

# InForce

A quarterly publication of the Berks County Sheriff's Office

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Fall 2014

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"Making a Difference"

## A Message from Sheriff Eric J. Weaknecht

On August 13, 2014, Bryant M. Semenza was appointed and sworn in as Chief Deputy of the Berks County Sheriff's Office (see pg. 3). As required by Article XII of the County Code of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Sheriff of each county shall appoint a Chief Deputy who, during [the Sheriff's] continuance in office, "shall have full power and authority to perform any duty incumbent upon such sheriff, with like effect in law as if such official act had been done by the sheriff in person, regardless of the ability or temporary disability of such sheriff to act, while such sheriff continues in office."



In the event I cannot fulfill the term for which I was elected, the Chief Deputy Sheriff, so appointed and second in command, would become Acting Sheriff and would remain so until either the next municipal election or until a Sheriff is appointed by the Governor of Pennsylvania and confirmed by the Pennsylvania Senate.

The authority, duty and responsibility of the Chief Deputy Sheriff is similar to that of the chief deputies of all Row Officers in county government in that each may exercise all official authority of an elected Row Officer's office.

The position of Chief Deputy of the Sheriff's Office is one of tremendous responsibility. Chief Semenza brings with him decades of law enforcement experience which will benefit the overall operations of the Office of Sheriff.

## Features



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appointed Chief  
Deputy  
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## Deputy Sheriff Brian Noecker

Deputy Sheriff Brian Noecker humbly acknowledges recognition as Star of the Quarter for actions truly above and beyond . . . Brian opened his heart and his home to fellow deputy Andy Rushton during the final weeks of Andy's life when doctor's said there was nothing more that could be done in Andy's battle with brain cancer. Brian turned his living room into a hospital room and spent his free time with Andy until he passed away on August 3, 2014.

Brian reflects on his friendship with Andy on page 2.

Deputy Noecker began working for the Berks County Sheriff's Office in February, 2006 and is currently assigned to the Warrants Division. He is also a member of the U.S. Marshal Task Force Team. He attended Kutztown University and both the Reading Police and Deputy Sheriff Academies. He is an assistant football coach at Daniel Boone High School, enjoys hunting, and is married with two daughters.



[bctv.org](http://bctv.org)  
Be informed. Be involved.

BCTV airs "Your Right to Carry" presented by Sheriff Weaknecht  
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To really understand the character of a human being, watch what he's doing when he thinks no one is looking.

Visit the Sheriff's Office booth at the 2014 Berks Encore Senior Expo which will be held on October 28, 2014 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Body Zone Sports and Wellness Complex, Wyomissing.

berksencore 2014  
**SENIOR EXPO**

brought to you by **READING HEALTH SYSTEM**  
Advancing Health. Transforming Lives.

Honor... Integrity... Service...  
We will miss you, Andy.

~Your brothers & sisters / Berks County Sheriff's Office

## In Memory

# Deputy Sheriff Andrew "Andy" Rushton

4/4/74 – 8/3/14

By Deputy Sheriff Brian Noecker

I first met Andy through my younger brother in 2001. Andy and I became fast friends and spent a lot of time just hanging out together. At that time, Andy worked and owned movie theaters. When the movie theater business began to slow down years later, Andy became interested in police work. By then I was working as a deputy sheriff and convinced Andy to go to the Reading Police Academy. Shortly after he completed Reading's program, he was hired by the Sheriff's Office. Andy was now a part of the brotherhood of law enforcement. Andy and I were both assigned to the Warrants Division; I worked first shift and Andy worked second shift. We talked a lot about police work, especially as it relates to safety, tactics and general warrant service. Our friendship grew stronger through our shared interests, which included more than police work. We both were avid NFL fans and spent Sunday afternoons together watching football games in my living room, we played a lot of pick-up basketball games, and Andy was godfather to my four-year old daughter.

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**"On that day, I realized I lost more than a friend; I lost my brother."**

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Andy was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2010. I saw a strong and determined side of my friend emerge as he battled numerous brain surgeries and chemotherapy for close to four years. He was strong, and his strength rubbed off on others. I wasn't the only one who believed he would fully recover one day. His positive attitude and strong faith in God were contagious.

