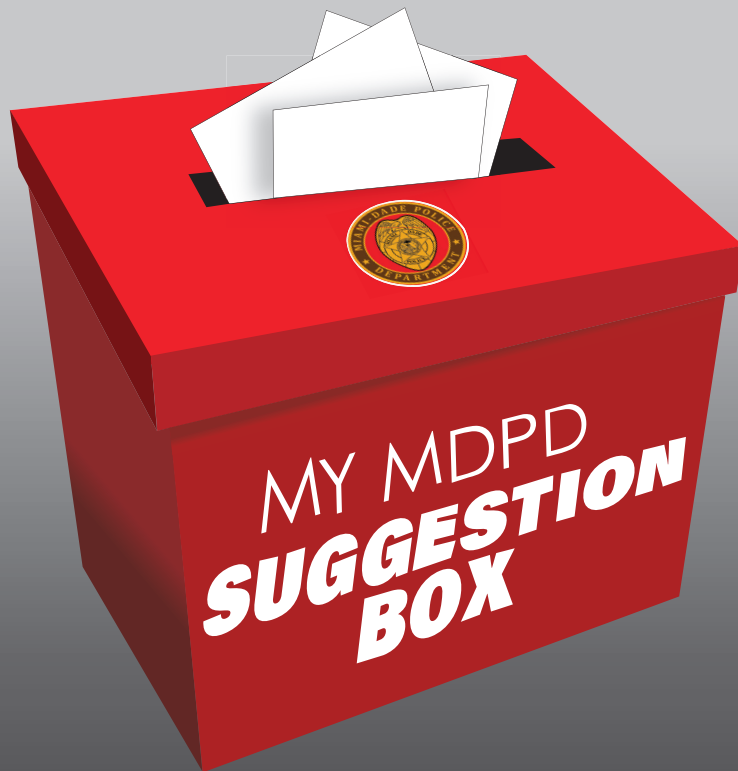
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The Suggestion Box application is now online through the MDPD portal, Popular Links.
This application is not an avenue for complaints.



July/September 2024
Vol. 40, No.3

ALERT Newsletter
Published by the
Miami-Dade Police Department
Media Relations Section
9105 NW 25 Street
Doral, FL 33172
305-471-1900

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