

# Office of the Sheriff

## *Newsletter*



June 2025

### UPCOMING EVENTS & DATES

**June 6th**

FCHS Graduation



**June 7th**

Coopers Cove Community Center  
Ice Cream Social, 2pm - 5pm



**June 13-15th**

Antique Farm Days, Sontag Rec Park

**June 19th**

Juneteenth



**June 20<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup>**

SML Songwriters Festival  
[SMLSongwriters.com](http://SMLSongwriters.com)

**June 27th**

Rotary Independence Festival  
FCHS - 5pm

**June 28th**

Beulah Baptist Church Fun Day  
"Touch-A-Truck" - 10am - 2pm





## NEW MEMBERS AT THE OFFICE

### **RaChaise Gilbert - Patrol Division**



RaChaise Gilbert was sworn in to the Office of the Sheriff on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025.

After serving at the Western Virginia Regional Jail since January of 2023, Deputy Gilbert will join our Patrol Division once completing Basic LE Academy.

Welcome, RaChaise!

---

### **Brian Hurd - Patrol Division**



Brian Hurd was sworn in to the Office of the Sheriff on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025.

After completion of Basic LE Academy, he will be assigned to the Patrol Division.

Welcome, Brian!



## NEW MEMBERS AT THE OFFICE

### Joseph Presinzano - Patrol Division



Joseph Presinzano was sworn in to the Office of the Sheriff on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025.

After completion of Basic LE Academy, he will be assigned to the Patrol Division.

Welcome, Joseph!

---

### Nichole Brewster - Communications Division



Nichole Brewster joined the Office of the Sheriff on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 and has been assigned to the Communications Division.

Welcome, Nichole!



## **NEW MEMBERS AT THE OFFICE**

### **Kendra Smith - Communications Division**



Kendra Smith joined the Office of the Sheriff on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 and has been assigned to the Communications Division.

Kendra comes to us with previous experience from both Martinsville Dispatch Center and Roanoke Communications Center.

Welcome, Kendra!

---

### **April Ashworth - Communications Division**

April Ashworth joined the Office of the Sheriff on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025 and has been assigned to the Communications Division.

Welcome, April!

# NOT SO NEW FACES AT THE OFFICE

## Celebrating Milestones in June 2025



While we recognize members for their 5-year service milestones at our annual awards banquets, we don't want to discount the annual milestones that are just as important! Thank you all for your service!

Travis Whittaker - 31 Years of Service

Chad Austin - 27 Years of Service

Darryl King - 25 Years of Service

Derick Wilson - 22 Years of Service

Jennifer Gammons - 20 Years of Service

Keith Grantham - 19 Years of Service

Cody Noakes - 18 Years of Service

Megan Huston - 13 Years of Service

Jessie Scalf - 11 Years of Service

Katie Ferguson - 4 Years of Service

Robert Cowan - 2 Years of Service

## THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

### *Not All Wounds Bleed: The Toll of Negativity*



**Chaplain Gareth Stephenson**

**540-556-2093**

**Stephenson@ShieldChap.org**



**Pastor Justin Likens**

**540-312-4280**

**RevLikens@gmail.com**



In this line of work, you're trained to respond to visible wounds—gunshots, broken bones, blood. But what about the wounds that don't bleed? The ones that form quietly, over time, from the constant exposure to negativity, conflict, and suffering?

Law enforcement professionals face a barrage of stressors: the pressure to stay alert, the need to make split-second decisions, and the emotional weight of dealing with people on their worst days. Add to that the negativity we see online, in the media, and sometimes within our own walls—and it's no wonder that even the strongest among us can feel worn down.

Negativity is like slow-drip poison. It clouds our judgment, erodes our morale, and isolates us from each other. Over time, it can manifest as burnout, cynicism, and even depression. And the worst part? These wounds often go unnoticed—by others, and even by ourselves.

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone.

But you don't have to carry it alone either.

I want to remind you: It's okay to acknowledge when you're not okay. Seeking help doesn't make you weak—it makes you wise. Talk to a peer. Reach out to a counselor. Come see your chaplain.

You wear the uniform with strength and pride, but you're still human underneath. Let's take care of each other—not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually, too.

Stay safe, and stay connected.

## THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

### *Welcoming a New Chaplain to the Office of the Sheriff*

We recently welcomed a new member into our Chaplain Program.



**Chaplain Ben Stiles**  
**803-720-6103**  
**fcschap3@gmail.com**

Ben Stiles was born in Rocky Mount and attended Ferrum Elementary School and Christian Heritage Academy before relocating to South Carolina with his family in high school.

After graduating, he attended Columbia Bible College for one year, then moved back to Virginia where he worked as the Youth and Children's Director at Furnace Creek Baptist Church. During this time, he also was a volunteer member of the Ferrum Rescue Squad and Henry Volunteer Fire Department.

In 2003, Ben moved back to South Carolina and began a career in law enforcement. After nearly 20 years of service, he retired due to a line of duty injury.

