

Sergeant Nicholas G. Sottile
End of Watch: Friday, January 12, 2007



Murder Indictment Begins Long Legal Process
Published on Wednesday, February 7, 2007, in the Highlands Today

SEBRING - The grand jury indictment was just handed down in last month's shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol officer, but state attorneys said it's only the beginning of a "long, drawn-out process."

Assistant State Attorney Steve Houchin said Tuesday that Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, Sebring, next faces a Feb. 28 arraignment in court where he'll be asked to enter a plea of guilty or not guilty.

Altersberger is charged with first-degree murder in the death of FHP Sgt. Nicholas Sottile and possession of a firearm after previously being convicted of a juvenile offense.

Anyone convicted of a criminal offense while a juvenile isn't legally allowed to own a firearm until they are 24 years old.

Houchin predicted Altersberger and his public defense attorneys would enter a plea of not guilty. He said that will likely be followed by a lengthy discovery process in which Altersberger's defense attorneys will ask for witness lists and lab reports from state attorneys.

Any possible trial won't be set until long after that, Houchin said. He also said any possible trial is at least two years away.

Houchin said he's only days away from formally filing paperwork seeking the death penalty against Altersberger.

"At this point we're assuming it will be in Highlands County," Houchin said, although he previously said defense attorneys may seek a change of venue.

Any change of venue could mean Altersberger's trial will be held in Tampa, Orlando or even Miami.

Stetson University law professor Robert Batey of St. Petersburg said evidence of Altersberger's crimes as a juvenile most likely won't be introduced at his upcoming murder trial.

"It might be considered at his sentencing, however. And if the defendant chose to testify on his own he may open himself up to being asked about his past, but only in very limited circumstances if he's a juvenile," Batey said.

Kinder's Future

The only possible witness in the shooting is being held without bond at the Highlands County Jail and so far isn't being given immunity in exchange for his testimony, Houchin said.

FHP officers said Sottile was shot and killed after stopping Altersberger, who was driving northbound along U.S. 27. The FHP report said Altersberger's passenger, Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, fled into a nearby orange grove shortly after the shooting.

Kinder is a Georgia resident and was later arrested on misdemeanor charges of illegal trespass of an orange grove after surrendering without incident.

Kinder is scheduled to face arraignment on those charges Wednesday morning in misdemeanor court.

Houchin said Kinder has been cooperating with state attorneys so far, and was even given a court-appointed attorney recently, Derek Christian.

"He was cooperative from the moment he walked out of the orange grove," Houchin said.

"Even if the misdemeanor charges against him were dropped, we still have violation of probation charges from the state of Georgia to hold him on. And when we're finished with him, he's going back to Georgia," Houchin said.

Grand jury indicts man in slaying of state trooper Published on Wednesday, February 7, 2007, in the Gainesville Sun

SEBRING — A Highlands County grand jury has indicted a man on charges of first-degree murder for the shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, of Sebring, was charged Monday with first-degree murder and possession of a firearm by a delinquent in the killing of Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nicholas Sottile on Jan. 12.

Prosecutors have said they intend to seek the death penalty against Altersberger, Highlands Today reported.

Sottile, 48, observed Altersberger driving erratically and pulled him over. As Sottile approached the vehicle, the passenger, Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, fled on foot to a nearby orange grove, authorities said.

Sottile went back to his patrol car to call for backup and then began walking toward the suspects' car when Altersberger shot him in the chest, authorities said.

Altersberger fled; Sottile was flown to Florida Hospital Lake Placid and pronounced dead. The suspects' vehicle was later found in an orange grove in Sebring.

Kinder was charged with trespassing in a cultivated grove after surrendering without incident.

Both suspects were ordered held without bail and remain in the Highlands County jail.

Grand Jury Indicts Altersberger Published on Tuesday, February 6, 2007, in the Highlands Today

SEBRING — A Highlands County grand jury handed down first-degree murder charges Monday against the 19-year-old Sebring suspect charged with last month's shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper on U.S. 27 north of Lake Placid.

A 21-member grand jury formally indicted Joshua Lee Altersberger on charges of first-degree murder and possession of a firearm by a delinquent in the killing of Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nicholas Sottile on Jan. 12.

State attorneys have already said they intend to seek the death penalty against Altersberger.

Highlands County Court Services Director Bob Germaine said last month that more populated areas usually have grand juries established at all times because of higher crime rates.

Assistant State Attorney Steve Houchin said last month that any trial involving the suspect might be at least two years away.

Houchin said Highlands County usually averages one murder per year.

He also said setting a trial date will take longer than any usual criminal trial, given the capitol murder charges.

Background

Altersberger is charged with first-degree murder in the death of FHP Sgt. Nicholas Sottile, 48.

Sottile stopped a 2003 Toyota Camry on northbound U.S. 27 last month for a traffic violation. According to an FHP report, Altersberger's passenger, Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, then fled into a nearby orange grove.

Kinder is a Georgia resident.

The FHP said Altersberger then shot Sottile in the chest and fled in his vehicle, later located in a Sebring orange grove.

Law enforcement officers found and arrested Altersberger early the next morning. Kinder was charged with trespassing in a cultivated grove after surrendering without incident, also on Saturday morning.

According to the Highlands County Sheriff's Office, Altersberger had been arrested two years ago and charged with battery, aggravated assault with a weapon and cocaine possession.

The two suspects have been ordered held without bond and are currently being held separately from each other and other inmates in the Highlands County Jail, Germaine said.

It was the first grand jury proceeding held in Highlands County in two years.

**Shooting Suspects Not Held With Other Inmates
Published on Tuesday, January 23, 2007, in the Tampa Bay Online**

SEBRING — The two men law enforcement officials said were involved with this month's shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol officer are being held separately not only from other inmates, but from each other.

Highlands County Jail Detention Center Captain Booker Johnson said jail officials made the decision to house the two apart from other inmates until further notice.

Joshua Lee Altersberger and Quintin Jerome Kinder were arrested last week after FHP reports said Sgt. Nicholas Sottile pulled over a vehicle the two were using near Lake Placid for a traffic violation.

The FHP said Altersberger shot Sottile in the chest and fled in his vehicle, prompting Kinder to flee into a nearby orange grove. According to an FHP report, Kinder was a passenger in the car driven by Altersberger.

The two were later separately caught by law enforcement. Altersberger is charged with first-degree murder, while Kinder is charged with trespassing in a cultivated grove, a misdemeanor.

The two suspects have been ordered held without bond and are currently being held in the Highlands County Jail.

Johnson said the decision to separate the two suspects is not uncommon, considering both are high-profile suspects.

He said Altersberger and Kinder are the two most high-profile suspects the jail has had in years.

“It was determined as soon as they were processed,” he said.

“We’re concerned with their safety and making sure we don’t put them in with a family member of the deceased. We look that stuff up. As with most high-profile inmates, it’s very much the case here,” Johnson said.

Johnson said a court date for Altersberger most likely won’t be scheduled for anytime within the next six months.

“There is no set criteria, but eventually they will be mixed in with the general population,” he said, adding other high-profile inmates not initially released to the general inmate population have included those charged with homicide and crimes against children.

State attorneys said last week they intend to seek the death penalty against Altersberger, a Sebring resident.

Assistant State Attorney Steve Houchin said last week that Altersberger’s trial might be at least two years away.

According to the Highlands County Sheriff’s Office, Altersberger was arrested two years ago and charged with battery, aggravated assault with a weapon and cocaine possession.

Houchin said setting a trial date for Altersberger will take longer than any usual criminal trial, given the capital murder charges filed against him.

'Friday, the world as we know it stopped'

Published on Wednesday, January 17, 2007, in the Highlands Today

SEBRING - Sgt. Nicholas Sottile was remembered as “a Trooper’s Trooper,” a devoted husband and father, a man of faith, a great cook and a captivating storyteller at his funeral Tuesday.

The 24-year veteran of the Florida Highway Patrol was shot Friday during a traffic stop outside of Lake Placid. Sottile, 48, died that evening at Florida Hospital Lake Placid.

More than 2,500 people gathered at Restoration Church of the Highlands to honor the fallen trooper, including about 2,000 law enforcement personnel from throughout the state and country, including Florida’s governor.

Several hundred FHP troopers helped perform the ceremonial aspects of the service. As the flag-draped casket was loaded into the hearse, troopers stood at attention, united in a Wall of Honor.

“It’s a sign of honor that everyone bestows on the fallen officer for giving his life,” FHP Lt. Doug Dodson said.

During the funeral, Gov. Charlie Crist thanked Sottile and all law enforcement officers for their service.

“Every day, Florida law enforcement officers put themselves in harm’s way and put their lives on the line for us,” Crist said. “On behalf of citizens in the state of Florida, I thank you for this and for making our lives more secure and safe ... We are forever indebted to you.”

FHP Sgt. Wesley Daum, who worked with Sottile, said the death of his colleague is a shock he is still trying to cope with.

