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A prideful, painful farewell

Community says goodbye to slain Deputy Kyle D. Pagerly

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Reading Eagle

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Berks County Deputy Sheriff Kyle D. Pagerly spent his last day like he did so many: helping others.

He charged up a wooded hill with his K-9 partner, Jynx, trying to save lives by arresting a dangerous fugitive in Albany Township.

Pagerly was committed to service until his final moments, when that fugitive fatally shot him June 29, colleagues and friends said during Wednesday's memorial service that drew more than 3,000 law enforcement officers and others to the Sovereign Center.

Thinking back on Pagerly's dedication moved some veteran officers to tears, especially near the close of the service.

The loudspeakers played a simulated radio call from Berks County Sheriff Eric J. Weaknecht to Pagerly, whose call number was 1737.

"Berks 1790 to 1737," Weaknecht said in the otherwise silent arena.

"Berks 1790 to 1737."

"Berks 1790 to 1737."

After the final call went unanswered, Weaknecht said 1737 should be listed as out of service.

At once, about 1,000 law enforcement and emergency personnel snapped to attention, saluting Pagerly's flag-draped casket.

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Several times during the 90-minute memorial service, Pagerly's family members, seated in the front row with Jynx at their feet, cried and hugged one another.

In an especially emotional moment, Pagerly's widow, Alecia, led Jynx onto the stage.

Chief Deputy Sheriff Tony Damore's voice broke as he recounted how Pagerly was fatally shot while he was with other law enforcement officers trying to arrest Matthew M. Connor near Connor's family home in the Hawk Mountain area. Connor ambushed the team, shooting Pagerly twice with a semi-automatic AK-47 before he also was fatally shot.

The German shepherd not only alerted the task force to Connor's presence, saving others from being shot, but tried to pull his partner to safety after Pagerly was wounded.

More would have died if not for Pagerly and Jynx's actions, Damore said before Weaknecht placed a medal of honor around the dog's neck.

'A great deputy'

Weaknecht said Pagerly was a model deputy throughout his five years, handling every assignment enthusiastically and professionally.

"Folks would tell me, 'You have a great deputy working for you,'" Weaknecht said.

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Deputy Sheriff Kyle D. Pagerly's parents and wife leave the Sovereign Center on Wednesday behind his casket. From left is Pagerly's father, David Pagerly; his widow, Alecia Pagerly; and his mother, Michelle Moyer.

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U.S. Marshals Service Director Stacia A. Hylton spoke of Pagerly's work with the fugitive task force.

"When he ended his watch, he did so saving lives with unbelievable courage and honor, protecting his community," she said. "He embodied the very meaning of what it means to put others first. He was a man others could look up to."

When the visitation began at 9 a.m., many law enforcement officers filed to the front of the arena to salute Pagerly's casket or to say a prayer.

Many from the community, and local, county, federal and state officials, including Gov. Tom Corbett, also came to honor Pagerly's work as a deputy, a Western Berks Regional police officer and a Spring Township Fire Department lieutenant.

A 2001 Wilson High School graduate, he was also an Army veteran who served as a military policeman in Iraq and Kosovo.

Pagerly's Army, deputy and firefighter uniforms hung nearby, and the center's big video screen showed photos of his life.

A group of musicians from bagpipe and drum corps in Philadelphia, King of Prussia, Pittsburgh, Camden, N.J., and Washington, most made up of police or firefighters, played during and after the service. Among their tunes were "Amazing Grace" and "God Bless America."

Somber blue salute

After the memorial service, a blue line of uniformed officers and K-9s stretched along both sides of Penn Street from the railroad tracks near the Sovereign Center to Eighth Street, saluting as the hearse carrying Pagerly's remains passed.

The procession headed through Reading and Shillington before reaching the Spring Township Fire Department, where deputy sheriffs carried Pagerly's casket from the hearse.

After a prayer, an honor guard gave a 21-gun salute and played taps. Deputies folded the flag that had been draped over the casket and presented it to Pagerly's family.

Spring Township firefighters then draped the department's flag over the casket and carried it into a firetruck. Hundreds of firefighters and law enforcement officials saluted as the truck departed.

The procession carried the casket past Wyomissing Cemetery in Gouglersville, where a relative of Pagerly's is buried, before returning to the Edward J. Kuhn Funeral Home in West Reading.

Small body, big heart

Earlier at the Sovereign Center, colleagues spoke of how Pagerly's body wasn't big - he stood about 5 feet 5 inches tall - but his heart was huge.

He was always the one who ran the fastest and the farthest, whether training to become a deputy sheriff or when exercising with friends.

He was so committed to staying in shape that his breakfasts, which he ate while riding to work with Jynx and a fellow deputy, often consisted only of almonds and hard-boiled eggs. That took self-control, since his colleague and his dog feasted on egg sandwiches and Slim Jims.

"He was a stud," said Chris Kaag, owner of Corps Fitness, a Wyomissing gym at which Pagerly worked out.

Although Pagerly was the best athlete in the gym, he showed his confidence quietly as a leader but not a show-off, Kaag said.

Three days before Pagerly was killed he had hiked with Kaag, Kaag's wife, Gretchen, and about 30 others to the Pinnacle atop the Blue Mountain in Albany Township. Pagerly helped carry Chris Kaag, who is paraplegic, and another paralyzed hiker over a rocky spot near the summit.

"He was someone we were always trying to catch up to," Chris Kaag said.

'I ... love him so much'

Pagerly's greatest passion was Alecia, whose friends and workout partners at Be Fit Now gym in Wyomissing call "Allie."

Pagerly and Allie lit up each time they saw each other, said friend Carol Chelius of Sinking Spring.

"She'd always say, 'I married my best friend,' " Chelius said.

Whenever Allie would see Pagerly's name on the board at Corps Fitness, put there in recognition of yet another of his workout feats, she would kiss the fingertips on her right hand and press them against his name.

Friend Karen Montag of Exeter Township would roll her eyes at Allie, joking that the two were sappy in their affection for each other.

"She'd smile and say, 'I just love him so much,' " Montag said.

Never did the couple seem happier than in recent weeks, when they announced that they were expecting a child in January.

They'd show off a recent sonogram, proud of their "little peanut" in the photo.

"All he talked about was how excited he was," Chris Kaag said.

Leaving his mark

Pagerly no doubt would have been a great father, friends said, another example of how his potential was cut short.

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But Weaknecht said Pagerly will still continue to inspire others.

During his final shift, Pagerly volunteered to mentor young people pursuing law enforcement careers through the sheriff department's new Explorer Post.

The post will now be named after Pagerly and was assigned his badge number - 027 - meaning it will inspire generations of young persons to emulate his heroics, Weaknecht said.

"If just a small percentage (of youngsters) follow in his footsteps, Berks County will benefit greatly," he said.

Contact Mike Urban: 610-371-5023 or murban@readingeagle.com.

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