Andy lived the last six weeks of his short life at my house; he passed away on August 3, 2014 at the age of 40. On that day, I realized I lost more than a friend; I lost my brother.



# Sheriff Weaknecht Appoints Chief Deputy

**Bryant M. Semenza was appointed Chief Deputy of the Berks County Sheriff's Office effective August 13, 2014.**

Chief Semenza, recently retired from the U.S. Marshals Service in July of this year, brings over 35 years of law enforcement experience to the Sheriff's Office. He is second in command to Sheriff Eric J. Weaknecht.

As a member of the U.S. Marshals Service, Semenza served the jurisdictions of the Southern District of New York and Eastern District of Pennsylvania. For the Southern District of New York, Semenza was assigned as the first Drug Enforcement Administration liaison to adopt and reassign drug fugitive investigations to the U.S. Marshal Service, established and supervised anti-terrorist details and was a team leader on 9/11 Search & Rescue and Search & Recover. He also established Major and Cold Case Squads and was instrumental in establishing Operation Terror Stop and perimeter security for the U.S. Courthouse following the first attack on the World Trade Center, which continued following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

For the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Semenza established duties and responsibilities for Sex Offender and Judicial Security Coordinators and developed district Sub-Office Task Forces, one of which is the Berks County Sheriff's Office. As a supervisor assigned to operational details in New York City and the sub-offices for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Semenza was also responsible for procurements and purchases, office budget and fleet management.

As a member of the U.S. Coast Guard Reserves, Military Special Agent assigned to the Coast Guard Investigative Service, Semenza conducted national security investigations, enforced the Uniform Code of Military Justice and investigated maritime

violations. These duties, carried out over two decades, touched on national events including 9/11; Hurricane Sandy and Hurricane Katrina; and Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, among others.

Semenza earned a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Thomas Edison State College of New Jersey; is a graduate of the Monmouth County Police Academy in Howell, New Jersey; completed U.S. Coast Guard Basic Training in Cape May, New Jersey; and Federal Law Enforcement Training in Glynco, Georgia. He was employed as a law enforcement officer in various New Jersey municipal police departments and the Monmouth County Sheriff's Department. He is the recipient of numerous awards, commendations, medals and citations for performance and excellence in the field of law enforcement and military service.

Chief Semenza is responsible for the overall operations of the Sheriff's Office and supervises five Captains. He will also oversee policy and procedures, special projects, and will be responsible for the office budget.



*Chief Deputy Bryant M. Semenza*



Young men and women ages 14 to 20 interested in joining the Explorer Post in 2015 can complete and mail an application between November 1 and December 1, 2014 by logging onto <http://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/Sheriff/Pages/ExplorerPost27>.

## Explorers Experience Hands-On Exercises

Deputies in the Berks County Sheriff's Office led the Explorers in training exercises and demonstrations focusing on firearms safety, defense tactics, physical agility and team building during a block week of instruction this past July. Topics such as civil and criminal law, radio communications, vehicle code and traffic stops were introduced. Explorers also spent time learning the procedures involved in central processing and were able to observe criminal court proceedings.

Explorers new to the program in 2014 received CPR certification, and returning Explorers partnered with deputies for ride-alongs and the opportunity to participate in supervised instruction at a firearms range.

# Sheriff's K-9 Division presented with \$5,000 check from **PETSMART!**



Captain of the K-9 Division, Matthew Mendenhall (left) with Chief Semenza, Sheriff Weaknecht, members of the K-9 Division (in back) and representatives of PetSmart outside PetSmart's distribution facility in Bethel, PA

The Berks County Sheriff's Office K-9 Division was the recipient of a \$5,000 donation presented to Sheriff Eric Weaknecht and members of the Berks County Sheriff's Office K-9 Division at the September 21 grand opening celebration of PetSmart's distribution center in Bethel, Pa. PetSmart's "family day" grand opening celebration included plenty of food, games for kids, and tours of the 870,000-square-foot distribution center.