“Friday, the world as we know it stopped, and it’s almost like we are in a fog now,” Daum said. “We are going to get through with the help of the people here who know and love Nick.”

Born in Avon Park, Sottile was raised in Lake Placid and graduated from Lake Placid High School. He started his career working for FHP in Miami but spent the majority of his years with Troop F - Arcadia.

“In this small, tight-knit community, the troopers and their families spend a lot of time together,” FHP Director Col. Christopher Knight said. “This loss creates a void that we aren’t yet sure how to fill.”

Sottile is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, daughter Heather, 19, and son Nicholas II, 22, who is an FHP trooper in the Tampa area.

FHP Cpl. Ed Finneran, who worked with Sottile for most of his career, said he was always proud of his family.

“One legacy he left behind was his family and he produced another trooper,” Finneran said. “His family was No. 1 to him. He was a very devoted husband and father. I wish I could leave behind a legacy like that.”

The Rev. Raymond Cameron, who was a personal friend of Sottile’s, said Sottile was a passionate person and faithful Christian.

“Nick Sottile loved life and he embraced life, and he called others along to embrace it with him,” Cameron said. “If you had Nick Sottile as a friend, you had a true friend.”

Cameron held up a bright orange T-shirt Sottile bought on a trip their families took together to Field of the Woods, in N.C., which seemed to sum up his feelings about his friend.

“Live your life so the preacher won’t have to lie at your funeral,” the bright orange T-shirt read.

Capt. Jimmy Picañol graduated from the FHP Training Academy, in Quincy, Fla., with Sottile in June, 1983.

“We supported each other and he supported everyone,” Picanol said. “Being from a small town, he always had a positive attitude about everything. And he knew about 1,000 jokes.”

About every law enforcement agency in Florida was represented, and Deputy Terry Corbin, of Citrus County's Sheriff's Office, said that's a typical showing.

"Law enforcement is a family," Corbin said. "Whether you know the person or not, we come to show respect for the family and colleagues."

Dennis Hallion, president of the National Troopers Coalition, flew from New Jersey to attend the funeral.

"Any time a trooper dies, it takes a little piece of all of us," Hallion said. "The best thing we can do is be there and show the family we care, even as far away as New Jersey. He made the ultimate sacrifice out there enforcing the law and interacting with the community and we all know that any day, it could be one of us."

**Community Mourns Slain Officer
Published on Wednesday, January 17, 2007, in the Highlands Today**

SEBRING - More than 2,500 people, including Florida's governor, gathered Tuesday afternoon to remember fallen Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nicholas Sottile Sr.

Several hundred highway patrol troopers took part in the service. As the flag-draped casket was loaded into the hearse, troopers stood at attention, united in a Wall of Honor.

"It's a sign of honor that everyone bestows on the fallen officer for giving his life," highway patrol Lt. Doug Dodson said.

Sottile, a 24-year veteran of the patrol, was shot Friday during a traffic stop outside Lake Placid. The 48-year-old sergeant died late that afternoon at Florida Hospital Lake Placid.

About 2,000 law enforcement personnel from across the country attended the funeral at Restoration Church of the Highlands.

During the funeral, Gov. Charlie Crist thanked Sottile and all law enforcement officers for their service.

"Every day, Florida law enforcement officers put themselves in harm's way and put their lives on the line for us," Crist said. "On behalf of citizens in the state of Florida, I thank you for this and for making our lives more secure and safe. ... We are forever indebted to you."

Highway patrol Sgt. Wesley Daum, who worked with Sottile, said he is still trying to cope with the death of his colleague.

"Friday, the world as we know it stopped, and it's almost like we are in a fog now," Daum said. "We are going to get through with the help of the people here who know and love Nick."

A native of Avon Park, Sottile was raised in Lake Placid and graduated from Lake Placid High School. He started his career working for the patrol in Miami but spent most of his years with Troop F, which has its headquarters in Arcadia.

"In this small, tight-knit community, the troopers and their families spend a lot of time together," said Col. Christopher Knight, the highway patrol director. "This loss creates a void that we aren't yet sure how to fill."

Sottile is survived by his wife, Elizabeth; daughter, Heather, 19; and son, Nicholas II, 22, who is a trooper in the Tampa area.

Cpl. Ed Finneran, who worked with Sottile most of his career, said the sergeant was proud of his family.

"One legacy he left behind was his family, and he produced another trooper," Finneran said. "His family was No. 1 to him. He was a very devoted husband and father. I wish I could leave behind a legacy like that."

The Rev. Raymond Cameron, a friend of Sottile, said Sottile was a passionate person and faithful Christian.

"Nick Sottile loved life and he embraced life, and he called others along to embrace it with him," Cameron said. "If you had Nick Sottile as a friend, you had a true friend."

Cameron held up a bright orange T-shirt Sottile bought on a trip their families took together to Fields of the Wood in North Carolina, which seemed to sum up his feelings about his friend.

"Live your life so the preacher won't have to lie at your funeral," the bright orange T-shirt read.

Dennis Hallion, president of the National Troopers Coalition, flew from New Jersey to attend the funeral.

"Any time a trooper dies, it takes a little piece of all of us," Hallion said. "The best thing we can do is be there and show the family we care, even as far away as New Jersey. He made the ultimate sacrifice out there enforcing the law and interacting with the community, and we all know that any day, it could be one of us."

A Lawman's Final Tribute

Published on Wednesday, January 17, 2007, in the Highlands Today

LAKE PLACID - They came from their homes, from Florida Hospital Lake Placid and from out of state. Some came on motorcycles, some in squad cars, helicopters and golf carts.

They journeyed there to pay their respects to fallen Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nicholas Sottile Sr., who was fatally shot Friday while making a traffic stop.

Hundreds of spectators lined the 11-mile route of his funeral procession Tuesday afternoon, from Restoration Church of the Highlands on State Road 66 in Sebring to Oak Hill Cemetery in Lake Placid.

"We have to pay our respects to a fallen trooper," said David Nunez, a physician from Florida Hospital Lake Placid. "I feel for the family."

In front of the Buttonwood Bay RV park, residents greeted the oncoming motorcade with silent salutes from their golf carts while under the shade of umbrellas.

Enduring the summerlike heat, Tammy Haskett, a resident and park ranger at Buttonwood Bay, said she and community manager Terry Wells sent out fliers to alert everyone to the procession. About 600 residents came out for the tribute, Haskett said.

"I've seen a lot of grown men cry today," Haskett said.

Near the hospital, nurses and other staff sat outdoors and waited for the procession.

Only a few spectators personally knew Sottile, but many didn't need to know him to relate.

"We're all brothers," said Sebring resident Ned Doran, a retired detective from the police department in Milford, Conn. "We all pay our respects."

The sentiment was universal among current and retired troopers and officers, several hundred of whom were in the procession. Some watching the procession also reflected on the shooting.

"We feel it's just a senseless act," said a nurse from Florida Hospital who did not wish to be identified. "A young man is going to lose his life. ... If people would stop and think before they act, we would avoid these kinds of tragedies."

At the cemetery, law enforcement officers circled Sottile's grave site and played taps. Afterward, guns were fired three times before a final radio signal went out.

The radio went silent, and as the officers stood at attention, 16 helicopters flew overhead. An officer handed Sottile's wife and family a folded U.S. flag and his belongings.

For a minute, the officers remained expressionless. Some bowed their heads. The tears rolled down from behind sunglasses as they hugged one another.

**FHP Sgt. Nick Sottile Praised in Wake of His Killing Last Week
Published on Wednesday, January 17, 2007, in the Lakeland Ledger**

Family, friends, fellow officers and dignitaries from across the state - nearly 2,000 people in all - came to the Restoration Church of the Highlands in Sebring on Tuesday to pay final respects to Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nick Sottile, who was killed in the line of duty Friday afternoon.

As mourners filled the auditorium, an FHP honor guard kept vigil over Sottile's flag-draped coffin. Two men stood watch at a posting, replaced at regular intervals by other officers in a solemn ceremony.

As it neared 1 p.m., starting time of the funeral, the gathering had grown to standing-room only, with mourners three deep in the aisles. FHP troopers occupied three rows in the main auditorium.

Florida Highway Patrol Col. Christopher A. Knight presented the eulogy.

"We come together today to honor Nick. To his wife Elizabeth, his daughter Heather, his son Nick II, his father Philip, his siblings Jimmy, Raymond, and Debbie, the citizens of Highlands County, the state of Florida stands with you," Knight began.

"Those who knew him would agree that Nick stood tall," Knight said. "He was a special person. Whether you knew him or not, his smile could make you happy."

Knight recounted the numerous citations that adorn Sottile's record.

One letter tells of a dark night on a rural section of U.S. 27. Sottile, coming off a long duty shift, discovers a woman stranded with a broken-down car. Not the type to ever leave a woman in need, Sottile stayed with her for more than two hours until a tow truck arrived.

"He joked and made her feel safe the whole time," Knight said.

