

OFFICER DOWN INC.

Honors Fallen Heroes, Asks for Help



The children of Ocean Gate Police Department Officer Jason Marles.

BY TRUSTEE RIKKI WERNER

Officer Down Inc. (ODI), a nonprofit, registered 501(c)(3) organization that raises money throughout the year to assist deceased or permanently disabled New Jersey law enforcement officers and/or their families, held its annual Honoring Our Heroes Gala on January 21, 2012, at the Grand Marquis in Old Bridge. The memorable event was a fundraiser and a wonderful evening honoring heroes who have given so much of themselves for the citizens of New Jersey. After a cocktail hour, the opening ceremony began. At this point in the evening, time was taken to remember deceased officers and military members with the table of honor. Following a small tribute video, a monetary gift was presented to the 2011 ODI recipients and their families.

Holding on to Hope, a foundation started by Kelly Walsifer (the fiancée of slain Lakewood Police Officer and 2011 recipient Christopher Matlosz, EOW January 14, 2011), was the Badge of Honor sponsor for this memorable event. Other sponsors included the William Gross Charitable Foundation (gold sponsor), D'Arcy Johnson Day Lawyers (silver sponsor), Lodge #109, Ramada Inn of Tomis River, Swedesboro True Value, South Jersey Nam Knights and First Priority Emergency Vehicles. Photography services were donated by James Webb Photography located in Pemberton, and DJ services were donated by John Lee of Sound Impressions, a longtime sponsor and current member of ODI.

2011 RECIPIENTS

- ▶ Officer Christopher Matlosz, Lakewood Police Department
- ▶ Officer Randy Rubestello, New Jersey Department of Corrections
- ▶ Officer Jason Marles, Ocean Gate Police Department
- ▶ Sergeant Paolo Marano, Township of Union Police Department
- ▶ Officer Angelo Vasile, Harvey Cedars Police Department
- ▶ Officer Julian Grah, Moorestown Township Police Department

More than 200 people attended the Honoring Our Heroes Gala, ranging from ODI members and volunteers to current and past recipients, sponsors and other supporters throughout the many communities in New Jersey. Some of the departments that did not have recipients but were represented included Howell Township, Pemberton, Mount Laurel and the New Jersey Law Enforcement Supervisors Association, among others.

The posting of the colors was presented by the Township of Union Police and Beachwood Police Honor Guard, while Monmouth County Police/Fire Pipes and Drums was also there. Senior Parole Officer Victoria Leach sang a wonderful rendition of the national

anthem. The event's guest speaker was Agent Christopher Rogers, retired from Collingswood Police Department.

In the immediate days following the gala, each recipient family expressed kind words of gratitude toward ODI for honoring them and their loved ones. Stacey Vasile, widow of 2011 recipient Angelo Vasile, contacted the organization after the gala that honored her late husband with the following statement: "When I first heard about Officer Down and that they chose my husband, Officer Angelo Vasile, as one of their 2011 recipients I was speechless. I thought how amazing it was for an organization of strangers to want to give their support to my family and myself, and I was in disbelief. Over the next few months, I realized that this was not just an organization of strangers offering support. It's more like a family. They accepted my son and myself right from the start, not even knowing who we were. From the first phone call in early 2011 until this very day, I continue to receive phone calls, text messages and emails just to say hello and find out how we are doing. Officer Down is not just about fundraising. Officer Down is an organization of members that go above and beyond to let you know that you are not alone. They understand and help you get through the pain. For my son and I, Officer Down Inc. is our guardian angel!"

Since ODI was established in 2002, the organization has provided over \$300,000 in monetary assistance to over 50 recipients

Photos by Nick Barbato and Trustee Rikki Werner.



The 2011 recipients and Officer Down Inc. members.



Sergeant at Arms Monica Braun and Treasurer and 2008 recipient Pete Scaramaggio.



The 2011 recipients at the 2011 Motorcycle Run.



Officer Down Inc. Chairman Len Werner and his daughter Haley.



Mike Mattaliano volunteered to sing at the 2011 Motorcycle Run after-party.

throughout the state. ODI is committed to aiding those officers in need and their families. This remarkable organization is run exclusively by volunteers and exists to ensure that these officers are not forgotten.

Current-year sponsors of ODI include Prospectors Restaurant, Sea Wolf Marine, PartsGeek.com, Lodge #191, the William Gross Charitable Foundation and others. ODI is currently looking for more year sponsors. ODI Chairman Len Werner states, "Due to all of the recent tragedy in the police community, now more than ever we must show our unity in supporting our own. Through an organization like Officer Down, we continue to remind people that we don't forget those officers who gave so much for the safety of others."