Sheriff Eric Weaknecht and Captain Matthew Mendenhall spoke about the important work of the K-9 teams and thanked PetSmart for its donation which will be used to offset the high costs of training items and safety equipment for each of its K-9s.

PetSmart provides charitable donations through its PetSmart Gives Back initiative which focuses on giving back to local communities in support of organizations that "enrich people's lives through the power of pets."

## General Manager of Local Hotel Recognized at Annual K-9 Picnic



Craig Poole, General Manager of the Crowne Plaza Hotel, was recognized by Sheriff Weaknecht and members of the Berks County Sheriff's Office at its third annual Friends of the Berks County Sheriff's K-9 Association picnic held September 27.

Matthew Mendenhall, Captain of the K-9 Division, spoke of Poole's partnership with the K-9 Division. Poole regularly permits the K-9 teams to practice training drills in the hotel's common areas and empty hotel rooms. The different venue provides practical training opportunities for the K-9 handlers and their K-9s.

Poole, General Manager of the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Wyomissing since 2010 (formerly the Sheraton) regularly demonstrates its "community-minded" mission to build partnerships within and outside the County of Berks.



Craig Poole, General Manager of Crowne Plaza Hotel with members of the BCSO Office and K-9 Division

## Friends of the Berks County Sheriff K-9 Association receives donated funds from the Jarett Yoder Memorial Fund



Heather Garay-Yoder, whose husband Jarett was killed in Afghanistan in 2013, has made a habit of donating funds raised to support the Jarett Yoder Memorial Fund. This past July, Heather decided to donate the proceeds received from a fundraiser organized by friend and owner of Salon EveLeila to the Friends of the Berks County Sheriff K-9 Association. Deputy Troy Wolf and his K-9 partner Rokk attended the fundraiser which raised over \$1,400.



K-9 Deputy Sheriff Troy Wolf with K-9 Rokk; Heather Garay-Yoder, Sheriff Eric Weaknecht, and Mindy Burgess, owner of Salon EveLeila

# Safety Tips

## Planning for a Hike

When the heat of summer begins to transition to the cooler days of fall, many of us take pleasure in being outside to breathe the crisp autumn air and observe colorful surroundings. Some of the most beautiful scenery can be enjoyed off the beaten path on hiking trails and in wooded areas. Before heading out on a hiking trail, it's not only important to make sure you are properly prepared in terms of weather and hydration, it's just as important that your mental checklist be evaluated in order to reduce risk of becoming a victim of a crime.



Situational awareness is one of your best defenses against crime at any time, and when hiking outdoors in unpopulated areas, you need to take extra precautions. Remember to always trust your instincts, which are usually right, especially when you suddenly realize those perceived

miles of personal space are being shared by someone you don't know. Be cautious and don't tell strangers your plans. Avoid anyone acting suspicious, hostile, or intoxicated. If approached, it's always best to say you are with a group following behind you.

Your risk of harm will be reduced by making it a point to never hike alone, and although it's better to hike with at least one other person, the best practice is to hike as part of a group. Hiking as part of a group also provides added safety in the event one of you is injured and your group must separate in order to seek help.

Always be certain to tell others of your hiking plans and establish a time when you are expected to return. What is the plan of action should you fail to check in? Long-distance hikers should plan to check in regularly and be mindful that any deviation from the plan may likely result in an unnecessary search.

Marked trails usually have trail registers at the trailhead. You should be sure to include information on the sign-in sheet that will let others know you are on the trail in the event someone needs to locate you. Record only last names and, if hiking alone, include the word "group."

To eliminate opportunities for theft, you should plan to leave all valuables at home. Do carry a cell phone, despite the possibility of dead zones in certain areas.

Lastly, you should always report any crime, harassment or suspicious person or activity to local authorities.

# ON PATROL

WITH BERKS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

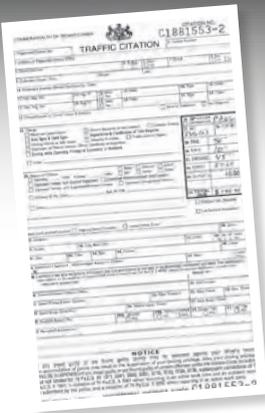


## Did you know...

That it is illegal in Pennsylvania to text message while driving a motor vehicle.