"The state, his friends and family will never forget the sacrifice he and the other 40 troopers who have died in the line of duty have made," Knight said.

"A golden heart stopped beating, a beautiful smile at rest, God broke our hearts to prove he only takes the best," Knight said.

Gov. Charlie Crist was flown by helicopter to the service along with members of his Cabinet.

"Everyone in law enforcement puts themselves in harm's way," Crist said. "On behalf of a thankful state we cannot thank you enough. God bless you."

Sgt. Wesley H. "Butch" Daum was joined at the podium by fellow troopers Cpl. Albert H. Middleton and Cpl. Edward J. Finneran.

"On Friday, Jan. 12, the world as we knew it stopped," Daum said.

"Nick was the type of person who would, whatever mood you were in or depression, smile and make you laugh," Daum said.

"He would do his job regardless of who you were," Daum said. "We are going to miss him, and he will always be with us."

With tears in his eyes and his voice breaking, the veteran trooper addressed Sottile's son, fellow Trooper Nick Sottile II.

"Nick, when he would talk about you his chest - and it was a big chest - would fill out," Daum said.

Law enforcement personnel, in silent procession, passed the casket before forming an honor wall surrounding the hearse that would carry the slain trooper's body to Oak Hill Cemetery in Lake Placid where he was laid to rest.

U.S. 27 was closed from Sebring to Lake Placid as a funeral procession more than nine miles long made its way to the cemetery.

Sottile, 48, was born Sept. 7, 1958, in Avon Park. He was a longtime resident of Lake Placid and graduated from Lake Placid High School. After graduation, he was accepted into the FHP academy in Tallahassee and graduated with the 68th recruitment class.

His first FHP assignment was in Miami. After a few years, he returned to Lake Placid where he was soon promoted and became a traffic homicide investigator. In 2003 he left Lake Placid for a promotion with the FHP in Tampa. He returned to Lake Placid one year later.

Sottile was killed Friday afternoon after making a traffic stop near Lake Placid. Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, of Sebring, was arrested early Saturday following the largest manhunt in Highlands County history and charged with killing Sottile.

A passenger in the car Altersberger was driving, Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga., also was arrested.

Kinder told authorities he got out of the car and ran into a nearby orange grove after Altersberger said he was going to shoot the trooper.

Kinder was charged with trespassing in a citrus grove. Both men are being held in the Highlands County Jail.

Sottile was a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Placid. In his free time, he enjoyed hunting, fishing, gardening, and cooking.

He is survived by his wife Elizabeth (Carr) Sottile; son Nicholas II, of Tampa; daughter Heather, of Largo; father, Phillip, of Lake Placid; brother Jimmy, of Sebring; brother Raymond of Melbourne; and sister Debbie Paszek of Granite Falls, N.C.

**Florida Highway Patrol Officer Laid to Rest
Published on Tuesday, January 16, 2007, in the WPBF News**

A Florida Highway Patrol officer who was killed in the line of duty will be laid to rest Tuesday.

Sgt. Nicholas Sottile was shot last week during a routine traffic stop.

Sottile's brother talked about what a great man Nicholas was, and said he hopes something good will come out of the ordeal.

"I just hope he doesn't die in vain," said Jimmy Sottile. "And I hope somebody who sees this will go home and hug their father, hug their brother. Make amends if there's any

confrontation between the two of you, because when you leave the house, it could be the last time you ever see them, the last time you ever tell them that you love them."

Police arrested two men in connection to the shooting. Joshua Alters-Berger is facing first-degree murder charges. Quintin Kinder is charged with trespassing. Both are being held without bond.

Slain Trooper's brother speaks out about his death

Published on Tuesday, January 16, 2007, in the Tampa Bay 10 News

Placid, Florida - It was a somber salute to Sgt. Nicholas Sottile. Sgt Sottile's younger brother Jimmy can't believe he's gone after being a trooper for 24-years, "When he worked he worked, even at 24 years on it was like he just started yesterday." And that makes it even more difficult dealing with today, "It's sick that he had to pass away like this, because if anything this is a disgrace to him, for something like this to happen to him." Words can't express how he feels about the person who murdered the 48-year-old, "When he killed my brother his life ended no matter what. But he made the choice to kill my brother, my brother didn't make the choice to die. My heart says I'd like to see him pay the same way, of what he did to my brother. I wish I could make him hurt the way he made our family's hurt."

Jimmy's going to miss joking around with his big brother, "We always had a good time, if you were around him he made you have a good time. This seems like some movie or something. I told my wife when I get home I'm gonna change the channel cause this can't be real."

Sgt. Sottile's family grieves, but it's especially hard on his son who is also a trooper. Jimmy has some advice for all those listening, "Tell everybody that you love them before you leave the house."

Funeral is today for slain state trooper

Published on Tuesday, January 16, 2007, in the St. Petersburg Times

SEBRING - Funeral services will be held today for a Florida Highway Patrol trooper who was shot Friday in Highlands County.

Services for Sgt. Nicholas G. Sottile, 48, a 24-year veteran of the patrol, will be at 1 p.m. at the Restoration Church of the Highlands, 8475 Sparta Road in Sebring.

He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth; a son, Nicholas, who is a trooper assigned to Tampa; and a daughter, Heather.

Sgt. Sottile was shot after he pulled over a car being driven erratically on U.S. 27 north of Lake Placid.

Two suspects were arrested Saturday: Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, of Sebring, and Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga. Authorities say Kinder fled into an orange grove and that Altersberger shot Sgt. Sottile in the chest and drove away.

Both were ordered held without bail on Sunday. Altersberger is charged with first-degree murder and Kinder with trespassing in a cultivated grove.

Suspects Appear in Court

Published on Monday, January 15, 2007, in the Tallahassee Democrat

BARTOW - Joshua Lee Altersberger and Quintin Jerome Kinder, who were arrested following the slaying of Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nick Sottile, had their first court appearances Sunday morning.

Both men were ordered held without bail.

Altersberger and Kinder were in the Highlands County Jail while the judge was in Bartow in Polk County and conducted the hearing via video camera.

Polk County Judge Mary Catherine Green said there was probable cause to hold Altersberger on charges of premeditated murder.

She asked Altersberger whether he planned to hire a lawyer or whether a lawyer should be appointed to represent him.

"Right now, I really haven't gotten a hold of my mom yet to tell her I need a lawyer," Altersberger said.

"Could you please just answer the question?" Green said.

"Oh ... I would like you to appoint one for me," Altersberger said.

Kinder is being held on a charge of trespassing in a cultivated grove, but Green also ordered that he continue to be held without bail "for now."

Both men were wore black-and-white striped uniforms, unlike the other Highlands County inmates who had their first court appearance Sunday morning. They wore orange uniforms.

Highlands County sheriff's Lt. Doris Rebmann said that was done because of the seriousness of the charges involving Altersberger and Kinder.

The striped uniforms alert jail personnel to use caution around them.

On Tuesday, the men will be assessed in the jail's classification system after the charges against them and their prior criminal history have been considered.

Altersberger, 19, is accused of shooting Sottile during a traffic stop on Friday afternoon near Lake Placid.

Kinder was a passenger in Altersberger's car when Sottile pulled over the vehicle. Kinder told law enforcement officials that as Altersberger stopped the car he said he was going to shoot the trooper.

Kinder got out of Altersberger's car and ran into a grove, according to arrest reports.

Investigators said in arrest documents that Altersberger shot Sottile, then drove away. Altersberger has two previous arrests.

In 2003 he was arrested by Avon Park police on a charge of domestic violence against his mother.

In 2004 he was arrested during an undercover drug investigation by the Highlands County Sheriff's Office and charged with possession of cocaine, marijuana and drug paraphernalia.

Here's why politicians respect police

Published on Monday, January 15, 2007, in the Tallahassee Democrat

The name of Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nicholas Sottile will be called in the Capitol courtyard next spring, and a white carnation will be pinned near Lake Placid on a big map of the state.

The annual ceremony honoring law-enforcement officers killed on duty always draws a large crowd, including the governor and Cabinet officers, legislative leaders, department heads and ordinary citizens. The patrol cars and uniforms of dozens of state, county and city agencies are seen in a slow procession down Monroe Street behind a mounted patrol and an honor guard.

When they reach the Capitol, hundreds of officers close ranks near a huge oak tree bordered by four sloping black walls engraved with the names of slain officers. After the rifles fire their salutes, some friends and family members take home a paper tracing of the new names.

There are dozens of celebrations and demonstrations in the courtyard every legislative session. But if you rush past this one without a second glance, maybe you've been around here too long.

Sottile, 48, was killed on Friday during a routine traffic stop. He leaves behind his wife, Elizabeth; his daughter, Heather, who lives in Orlando; and his son, Nicholas, who works for the FHP in Tampa.

"Our law-enforcement officers put their lives on the line every day for the safety and security of our state," Gov. Charlie Crist said, "and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices."

This latest case shows why law enforcement, particularly the FHP, is so highly regarded in the Legislature.