ODI hosts events throughout the year to raise money for its recipients. The 4th Annual Officer Down Goes Country was held on March 24, 2012, at Prospectors in Mt. Laurel. The Reel to Real Country Band and The Johnny Cash Show donated their time and talents. On June 16, 2012, the 9th Annual Motorcycle Run will start at the Mercer County Airport. The run will include classic and antique cars for the first time. Other events this year will include SummerStock in August and a cut-a-thon at Salon Pure in Princeton on September 29. The year will finish off with the gala.


With police deaths and injuries on the rise and department numbers on a swift decline, families are in need of the support of ODI more than ever before. ODI wants

to make 2012 the best year yet. The problem arising in this great organization is the lack of manpower. In order for ODI to continue its amazing and selfless work, volunteers are needed.

Besides volunteers, ODI is always in need of corporate sponsors, as well as auction items. Year sponsors will receive their logos on advertising materials and event shirts and can set up tables at events. These businesses also get a link on ODI's website and two tickets to each event (excluding the gala) per \$1,000 donated. Please help make 2012 the most successful year and honor our brother and sister officers.

For event dates, information and involvement and sponsorship opportunities, please visit www.officerdownnj.org. NJ

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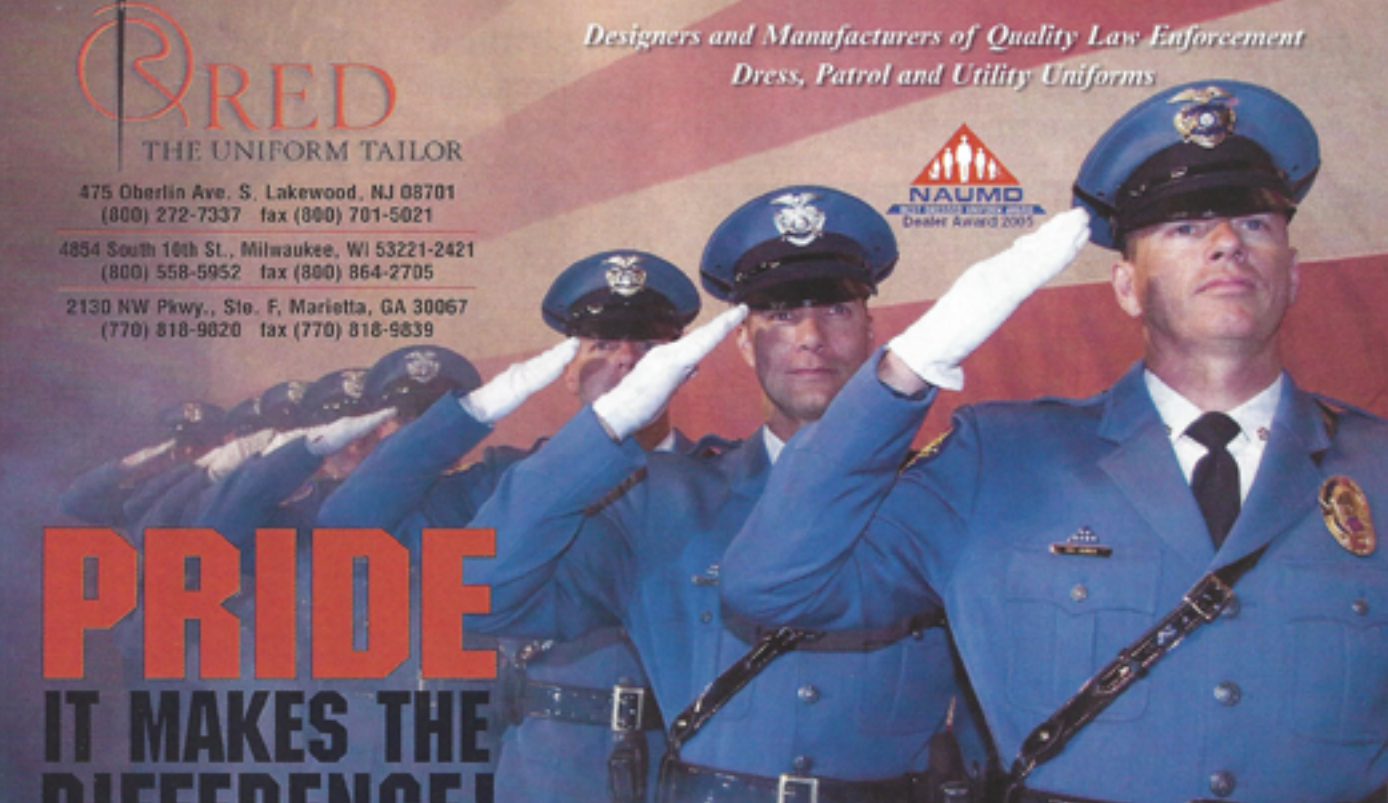


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