

Bronze Statue to Honor LEO's in Capitol Courtyard

By Georgianne Cox, Editor of the *Dade County PBA Heat* and David Murrell, Florida PBA Executive Director

Next spring, visitors to the state Capitol building in Tallahassee will have a permanent visual reminder of the ever-present dangers facing law enforcement officers and what it really means to pin on the badge each day.

Recently, the Florida PBA commissioned **Michael Jernigan** to sculpt a life-size bronze statue to honor Florida officers who were killed in the line of duty. The statue, entitled "Officer Down," depicts an unresponsive officer lying on the ground while a fellow officer kneels beside him with one arm around her fallen comrade, the other hand reaching for her radio, about to make the "officer down" call.

The impressive bronze casting will be situated on a granite slab under an oak tree in the courtyard between the old and the new Capitol

buildings, the site for Florida's Law Enforcement Memorial, and will be a visual enhancement to the Memorial. The courtyard is also where the state law enforcement memorial service is held every May. This year, on May 5th, the governor, legislators, and hundreds of law enforcement officers attended the memorial, honoring those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in 2007.

For a long time, **Florida PBA President John Rivera, President Emeritus Ernie George,** and the Florida PBA Board of Directors have wanted a more impressive memorial to honor law enforcement's men and women from across the State who have given their lives protecting Florida's citizens. The statue was a goal that both presidents hoped to achieve during their tenure as Florida PBA President, although Rivera good naturedly points out that the goal will actually be achieved under his administration. "The 'Officer Down' statue is a small token of appreciation for their great sacrifices. I wish I were able to thank each officer for their service to their communities across Florida. The statue is the PBA's way of doing just that," said John Rivera.

Since 1963, the PBA has faithfully backed officers and their families, and it is important to Rivera that the community stand behind the men and women who protect them. The statue will also serve as a constant reminder to law makers and the millions of visitors to the State capital of the perils law enforcement officers face every day and why legislation that supports our heroes is imperative. In 2007 alone, Florida lost 16 officers in the line of duty.

While the planned full-size monument won't be completed until the beginning of the Legislative Session next year, a smaller, 1/4 life-size scale model has been created. And, according to portrait sculptor Michael Jernigan, the moving tribute is already causing a strong emotional response. While working on the miniature version of the sculpture, called a "maquette," people have stopped by and expressed to Jernigan that the sculpture causes them to contemplate the sacrifices law enforcement officers have to make and it makes them more appreciative of the invaluable service they provide to the community. Florida PBA will host a dedication ceremony for the statue within the first few weeks of the 2009 Session, with dignitaries led by **Governor Crist** headlining the ceremony along with hundreds of rank and file law enforcement and correctional

officers from around the state. The statue will be unique to that part of the Capitol grounds and will prove to be very popular and moving for surviving families and the thousands who visit the Capitol every year.

"It makes me glad that my work tugs at the heart of those who see it. I hope the "Officer Down" statue inspires people to come together as a community and support those who so courageously protect us," Jernigan stated.

The small scale models of the "Officer Down" statue are available for purchase and can be personalized to represent any police

department or agency. For more information on how to obtain your statue, or to learn more about the sculptor, call 850-877-4332 or visit his website at: www.portraitsculpture.com.

Florida PBA, in collaboration with Broward, Dade, and Palm Beach County PBA's, is sponsoring the project. If you would like to make a donation of any size toward this project, please forward it to one of the following three charities:

DADE COUNTY PBA LOVE FUND
10680 NW 25th Street, Doral, FL 33172

BROWARD COUNTY PBA HOPE FUND
2650 West State Road 84, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33312

PALM BEACH COUNTY PBA CHARITY FUND
2100 N. Mango Road, West Palm Beach, FL 33409

Be sure to specify "Officer Down." All donations are tax-deductible. 🇺🇸



Senate and House Resolutions to create the "Officer Down" Law Enforcement Memorial Sculpture to be placed between the old and new Capitol buildings. See related newspaper article and photos on page 4.