The Police Benevolent Association can get special-risk retirement benefits and longevity pay raises for officers because the state doesn't want to lose them to city or county forces - and because the PBA's endorsement confers money and law-and-order credibility at election time.

But there's also a genuine respect in the Capitol for what the officers do.

Those titillating TV shows like "Cops" or any number of "wildest police chase" programs always feature the hair-raising, lurid, fast-paced, sometimes amusing cases that provide what television producers call "good visuals." But most often, these real-life tragedies are more maddening because they're so mundane.

Sottile stopped an erratic driver and was shot to death. Tallahassee Police Officer Ernie Ponce de Leon was killed when he approached a suspect. TPD Sgt. Dale Green rushed to help crime victims and was fatally ambushed.

They were all doing the same thing - protecting us. And hundreds more like them are out there right now, doing the same thing.

Funeral set for highway patrol trooper
Published on Monday, January 15, 2007, in the Melbourne Florida Today

BARTOW, Fla. -- The funeral for a slain Florida Highway Patrol trooper is scheduled Tuesday. The two suspects in the shooting were ordered held without bond Sunday.

Joshua Lee Altersberger and Quintin Jerome Kinder appeared at the hearing before Polk County Judge Mary Catherine Green by video from the Highlands County Jail.

Altersberger, 19, of Sebring, is charged with first-degree murder in the death of Sgt. Nicholas Sottile. Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga., is charged with trespassing in a cultivated grove.

Authorities have said Kinder fled on foot into an orange grove after Sottile stopped their vehicle Friday. Altersberger is accused of shooting Sottile, 48, in the chest after the trooper called for backup, then fled the scene, according to FHP.

Both men were arrested Saturday.

Funeral services for Sottile will be held at the Restoration Church of the Highlands on Tuesday in Sebring.

The 24-year veteran of the FHP is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, Nicholas and Heather. Sergeant Sottile's son, Nicholas, is also a member of the highway patrol. Sottile was the 41st trooper who has been killed in the line of duty since 1939.

Most Law Enforcement Agencies Don't Require Bulletproof Vests
Published on Monday, January 15, 2007, in the WESH News

Two men are being held without bond after a Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed last week.

Sgt. Nicholas Sottile stopped a vehicle on U.S. Highway 27 near Lake Placid Friday afternoon. Investigators said one of the men inside shot the officer in the chest and took off, WESH 2 News reported.

His visitation was held Monday evening at the Memorial United Methodist Church in Lake Placid, and the funeral is scheduled for Tuesday.

Sottile was not wearing a bulletproof vest. Modern-day vests are designed to stop a bullet fired from a handgun, even at relatively close range, as happened on Friday.

But Florida Highway Patrol policy does not require that troopers wear the vest all the time.

Police and sheriff's deputies often say that it's best to be prepared for the worst on the streets because no traffic stop or arrest is routine.

That became tragic reality on Friday afternoon in Highlands County when Sottile, a veteran officer, pulled over two men in a car and was shot fatally in the chest.

Experts said a bulletproof vest would have at least slowed down the bullet and most likely would have saved his life.

But according to the policy of Florida's Highway Patrol, body armor or bulletproof vests are not required.

"Members are strongly encouraged to wear issued body armor at all times," the manual says. "Members who do not wear body armor shall have it available for immediate use."

"More times than not, the vest is going to save someone's life," said Sue Livoti of the Marion County Sheriff's Department.

Even so, WESH 2 checked with every major law enforcement agency in Central Florida and found that almost all of them have bulletproof vest policies similar to the Florida Highway Patrol's.

"They are issued a vest as part of their standard equipment, and if they choose not to wear on a regular basis, they are required to sign a waiver," Livoti said.

In fact, every agency with this policy points to one major factor in creating it -- the environment and the fact officers must work outside in Central Florida.

"Unfortunately, because of the weather, how hot it gets around here, it wasn't that uncommon to have a law enforcement officer passing out from the heat," said Carlos Padilla of the Orange County Sheriff's Office.

Only Marion County requires deputies who choose not to wear bulletproof vests to sign a waiver.

Two agencies require an officer to wear body armor all the time they are in uniform -- the Brevard County Sheriff's Office and the Kissimmee Police Department -- but most police agencies leave it up to an individual officer.

Services set for slain FHP officer

Published on Monday, January 15, 2007, in the Ft. Myers News-Press

BARTOW -- Funeral services are tomorrow in Sebring for Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nicholas Sottile, killed Friday during a routine traffic stop.

Two suspects are in jail in connection with the slaying.

The viewing for the patrolman is today at 6 p.m. at the Memorial United Methodist in Lake Placid. The funeral is tomorrow at 1 p.m. at the Restoration Church at the Highlands in Sebring.

Sergeant Sottile, a 24-year veteran of the FHP, was assigned to Troop F – Arcadia. He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, Nicholas and Heather.

Sergeant Sottile's son, Nicholas, is also a member of the Patrol. Trooper Sottile is assigned to Troop C – Tampa.

Sergeant Sottile becomes the 41st trooper who has been killed in the line of duty since 1939.

The suspects in the shooting death are being held without bond.

Joshua Lee Altersberger and Quintin Jerome Kinder are charged in the case.

Nineteen-year-old Altersberger is charged with first-degree murder; Kinder, 21, is charged with trespassing in a cultivated grove.

Authorities say Kinder fled on foot into an orange grove after Sottile stopped their vehicle Friday. FHP says Altersberger shot Sottile in the chest after the trooper called for backup, then fled the scene.

Both men were arrested Saturday.

SHOOTING SUSPECTS CAPTURED

Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Highlands Today

LAKE PLACID — Christina Clay can remember the exact moment Friday evening she realized Sgt. Nick Sottile was dead.

“We heard earlier that an officer had been shot,” Clay said. She and her mother, Dottie Lanzel, are waitresses at Schooni's, an Italian pizza and submarine restaurant on Main Avenue that the Florida Highway Patrol trooper frequented.

Then, the news came it was Sottile, a 24-year veteran, who had been hit.

They heard he had been airlifted to a metro hospital, but just a few minutes later, there was a correction. He was still at Florida Hospital in Lake Placid, and he'd died.

“My poor mom,” Clay said Saturday morning. Her mother had known Sottile for a dozen years. “She went outside and just cried.”

How It Happened

According to FHP director Col. Christopher Knight, Sottile, 48, was southbound on U.S. 27 about 3:22 p.m. Friday when he witnessed a Toyota Camry driven aggressively, nearly tangling with a semi-truck.

About that same time, Lake Placid Town Councilor Debra Worley was also southbound, and saw a Highway Patrol car make a U-turn.

“He was behind me,” Worley said. “I saw he turned around and went back.”

The Toyota stopped. There were two black men inside, Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, of Sebring, and Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga. According to a criminal history from the Highlands County Sheriff’s Office, Altersberger had been arrested two years ago for battery, aggravated assault with a weapon and possession of cocaine.

Sottile approached on foot. Officers think Kinder lept from the car and fled into the orange groves, a few miles north of Lake Placid.

Altersberger fired at least one shot.

“It was fatal. Right about here,” Knight said, touching a spot above his heart, but below his right shoulder. He wouldn’t say if more than one shot was fired.

Knight held a press conference on the shoulder of U.S. 27, across from the Coldwell Banker real estate office. It was just a mile north of the crime scene.

Roberto Carrillo, an air conditioner installer, was on his way back to Lake Placid when he saw Sottile lying on the ground, probably five minutes after the shooting happened.

“He was right in front of his car,” Carrillo said. He surmised that Sottile had returned to his marked unit.

Carrillo slowed down, but there were lots of other cars stopped, so he drove on.

Others Remember

Sottile (soTILLe), according to friends, was a jovial man.

“He was always joking,” Knight remembered. “He loved the people he supervised, and he loved the people who supervised him.”

“He was just a good man,” said Thomas Tillman, who was getting a haircut Saturday morning. Carrillo waited his turn in the chairs across from him.

"I've known him just about all his life. He was born and raised here," said Tillman, who is also a lifetime resident.

"It's just scary," said Jeff Wahoo Stanley, a customer in the Cornerstone Barbershop, where Ron Elwell cut hair. "I moved here 10 years ago. I wanted to stay away from the traffic and crime."

A Miami native, Stanley leads white water rafting excursions to North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia.

"I live north of Lake June, and there wasn't anytime last night I couldn't hear the helicopters overhead, buzzing. It was like Manhattan or something."

At Schooni's, Highlands County Deputy Robert Campbell was having lunch Saturday with his family. He often met Sottile at the sheriff's substation in Lake Placid.

"He was always smiling, always on top of the world. He never seemed to be down," said Campbell. "He was a good family man. They always seemed to be part of his life."

Sottile's son, Nicholas, is also a trooper.

Capture

About 4:57 a.m. Saturday, police found Altersberger, who had fled in his car to Sebring. Knight would not say whether he was arrested in his own home.