"No driver shall operate a motor vehicle on a highway or trafficway in this Commonwealth while using an interactive communications device to send, read or write a text based communication while the vehicle is in motion."

Pa.C.S. Title 75, § 3316 (a)  
FINE: \$50.00 + \$102.50 (Minimum Costs) = \$152.50



## BERKS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

# Most Wanted



**Name:** Gerald Burns  
**DOB:** 09/17/1994  
**LKA:** 130 Clymer Street, Reading PA 19602  
**Charges:** Stolen Property



**Name:** Robert Louis Walker, Jr.  
**DOB:** 09/16/1986  
**LKA:** 130 West Oley Street, Reading PA 19601  
**Charges:** Failed to Comply w/ Registration of Sex Offender



**Name:** Jolinda L. Kahley  
**DOB:** 03/21/1980  
**LKA:** 226 Upland Avenue, Reading PA 19611  
**Charges:** Receiving Stolen Property



**Name:** Styles A. Hargis Martin  
**DOB:** 09/10/1987  
**LKA:** 1540 N. 10th Street, Reading PA 19604  
**Charges:** Theft By Unlawful Taking

*If you have information that can help apprehend any of the fugitives in this publication, call the Berks County Sheriff's Office Fugitive Tip Line at 610-478-6390 or Crime Alert Berks at 1-877-373-9913.*

*All your information will be kept confidential.*

# Your Right to Carry

Sheriff Eric Weaknecht's presentation on an individual's Second Amendment right to carry firearms was presented live on BCTV on September 22.

The one hour presentation covers gun rights inside and outside of the home, restrictions on where laws allow conceal carry, and the importance of gun safety. The recent change to Pennsylvania law under the Castle Doctrine relating to the use of deadly force inside the home is also provided.

Sheriff Weaknecht will next present the Right to Carry seminar on November 13, 2014 in Kempton, Pennsylvania. Contact 610-756-6826 to make a reservation to attend.

Interested viewers can also log onto [BCTV.org](http://BCTV.org) and search "gun laws" to watch the September 22 presentation.

To schedule a Right to Carry seminar for your organization, contact 610-478-6240 ext. 3262.

**The RTC presentation is just one of the community outreach programs offered by the Sheriff's Office at no cost to the public.**



## CONGRATULATIONS TO: Sergeant Jeremy Kalis and Sergeant John Parsons

**Congratulations to Sergeant Jeremy Kalis who was promoted from the rank of Deputy Sheriff effective July 16, 2014.**

Sergeant Kalis is a graduate of Schuylkill Valley High School. He attended the Reading Police Academy in 2002 and the Pennsylvania Deputy Sheriff's Academy in 2007. Prior to becoming a deputy sheriff in January, 2007, Kalis worked at Reading Hospital, Deka Battery and AT Systems (armored truck).

As a sergeant in the Warrants Division, Kalis distributes and assigns warrants to deputies, coordinates the schedule for extraditions of inmates both in and out of state, ensures assigned equipment is in working order, handles tips received from the public on wanted persons, and will continue to be part of the warrants team out on the street. Sergeant Kalis is also a sworn member of the US Marshals Fugitive Task Force.



*Sergeant Jeremy Kalis with Sheriff Eric Weaknecht*

**Congratulations to Sergeant John Parsons who was promoted from the rank of Deputy Sheriff effective September 24, 2014.**

Sergeant Parsons is a graduate of Twin Valley High School and graduated from Alvernia University in 2005 with a degree in criminal justice. He completed Deputy Sheriff Act 2 certification in 2006 and began working as a deputy sheriff in May of that same year. Prior work experience largely involved working with children with mental and behavioral health issues.

Sergeant Parsons is a certified firearms instructor and is responsible for scheduling semi-annual firearms qualifications and all other law enforcement required training and updates for sworn deputies. He is also the field training officer reporting to division captains for all new law enforcement hires. He works directly with the District Attorney's office regarding all out-of-county transports and is responsible for ensuring all firearms and equipment are in excellent working order.



*Sergeant John Parsons with Sheriff Eric Weaknecht*