

A LEGACY OF RESPECT

GOODDING CHOSEN OREGON PERSON OF THE YEAR



Jason Gooding

By Jim Ryan
The Oregonian

Dean Gooding has heard many stories about his son over the past 11 months.

There's the Tillamook building renamed in tribute to his service. The criminals who gave street officers a hard time but let his son arrest them because he showed them respect. The way his boy checked on homeless people, blankets in tow, and gave food money to those in need.

"That's his legacy," Dean Gooding said.

Jason Gooding, a Seaside Police sergeant killed by a wanted felon in February, is The Oregonian's 2016 Oregon Person of the Year. His vigil and public memorial drew crowds totaling more than 3,000 overall. Many people sent support to Seaside Police. And more than 43 percent of Oregonian/OregonLive voters picked him for the posthumous honor.

Such responses, the elder Gooding said, mean a lot to the family. But the remembrances bring a renewal of the pain of losing a loved one. It's like ripping off a scab that will eventually heal with time.

"We're very proud of him," Dean said.

Gooding, a 39-year-old police veteran and married father of two, was fatally shot while trying to arrest a felon outside a downtown restaurant Feb. 5. His partner returned fire, hitting the felon three times. The two men died at separate hospitals. Flags across the state were flown at half-staff for Gooding.

He was the 10th Oregon officer killed in the line of duty since 2007.

Colleagues remembered Gooding as a tenacious investigator and consummate professional who was active in the city's youth sports scene and earned respect by showing it. Gooding's boss said he was "the best of what anybody's looking for" in an officer. His high school hoops coach said it's easy to see how he went from standout student-athlete to lauded officer.

Gooding's philosophy was simple, according to his father: Bad people have gotten off the right path, but there's good in everybody.

"And I'm going to find it."

Perfect role

Gooding, a Portland State University and Sherwood High School graduate, started his police career as a reserve officer in McMinnville then was hired in Seaside shortly after in 2003.

"That department absorbed him," his father said.

Gooding served as a patrol officer and detective before becoming a sergeant in 2007 — a role he was perfect for, said Seaside Police Sgt. Rich Nofield.



JOSHUA BESSE/SEO MEDIA GROUP

An officer stands watch by Sgt. Jason Gooding's casket before a memorial service in February. The Seaside Police sergeant who was killed in the line of duty was chosen by readers as The Oregonian's 2016 Person of the Year.

Nofield, named to his current position this summer, said he also applied for the job but knew Gooding was the best candidate.

He recalled Gooding was concerned that his interview with the chief took 15 minutes and Nofield's six times that. But Nofield said he spent his interview telling the chief how great his colleague was.

"If you have a passion, he would talk to you about it, tell you how you can go achieve it, help you try to achieve it, and then the next day he's like, 'How we doing on this?'" Nofield said in February.

Gooding loved his co-workers and the community. He had two children with the woman he met as an eighth-grader, and they lived next to the county Sheriff Tom Bergin at the dead end of a gravel road.

He was an avid Oregon Ducks fan, liked to work out and played on an adult law-enforcement football team.

His passion for athletics was longstanding: He captained his high school basketball and football teams, leading the latter to the state championship game during his senior season. Dean Gooding said his son was named the school's male athlete of the year as a senior.

A former coach, who considers Gooding a friend, called him a quintessential leader who picked others up and had a trademark smile.

The coach, Roger Schenk, said he didn't know how many lives Gooding had touched until he was gone.

His guess as to why Gooding's story resonated so widely? People know a Jason Gooding in their own towns.

Nonprofit helps family, others

Schenk was among those who organized a nonprofit — called the Bowmen Family Foundation, for Sherwood's mascot — after Gooding's death. Schenk said the organization is in memory of Gooding and Marine Capt. Aaron J. Contreras, who was killed in a 2003 helicopter crash in Iraq.

Schenk said the organization has raised about \$80,000, which it has put toward a range of causes. Among them: setting up a trust fund for Gooding's girls, helping remodel their house and contributing to three Sherwood families in need of assistance.

It has also set up scholarships for Sherwood students interested in being first responders and nurses — Amy Gooding, Jason's widow, is a registered nurse. Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham said a former officer and current Portland fireman also helped spearhead a memorial scholarship effort in Seaside.

Tributes and recognition have rolled in since his killing. Gooding was posthumously awarded the state's Medal of Ultimate Sacrifice.

His death prompted an outpouring of love and respect in Seaside and elsewhere, said Ham, who was Gooding's close friend. The solidarity was evident in Seaside after Gooding's killing: A pair of memorials cropped up, and hundreds attended a vigil and his public service. People lined shutdown streets during a poignant processional leading to the service.

'I'll never forget that'

Dean Gooding said a Seaside golf course wanted to do something right away. So only a week after the public service, the course hosted a tournament in his son's name. Anyone could play.

Dean was in the refreshments cart, cruising the course, when he came upon a foursome that was whacking the ball, obviously unfamiliar with the sport. One of them hailed him down.

The man had heard Dean was the slain sergeant's father. And he had a story to tell.

The man threw his arms around Dean and thanked him for raising Gooding. They had gotten to know one another, Dean recalled the man saying, because Gooding had arrested him more than once.

He was sentenced to prison at some point. But Gooding tracked him down after his release. The sergeant also found the man a job.

It was an encounter that spoke to his son's influence.

"Where do you put that in life?" the elder Gooding asks.

"I'll never forget that."

Everton Bailey Jr. and Robbie DiMesio of The Oregonian contributed to this report.

Barber, Brown look to the new year

Seaside Signal

What's ahead in 2017? Seaside Mayor Jay Barber and Gearhart Mayor Matt Brown shared the biggest challenges facing their cities in the coming year.

"We have a City Council that works well together and gets things done," Barber said. "One of the significant challenges will be swearing in two new councilors in the new year, one newly elected and one that the council will appoint to fill the now vacant councilor seat from Ward 1 and getting them on board and working well with the other four councilors and the mayor."

"With the approval of the bond issue for the Seaside School District, it will be incumbent upon the Planning Commission and the council

to address the expansion of the urban growth boundary in the new year to bring the new campus into the city and work to provide proper access to the new location," Barber continued.

"I hope 2017 brings a sense of calmness and cooperation, working together with our citizens and other cities in Clatsop

County to solve common problems, such as affordable housing," Gearhart's Brown said. "I'm looking forward to having work sessions with our fellow councilors in the months to come to work on strategic planning for the next four years and prioritizing what is important to our residents."

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