At 7:23 a.m., Kinder was found, and Knight said a firearm was also located, although cautiously he did not connect the two.

Knight said Sottile's unit did not have a camera, which would have shown the shooting.

The capture, Knight said, "would not have been possible without help from the local and state agencies." Hundreds of officers from at least 25 departments responded.

"It's no surprise to me they were caught very quickly," Knight said.

Both suspects were taken to the Highlands County Jail. Altersberger was charged with first-degree murder. Kinder had not been arraigned by press time Saturday.

Sottile becomes the 41st trooper who has been killed in the line of duty since 1939.

Trooper's retirement dream was in reach

Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Orlando Sentinel

LAKE PLACID -- Days before he was gunned down during a routine traffic stop, Nicholas Sottile shared retirement plans with a longtime friend during breakfast at Lake Placid Family Restaurant.

"He had everything in place," restaurant owner Sam Weaver said Saturday. "Everything was really coming together for him."

Weaver said the 48-year-old Florida Highway Patrol sergeant was proud of having just dropped off 19-year-old daughter Heather at college in Clearwater. By the time she graduated, Sottile told his friend, the house he was building in Georgia would be ready for his retirement.

At 3:22 p.m. Friday, Sottile was fatally wounded during the traffic stop a few miles out of town on U.S. Highway 27.

" 'I've been shot! I've been shot!' He said it twice," said Highway Patrol Col. Christopher A. Knight. "That was his last transmission to us."

Sottile died a short time later at Florida Hospital Lake Placid.

Saturday morning, agents with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement arrested the accused gunman, 19-year-old Joshua Lee Altersberger, at his Sebring home on a first-degree murder charge after authorities received phone tips identifying him as the killer. Altersberger's passenger, Quintin Jerome Kinder of Bainbridge, Ga., was found in a citrus grove off U.S. 27.

Arrest reports filed Saturday and FDLE statements gave the following account of what witnesses say happened the afternoon the 24-year veteran became the 41st trooper to die in the line of duty in Florida:

Sottile pulled over the 2003 Toyota Camry after Altersberger cut off another vehicle on U.S. 27. He then radioed for backup, and other troopers were dispatched from the Highway Patrol station about two miles away.

Kinder told the FDLE that he fled into the orange grove after Altersberger told him that he was going to shoot the trooper.

It was about 3:21 p.m. when Sottile walked up to Altersberger's car and the driver shot the trooper once in the neck. Sottile fell to the ground but managed to radio for help.

Altersberger, according to the driver of the car he cut off who witnessed the shooting, fired a second round at the wounded officer as he lay on the ground. Altersberger then drove off.

Authorities later recovered a silver-colored semi-automatic handgun and about 1 a.m. discovered the Camry ditched in an orange grove.

Once news of the killing spread through the tightknit community, calls started coming in to authorities with information about the suspect.

By 5 a.m., investigators had arrested Altersberger.

About 7:30 a.m., Kinder surrendered to troopers who were forming a perimeter to secure the grove. Charges against him are pending, although he also is considered a witness.

"The witnesses have been very helpful to us, " Knight said. "He [Sottile] was actually a hometown trooper. Everybody knows their trooper here."

Lake Placid held a special lure for Sottile. When he graduated from high school, he became a trooper in Miami, later returning to Lake Placid for several years. Promoted to sergeant, Sottile then moved to Tampa, said Trooper Kim Miller, a Highway Patrol spokeswoman.

About 18 months ago, he went back to Lake Placid, a laid-back rural outpost about 100 miles south of Orlando whose welcome sign proclaims it Caladium Capital of the World for the landscape plant grown alongside its lakes and orange groves.

"He never changed," Weaver said. "He was very witty, liked to cut a joke, but was very serious about his work."

His love of the job influenced his son, also named Nicholas, who is a trooper stationed with a unit in Tampa.

"It is unreal," said Stanford Wright, owner of Heron's Garden restaurant where Sottile, like so many days before, ate lunch Friday. "I had never heard of such a thing happening here. And to such a good, good man."

Sottile's children and widow, Elizabeth, gathered in Lake Placid on Saturday to mourn him.

Troopers, who have covered their badges with black tape to mourn their fallen colleague, are expected to be out in force for Tuesday's funeral.

"Maybe in the North, they'd say he was a real nice guy. Most Southerners would say he was just a good old boy," Weaver said. "I would say the community ought to be on its knees praying for Nick and his family."

Excerpts of Probable Cause Affidavit

"While in the car Altersberger stated that he just killed a police officer by shooting him in the neck and had to get rid of the car. Witness #1 advised she did not believe Altersberger. Witness #1 stated she observed a silver color semi-auto handgun with wood grips on the front seat of the car. Altersberger drove Witness #1 to the orange grove located across the street from her residence. . . . Altersberger wiped the interior of the vehicle down with his shirt and handed the shirt to Witness #1. Witness #1 left the orange grove and went to her residence. Altersberger removed the handgun from the Toyota Camry and also left the orange grove."

"Witness #2 picked Joshua Lee Altersberger DOB: 11/05/1987 out of a photo line up as the driver of the Toyota Camry and the person who shot Sergeant Sottile."

"Witness #3 said that he and Altersberger saw that the trooper had turned around and came up behind them. Witness #3 said Altersberger continued to drive north of US 27 for about two minutes, before he stopped for the trooper. During this two minute time period, Altersberger stated that he was going to shoot the trooper. Witness #3 said that he felt

Altersberger was serious, and he knew that Altersberger kept a gun in the driver side door panel of his car; so he feared that Altersberger was going to shoot the Trooper. Fearing that Altersberger was going to shoot the trooper, Witness #3 exited Altersberger's car from the front passenger's side door and ran on foot traveling east into a Lykes Brothers citrus grove."

SOURCE: Florida Department of Law Enforcement

Sottile services

Memorial arrangements for Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nicholas Sottile:

Viewing from 6 to 8 p.m. Monday at Memorial United Methodist Church in Lake Placid.

Funeral begins at 1 p.m. Tuesday at Restoration Church of the Highlands in Sebring.

**2 Men Arrested In Fatal Shooting Of Highway Patrol Sergeant
Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Tampa Tribune**

LAKE PLACID - Two men were arrested Saturday in the fatal shooting of Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nicholas Sottile, authorities said.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, was arrested at 4:30 a.m. at his home in Sebring. He faces a first-degree murder charge in the death of Sottile a day earlier during a traffic stop. He was being held without bail at the Highlands County Jail.

Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga., gave himself up to a search team at 6 a.m. He was charged with trespassing and also held at the Highlands jail. Bail was set at \$10,000, but authorities were trying to get it changed to no bail, Highlands County sheriff's spokeswoman Lisa McGehee said.

Both men were arrested without incident, said Col. Christopher A. Knight of the highway patrol. He did not give a motive for the shooting and said it remains under investigation.

Authorities recovered a vehicle and a gun thought to have been used in the shooting.

Sottile, 48, stopped the car Friday afternoon after seeing it driving erratically on northbound U.S. 27 near Witmore Curve, south of State Road 66.

As Sottile approached the vehicle, Kinder, the passenger, got out and ran, patrol spokesman Ernie Duarte said. Sottile went back to his patrol car to call for backup and had begun walking toward the suspects' car when Altersberger shot him in the chest at 3:22 p.m. and fled, Duarte said.

Sottile was flown to Florida Hospital Lake Placid and pronounced dead.

His death was noted Saturday by Gov. Charlie Crist.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow troopers," Crist said in a statement. "Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line every day for the safety and security of our state, and I speak for all the Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices."

About 200 law enforcement officers from surrounding agencies descended on the scene of the shooting Friday evening to search for the suspects. Officers from Polk County, where a sheriff's deputy died in the line of duty in September, poured into Highlands County to assist. Lake Placid is about 105 miles southeast of Tampa.

Helicopters and planes searched the orange groves on either side of the highway in regular search patterns. Officers and canine units also searched on foot.

Grim-faced officers comforted one another at the scene as crime scene investigators used metal detectors to search the ground for shell casings or other evidence around the patrol unit of the officer.

The last time a Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed was in May 1998 in Pasco County. James B. Crooks, 23, was attempting to apprehend a suspect who had just shot and killed two Tampa Police Department detectives. Crooks had been with highway patrol for nine months.

**Suspects in FHP Slaying Caught
Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Lakeland Ledger**

The two suspects in the killing of Sgt. Nick Sottile were arrested by state authorities Saturday morning following a massive manhunt that brought in more than 300 law enforcement officers from 25 different agencies around the state.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, who is accused of shooting Sottile, 48, during a traffic stop, was arrested by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement on a charge of first degree murder. He is being held without bail at Highlands County Jail.

Quintin Jerome Kendal, 21, has also been arrested by FDLE special agents. He was booked into the county jail on a charge of trespassing in a citrus grove. He is being held on \$10,000 bail.

Altersberger is from Sebring and Kendal is from Bainbridge, Ga.