Ben holds a Bachelor's Degree from in Criminal Justice and a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice/Public Administration, both from Liberty University. He was ordained in 2015 by a church in South Carolina and participated as a Chaplain for the local FOP in that area for a few years, before relocating back to the Ferrum area.

We welcome Ben on board to our Chaplain Program!



## COMMENDATIONS



Lieutenant Joe Knight and Deputy Beau Custer were both presented with Excellence Awards recently by Sheriff Overton. Both of these men received compliments from community members for their interactions with the public. Lieutenant Knight was complimented on his professional demeanor and appearance during an interaction regarding a lost phone and wallet on a fishing dock. The items were able to be returned to the owner, who was very pleased with the interactions.

Deputy Custer was complimented for his courteous and professional interactions with the public, regardless of what first responder hat he has on. Deputy Custer has also served as an emergency medical responder within Franklin County. His medical training has proven invaluable during critical situations, further demonstrating his commitment to the well-being of our community.

We take great pride in sharing these commendations. They reflect the caliber of individuals serving within our agency and underscore the positive impact they have on our community. Franklin County is a great place to live and serve, and we are grateful for the continued trust and support.

## COMMENDATIONS



Recently, Sheriff Overton presented two Certificates of Excellence to Deputy Eric Eberth and Deputy Sam Messer for their professionalism and compassion during a critical call for service. This award comes after kind words were expressed by someone involved in that particular situation, stating that the deputies were very caring, compassionate and professional to the victim.

We appreciate the feedback and applaud these members for not just doing the job, but doing it with kindness. Thank you!

## COMMENDATIONS



Deputy Johnny Huddleston was recently awarded a Certificate of Excellence for his dedication to our community and School Resource program. Sheriff Bill Overton, who has known Deputy Huddleston for the majority of their careers, expressed his gratitude to Johnny for all that he has done, and continues to do for the Office of the Sheriff and the County of Franklin.

While Deputy Huddleston is technically a part-time member of this office, his duties are vast and some weeks turn into a 36-40 hour work week. He is well known in the Westlake area, where much of his focus is during the peak summer season. A resident of Bedford County, we are thankful that he loves Franklin County as much as he does and we are thankful for his dedication, his hard work, and his willingness to assist in any way that he can!

Thank you, Johnny!

## COMMENDATIONS



Deputy Faith Gunnell, who has been with the Office of the Sheriff less than a few months, was recently presented with an Award of Excellence by Sheriff Bill Overton for her role in saving the life of a recruit officer while attending basic academy school. Her colleague experienced a medical emergency that required intensive CPR and lifesaving measures.

With EMT experience under her belt, Deputy Gunnell quickly commanded the scene, assisted with CPR on her colleague, and provided critical care while awaiting on local EMS providers to arrive on scene. Greatly due to her swift actions and knowledge of emergency medical care, her colleague was transported to a hospital where they are now recuperating.

Deputy Gunnell receives this award after high praise from the instructors and staff at Cardinal Criminal Justice Academy in Salem, VA. We are proud to have you on board!

# 2025 JAKES EVENT



The Office of the Sheriff and a few of our wonderful COPS Members were on hand to greet the public, put on K9 demos and register kids for the bicycle giveaway at the 2025 JAKES Event. Thank you to all who organized, participated, demonstrated their crafts, and volunteered to make this such a successful event! Special thank you to our local Walmart for donating the bicycles that were raffled off to the kiddos!



**TWO IN CUSTODY ON MURDER CHARGES**

The Franklin County Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigations Division has arrested two individuals in connection with the death of 24-year-old Emily Grace Keene.

**Corion Devontae Manns**, 22, of Henry, and **Isaiah Kahlil Witcher**, 25, of Bassett, were taken into custody on May 7, 2025. Both individuals have been charged with one felony count of Second-Degree Murder and one felony count of Use of a Firearm in the Commission of a Felony. They are currently being held without bond pending court proceedings.

Sheriff's Office investigators continue to work diligently on this case, and the investigation remains active and ongoing.

The Franklin County Sheriff's Office extends its deepest condolences to the family and loved ones of Emily Grace Keene. Our thoughts are with them as they navigate this unimaginable loss.

**LOCAL MAN ARRESTED FOR CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN**

The Franklin County Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigations Division recently received an Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) tip regarding the possession and distribution of child pornography. Investigators were able to launch an immediate investigation and obtain search warrants in connection with the case.

Upon executing the search warrants, investigators were able to identify Gustavo Macias-Velazquez, 25 years old from Rocky Mount, as the suspect.

After completing their investigation, Mr. Velazquez was taken into custody and charged with:

- 21 felony counts of (18.2-374.1:1) Purchase/Possession/Distribution of Child Pornography
- One felony count of (18.2-361.01) Sexual Abuse of an Animal
- One Misdemeanor Count of (46.2-852) Reckless Driving
- One Misdemeanor Count of (18.2-371) Contributing to Delinquency of a Minor

He is currently being held without bond pending court proceedings.

The Franklin County Sheriff's Office remains dedicated to protecting the safety of children in our community.