A special response team arrested Altersberger without incident at a Sebring home around 4:57 a.m. Kendal surrendered to authorities patrolling the incident perimeter on County Road 17 between Sebring and Lake Placid about 7:30 a.m.

The arrests were announced at a press conference at 10:30 a.m. Saturday outside the FDLE command center on U.S. 27 north of Lake Placid. The command center ran the search operation - the largest in the history of Highlands County - which began after the shooting Friday afternoon.

"We said last night we would get 'em," FHP director Christopher Knight said. "And we did."

Knight praised the statewide response and took time to single out the efforts of the FDLE, Highlands County Sheriff's office and Highlands County Sheriff Susan Benton.

The ordeal began Friday about 3:20 p.m. when Sottile made a traffic stop on a beige Toyota Camry on U.S. 27 just north of Whitmore Curve near Lake Placid.

Kendal, a passenger in the car, told investigators that Altersberger, who was driving, swerved while on U.S. 27 and got the attention of Sottile, reports said.

A witness was cut off by Altersberger just before the traffic stop. The witness, who is not being identified by law enforcement, told Special Agent Tommy Ray that he pulled up behind Sottile's cruiser to discuss being cut off.

The witness said Kendal ran away from the car into an orange grove.

Before Altersberger stopped for Sottile, Kendal said, Altersberger said he was going to shoot the trooper, according to arrest reports. Fearing his friend was going to make good on his threat, Kendal ran into the Lykes Brothers citrus grove.

Sottile then approached the car.

"Sottile approached the vehicle and ordered the driver to place his hands on the steering wheel," according to arrest reports. "Sottile leaned into the driver window when the driver produced a silver handgun, possibly a .22 or .32 caliber, and fired one round into Sottile's neck area. Sottile fell back, reached for his radio on his lapel to remove it, then collapsed."

Sottile never drew his weapon, law enforcement said.

After about fifteen seconds the driver pointed the gun out the window and fired a second shot, it is reported. He fled the scene driving the Camry.

The witness identified Altersberger from a photo lineup.

Earlier law enforcement reports said it was the passenger who shot the officer while running away.

Investigators spoke with a female who was contacted by Altersberger a short time after the shooting, according to an arrest affidavit.

Special Agent Kevin Sapp reports the female witness, whose name is not being released, said Altersberger came to her at a house in Sebring and told her to get in the car.

"While in the car Altersberger stated that he just killed a police officer by shooting him in the neck and had to get rid of the car," said arrest affidavits released by the Highlands County Sheriff's Office.

Altersberger then reportedly drove the woman to an orange grove near her home. Altersberger wiped down the interior of the vehicle with his shirt, removed the gun and left the car, according to police reports.

Altersberger has two prior arrests. He was arrested by the Avon Park Police Department in 2003 on a charge of domestic violence against his mother. In 2004 he was arrested during an undercover narcotics investigation by the Highlands County Sheriff's office on charges of possession of cocaine and cannabis, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Kendal does not have any prior arrests.

The first court appearance for Altersberger and Kendal is scheduled for this morning at the Polk County Courthouse before Judge Mary Katherine Green.

**Suspects apprehended in Fla. trooper's death
Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Gainesville Sun**

LAKE PLACID - Two suspects in the shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper were arrested Saturday, authorities said.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, was arrested at his home in Sebring about 4:30 a.m. Saturday and was charged with first-degree murder in the death of Sergeant Nicholas Sottile a day earlier. A second man, 21-year-old Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga., was also arrested, after giving himself up to a search team at about 6 a.m., but charges were pending.

Sottile, 48, observed Altersberger driving erratically Friday and pulled him over. As Sottile approached the vehicle, Kinder, the passenger, fled on foot to a nearby Orange grove, said Ernie Duarte, a spokesman for the highway patrol. Sottile went back to his patrol car to call for backup and then began walking toward the suspects' car when Altersberger shot him in the chest at 3:22 p.m., Duarte said.

Altersberger fled; Sottile was flown to Florida Hospital Lake Placid and pronounced dead. The suspects' vehicle was later found in an orange grove in Sebring.

Sottile had worked for the FHP for nearly 24 years. He is survived by a wife, Elizabeth; a daughter, Heather, of Orlando; and a son Nicholas, of Tampa, who also works for the FHP.

The last time a Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed was in May 1998, in Pasco County. James B. Crooks, 23, was attempting to apprehend a suspect who had just shot and killed two Tampa Police Department detectives. Crooks had been with FHP for nine months.

Sottile's funeral will be held Tuesday in Sebring. His death was noted by Gov. Charlie Crist.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow troopers," Crist said in a statement. "Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line everyday for the safety and security of our state and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices."

FHP Trooper Shot And Killed

Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Central Florida 13 News

Florida Highway Patrol says two people are now in custody in connection with the murder of a state trooper.

Forty-eight-year-old Sgt. Nicholas Sottile was shot and killed Friday during a traffic stop in Lake Placid, in Highlands County. That is just south of Polk County.

Investigators say when Sottile pulled a car over one of the two men inside pulled out a gun and shot him. Both men took off.

After Sottile was shot, he was able to radio in and let dispatch know he was shot. He was transported to Florida Hospital and died at 4:51 p.m.

Hundreds of law enforcement officers converged on the area in a massive manhunt.

Troopers say they arrested 19-year-old Joshua Lee Altersberger early this morning near where the shooting happened. They say he was the shooter and is charged with first-degree murder.

Later a second suspect, 21-year-old Quinten Kinder of Georgia, turned himself in.

Troopers say Sottile did nothing wrong and was following procedure when he was shot.

Trooper say located the car the suspects were driving in an orange grove not far from where Sottile was killed. They also say the weapon used in the shooting has been recovered.

Col. Christopher Knight from the FHP said: "Our troopers do an excellent job. He followed all policy, he violated now policies of the highway patrol. Nick has been a trooper for 24 years. His son is a trooper in Tampa. He knew exactly what he was doing. He followed policy to a tee."

Troopers say there is no such thing as a routine traffic stop and they need to protect themselves.

Sgt. Jorge Delahiz from the Florida Highway Patrol said: "It's a reality check. People need to understand that one of the most dangerous things we do as law enforcement officers is a traffic stop. And when you're stopped, we're going to do things to protect ourselves. Some people don't understand it and don't like it but it's things we need to do to come home safely to our families."

Sottile was with the highway patrol for nearly 24 years. He is the state's 41st trooper to be killed in the line of duty.

Sottile is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, Nicholas III and Heather. Son Nicholas III is a trooper who works in the Tampa area.

Regarding the Death of Trooper Nick Sottile, Governor Charlie Crist said: "My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow Troopers. Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line everyday for the safety and security of our state and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices."

Funeral Arrangements have been made for Sergeant Nicholas G. Sottile. Viewing will be on Monday from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. located at the Memorial United Methodist Church at 500 Kent Avenue Lake Placid, Florida 33852.

Funeral Service will be on Tuesday, January 16 at 1 p.m. at the Restoration Church of the Highlands located at 8475 Sparta Road Sebring, Florida 33870 (At the corner of S.R. 66 and Sparta Road).

Suspects Denied Bond In FHP Trooper's Death
Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Central Florida 13 News

There are new developments in the deadly shooting of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper as the two suspects arrested in connection with the case are denied bond.

On Sunday, a judge ordered both 19-year-old Joshua Altersberger and 21-year-old Quintin Kinder to remain locked up.

Troopers say Altersberger shot and killed veteran highway patrol trooper Sgt. Nick Sottile following a traffic stop on Friday in Highlands County.

Troopers say Kinder ran away from the car shortly before the gunfire, but later turned himself in.

Altersberger is now charged with murder. Kinder is charged with trespassing but could face other charges.

Meanwhile, final goodbyes for Sottile begin Monday. A viewing will be held in Lake Placid for the 24 year veteran. His funeral will be on Tuesday in Sebring.

2 men held in death of FHP trooper
Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Melbourne Florida Today

BARTOW — Two suspects in the shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper were ordered held without bail today.

Joshua Lee Altersberger and Quintin Jerome Kinder appeared at the hearing before Polk County Judge Mary Catherine Green by video from the Highlands County jail.

Altersberger, 19, of Sebring, is charged with first-degree murder in the death of Sgt. Nicholas Sottile. Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga., is charged with trespassing in a cultivated grove.

Authorities have said Kinder fled on foot into an orange grove after Sottile stopped their vehicle Friday. Altersberger shot Sottile, 48, in the chest after the trooper called for backup, then fled the scene, according to FHP.

Both men were arrested Saturday.

The after-hours recording at the county public defender's office would not accept incoming messages Sunday night.

Sottile's funeral will be Tuesday in Sebring.

Suspects held in trooper's shooting
Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Bradenton Herald

LAKE PLACID - Two suspects in the shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper were arrested Saturday, authorities said.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, was arrested at his home in Sebring about 4:30 a.m. Saturday and was charged with first-degree murder in the death of Sergeant Nicholas Sottile a day earlier. A second man, 21-year-old Quintin Jerome Kinder, of Bainbridge, Ga., was also arrested, after giving himself up to Bradenton Police Department SWAT officers at about 6 a.m., but charges were pending.

The SWAT team had been assisting with the search near here.

Sottile, 48, observed Altersberger driving erratically Friday and pulled him over. As Sottile approached the vehicle, Kinder, the passenger, fled on foot to a nearby Orange grove, said Ernie Duarte, a spokesman for the highway patrol. Sottile went back to his patrol car to call for backup and then began walking toward the suspects' car when Altersberger shot him in the chest at 3:22 p.m., Duarte said.

Altersberger fled; Sottile was flown to Florida Hospital Lake Placid and pronounced dead. The suspects' vehicle was later found in an orange grove in Sebring.

Sottile had worked for the FHP for nearly 24 years. He is survived by a wife, Elizabeth; a daughter, Heather, of Orlando; and a son Nicholas, of Tampa, who also works for the FHP.

The last time a Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed was in May 1998, in Pasco County. James B. Crooks, 23, was attempting to apprehend a suspect who had just shot and killed two Tampa Police Department detectives. Crooks had been with FHP for nine months.

Sottile's funeral will be held Tuesday in Sebring. His death was noted by Gov. Charlie Crist.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow troopers," Crist said in a statement. "Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line everyday for the safety and security of our state and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices."

Trooper's accused killers will stay in jail

Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Tampa Bay 10 News

Bartow, Florida -- A judge ordered two men held without bond Sunday morning in connection with the fatal shooting of a state trooper Friday.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, faced a murder count and Quintin Kinder, 21, was charged with trespass on cultivated land. Other charges may be pending.

Their preliminary presentation hearing was via closed circuit TV from Highlands County, where the suspects are jailed, to Polk County, where the judge presided over the hearing.

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Lake Placid, Florida - Sgt. Nicholas Sottile was a popular face in Highlands County. He's described as an amazing trooper, as well as, a good husband and father, someone with a sense of humor. Sam Weaver says Sgt. Sottile often visited the Lake Placid Family Restaurant, "I've watched his children grow up, along with my children, my grand children it's a sad day for us, it really is."

Sgt. Sottile had made traffic stops for the last 24-years. But on Friday it was the stop on Hwy. 27 that took his life. Investigators say 19-year-old Joshua Altersberger shot Sgt. Sottile in the upper part of his chest. Passenger Quintin Kinder ran out of the car and into an orange grove, right before the shooting, realizing Altersberger was about to use his gun on the trooper. Kinder later turned himself in.

Since Sgt. Sottile did not call in a license plate number before stopping the car, investigators got help from witnesses in tracking down the alleged shooter. A woman named Shyne says Altersberger came to visit her son in Sebring after the shooting, "They were hanging out last night and this kid started bragging about it. Started bragging about it and some of the kids got together and my son and they all called police." She says it was a parent who actually notified authorities about Altersberger, "He was always so quiet and polite I would have never thought he would have done anything like this never."

It's being called a senseless death by residents and Florida Highway Patrol leaders like Colonel Christopher Knight, "He was an excellent trooper it's a great loss for this agency."

Sam says it's also a loss to the public he helped protect, "Everybody needs to pray for Nick's family, that's all they need right now. Tell all your family members that you love them, because you don't know...it could happen to you."

Altersberger was arrested in 2004 for possession of drugs within 1,000 feet of a school. Altersberger is charged with first degree murder. Kinder is charged with trespassing. Both make a first appearance in court on Sunday.

**Killed Trooper Will Be Missed
Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the WESH News**

LAKE PLACID, Fla. -- Law enforcement officers from across the state answered the call to help find the men accused of shooting and killing Sgt. Nicholas Sottile Saturday.

Police said the man who pulled the trigger meant to shoot and kill, WESH 2 News reported.

Sottile was gunned down as he stopped a driver who cut off another driver on U.S. Highway 27 near Lake Placid.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, is charged with the premeditated murder of the trooper. His passenger, Quintin Kinder, 21, ran out of the car moments before the shooting, police said.

Kinder is charged with trespassing on the orange grove where he hid overnight.

A manhunt turned up Altersberger first.

"At about 4:57 a.m. the troopers went in from Orlando and removed the shooting suspect from the residence without incident," Florida Highway Patrol trooper Kim Miller said.

Hours later, detectives said, Kinder walked out of the orange grove with his hands up in the air telling police that Altersberger said he would kill Sottile the second he walked up to the car.

FHP said they captured Altersberger because of so much help from citizens.

The driver, who Altersberger cut off on Highway 27, pulled over on the side of the road when he saw Sottile stop the driver. Police said he told Sottile that Altersberger was the man who cut him off.

The driver described the scene to investigators in detail, police said.

He told police he saw the trooper lean into the car and Altersberger shoot him in the neck. The driver said that Altersberger shot Sottile again after he fell back on the ground before driving off.

At Lake Placid Family restaurant, no one will ever forget trooper Sottile, the local man who grew up in Highlands County and then died there.

"If you didn't like Nick Sottile, you probably didn't like yourself. That's just the way we feel about him," restaurant owner Sam Weaver said.

Both of the suspects have a first appearance before a judge Monday morning. Sottile leaves behind a wife, a daughter and a son who is also a highway patrol man.

Funeral arrangements for Sottile are already set.

Viewing will be on Monday from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. at the Memorial United Methodist Church at 500 Kent Avenue in Lake Placid.

The funeral service will be on Tuesday at 1 p.m. at the Restoration Church of the Highlands located at 8475 Sparta Road in Sebring at the corner of State Road 66 and Sparta Road.

Slain Trooper's Hometown Mourns Hero
Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Highlands Today

LAKE PLACID - Sgt. Nicholas Sottile Sr. loved his job, and his death near the community where he grew up is a tragedy, his brother said Saturday.

The Florida Highway Patrol officer was shot Friday afternoon after pulling over a car for a traffic violation north of Lake Placid. He died less than two hours later. Two suspects in the shooting were arrested Saturday.

"It is terrible that some 19-year-old punk made my brother a hero," said Jimmy Sottile, who lives in Sebring. "My dad is 73 years old, and he didn't want to outlive his kids.

"This is a real tragedy and is a loss to the whole community," he said. "We have been here our whole lives.

"By the grace of God we will get through this; we're a very close family."

He said Highlands County Sheriff Susan Benton called him Saturday morning to tell him of the arrests.

Born in Avon Park, Nick Sottile was raised in Lake Placid and graduated from Lake Placid High School, his brother said. Nick worked briefly after high school before joining the Florida Highway Patrol.

"He worked in Miami and survived Miami only to be killed in his hometown," Jimmy Sottile said.

Nick was a 24-year veteran of the patrol and could have retired in a year if he chose to, patrol Director Col. Christopher Knight said.

Knight said the best way to describe Sottile was as a "super trooper."

"He was a friend to all of us," he said. "He was an excellent man."

"He just loved what he did and didn't shirk his responsibility," Jimmy Sottile said. "He took his job very seriously; he earned his money."

In his spare time, Nick "was a fantastic cook," his brother said. He also enjoyed hunting.

Sottile is also survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, daughter Heather, 19, and son Nicholas II, 22, who is a Florida Highway Patrol trooper in the Tampa area.

Elizabeth is the girls soccer coach at Lake Placid High School.

"I knew her husband and taught both of her kids," school Athletic Director Cindy Rivers said. "Actually, I went to school with her and her brother and ... what do you say? What do you say? What do you do?"

"Obviously, the whole school, faculty and staff will be there in any capacity that she needs. You don't know what to say. You don't know what to do."

SERVICES

Visitation will be held from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Monday at Memorial United Methodist Church, 500 Kent Ave., Lake Placid.

The funeral will be at 1 p.m. Tuesday at Restoration Church of the Highlands, 8475 Sparta Road, Sebring.

Nick Sottile Devoted His Life To His Job And Family Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Highlands Today

LAKE PLACID — Sgt. Nick Sottile was remembered Saturday as a super trooper, caring man and a fantastic cook by those who knew him.

The Florida Highway Patrol officer was shot Friday afternoon after reportedly pulling over a Toyota Camry on U.S. 27 north of Lake Placid. He died later at Florida Hospital Lake Placid.

His brother, Jimmy Sottile, said Highlands County Sheriff Susan Benton called him Saturday morning to report that the two suspects law enforcement officers were searching for had been apprehended.

"It is terrible that some 19-year-old punk made my brother a hero," Sottile said, adding that he was glad no one else was hurt. "My dad is 73 years old and he didn't want to outlive his kids.

"This is a real tragedy and is a loss to the whole community," he said. "We have been here our whole lives.

"By the grace of God we will get through this; we're a very close family."

Born in Avon Park, Nick Sottile was raised in Lake Placid and graduated from Lake Placid High School, his brother said. Nick worked briefly after high school before joining the FHP.

"He worked in Miami and survived Miami only to be killed in his hometown," Jimmy Sottile said.

Nick was a 24-year veteran of the patrol, and could have retired in a year if he chose to do so, according to Florida Highway Patrol Director Col. Christopher A. Knight.

Knight said the best way to describe Sottile was as a "super trooper."

“He was a friend to all of us,” he said. “He was an excellent man.”

“He just loved what he did and didn’t shirk his responsibility,” Jimmy Sottile said. “He took his job very seriously; he earned his money.”

In his spare time, Nick loved to cook for people and “was a fantastic cook,” Jimmy Sottile said. He also enjoyed hunting.

Sottile is also survived by his wife, Elizabeth, daughter Heather and son Nicholas II, also a Florida Highway Patrol trooper, Knight said.

Elizabeth is the girls soccer coach at Lake Placid High School.

“I knew her husband and taught both of her kids,” said Cindy Rivers, Lake Placid’s athletic director. “Actually, I went to school with her and her brother and ... what do you say? What do you say? What do you do? Obviously, the whole school, faculty and staff will be there in any capacity that she needs. You don’t know what to say. You don’t know what to do.”

Pair held in shooting of FHP trooper

Published on Sunday, January 14, 2007, in the Ocala Star-Banner

LAKE PLACID - Two suspects in the shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper were arrested Saturday, authorities said.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, was arrested at his home in Sebring about 4:30 a.m. Saturday and was charged with first-degree murder in the death of Sgt. Nicholas Sottile, who died on Friday. A second man, 21-year-old Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga., also was arrested, after giving himself up to a search team at about 6 a.m., but charges were pending.

Sottile, 48, observed Altersberger driving erratically Friday and pulled him over. As Sottile approached the vehicle, Kinder, the passenger, fled on foot to a nearby orange grove, said Ernie Duarte, a spokesman for the highway patrol.

Sottile went back to his patrol car to call for backup, and then began walking toward the suspects' car when Altersberger shot him in the chest at 3:22 p.m., Duarte said. Altersberger fled. Sottile was flown to Florida Hospital Lake Placid where he was pronounced dead. The suspects' vehicle later was found in an orange grove in Sebring.

Sottile had worked for the FHP for nearly 24 years. He is survived by a wife, Elizabeth; a daughter, Heather, of Orlando; and a son Nicholas, of Tampa, who also works for the FHP.

The last time a Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed was in May 1998, in Pasco County. James B. Crooks, 23, was attempting to apprehend a suspect who had just shot and killed two Tampa Police Department detectives. Crooks had been with FHP for nine months.

Sottile's funeral will be held Tuesday in Sebring. His death was noted by Gov. Charlie Crist.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow troopers," Crist said in a statement. "Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line every day for the safety and security of our state, and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices."

Two suspects in custody in trooper's shooting death

Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the Florida Times-Union

LAKE PLACID, Fla. - Two suspects in the shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper were arrested Saturday, authorities said.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, was arrested at his home in Sebring about 4:30 a.m. Saturday and was charged with first-degree murder in the death of Sergeant Nicholas Sottile a day earlier. A second man, 21-year-old Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga., was also arrested, after giving himself up to a search team at about 6 a.m., but charges were pending.

Sottile, 48, observed Altersberger driving erratically Friday and pulled him over. As Sottile approached the vehicle, Kinder, the passenger, fled on foot to a nearby Orange grove, said Ernie Duarte, a spokesman for the highway patrol. Sottile went back to his patrol car to call for backup and then began walking toward the suspects' car when Altersberger shot him in the chest at 3:22 p.m., Duarte said.

Altersberger fled; Sottile was flown to Florida Hospital Lake Placid and pronounced dead. The suspects' vehicle was later found in an orange grove in Sebring.

Sottile had worked for the FHP for nearly 24 years. He is survived by a wife, Elizabeth; a daughter, Heather, of Orlando; and a son Nicholas, of Tampa, who also works for the FHP.

The last time a Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed was in May 1998, in Pasco County. James B. Crooks, 23, was attempting to apprehend a suspect who had just shot and killed two Tampa Police Department detectives. Crooks had been with FHP for nine months.

Sottile's funeral will be held Tuesday in Sebring. His death was noted by Gov. Charlie Crist.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow troopers," Crist said in a statement. "Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line everyday for the safety and security of our state and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices."

Suspect bragged about wanting to shoot a cop

Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the Tampa Bay 10 News

Lake Placid, Florida - Affidavits released by the the Florida Department of Law Enforcement give more details about the shooting that killed a Florida Highway Patrol Trooper during a traffic stop in Highlands County Friday afternoon.

Investigators say they have also recovered the gun used in the murder of 48-year-old Sgt. Nicholas Sottile.

The shooting happened on Hwy. 27 between Lake Placid and Sebring.

Investigators have charged Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, with first degree murder and are questioning Quintin Kinder, 21, who at this point, is only charged with Trespassing on Posted Horticulture Property.

The Probable Cause Affidavit gives this synopsis:

Kinder said Altersberger swerved in his Toyota while driving on Hwy. 27 and caught the attention of Trooper Sottile. Altersberger continued to drive north as the Trooper came up behind them. Kinder says before Altersberger pulled over, he told Kinder he was going to shoot the Trooper. Kinder says he thought Altersberger was serious and knew there was a gun in the driver's side door. When Altersberger stopped his car, Kinder says he bailed and ran into a nearby orange grove.

The documents also contain the statement from another driver who witnessed the killing.

A man was driving on Hwy 27 when the Toyota cut him off in traffic. The driver says he saw Sgt. Sottile pull over that Toyota, so he stopped behind the Trooper's vehicle, intending to get out and tell him about the Toyota driver's aggressive driving.

Sgt. Sottile ordered the witness to get back into his vehicle. The witness says he then saw a black male exit the passenger's side of the Toyota and run into the orange grove. He says the Trooper approached the Toyota and ordered the driver to place his hands on the steering wheel. Sgt. Sottile then leaned into the driver's window but the driver produced a handgun and fired one round into the Trooper's neck.

The Trooper reached for his radio on his lapel to remove it, then collapsed. The witness says 15 seconds later, the Toyota driver pointed the gun out the car window and fired a second shot.

The affidavit says the witness picked Altersberger out of a photo pack as the driver of the Toyota and the person who shot and killed Sgt. Sottile.

Sgt. Sottile had been with the Florida Highway Patrol for nearly 25 years.

He was married and has two children, his son is also an FHP Trooper.

Governor Charlie Crist issued this statement:

“My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow Troopers. Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line everyday for the safety and security of our state and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices.”

**Two Men In Custody After Shooting Death Of State Trooper
Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the WFTV News**

HIGHLANDS COUNTY, Fla. -- The Florida Highway Patrol announced that two men have been taken into custody in connection with the shooting death of FHP Sergeant Nicholas Sottile, who was gunned down Friday afternoon in Highlands County.

In a news conference Saturday morning, it was disclosed that 19 year old Joshua Lee Altersberger of Sebring has been charged with first degree murder,

A second man, 21 year old Quintin Kinder of Bainbridge, Georgia, surrendered to police who were manning a perimeter in an orange grove, and was being interviewed Saturday.

The incident began Friday afternoon when Sgt. Sottile, a 24 year veteran of the Highway Patrol, pulled over a 2003 Toyota Camry on U.S. 27 north of Lake Placid for a traffic violation.

The driver of the car reportedly shot Sottile, then took off northbound on 27.

A passenger jumped out of the car and ran into the woods.

Sottile was able to radio in a description of the car and its tag number.

He was rushed to Florida Hospital in Lake Placid where he died a short time later.

Sottile was 48 years old and had a son, also named Nicholas, who is also a state trooper assigned to the Tampa area.

He was the 41st member of the Highway Patrol to die in the line of duty in Florida.

**Two Suspects Captured In Fatal Shooting Of State Trooper
Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the WFTV News**

HIGHLANDS COUNTY, Fla. -- Two suspects have been arrested in connection with the shooting of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper in Highlands County.

Few Details have been released, but an FHP spokeswoman said the two were captured Saturday morning.

A news conference is scheduled for to discuss details of the arrests and release further information on Friday's fatal shooting.

From the ground and the air, law enforcement officers hunted for the two suspected gunmen who shot and killed FHP Trooper Nicholas Sottile. Officers searched cars and hovered above from a helicopter Friday night.

Dodson said, "It's a tragic lose for the Highway Patrol because he was a good guy. I knew him personally. I knew him for 21 years and he was an awesome guy."

Investigators said the men opened fire and shot Sgt. Sottile in the chest during a traffic stop on US-27, North of Lake Placid. That's when the Trooper radioed for help.

"He called in on the radio and said, 'Can you send me some help? I need some back-up'," said Dodson.

One suspect was seen running into the neighboring orange groves. The other sped away. State Troopers said it's a terrible loss and they will do whatever it takes to find the men who killed one of their own.

Dodson said, "That vehicle fled the area. It traveled North on US-27 and was later lost by witnesses."

Sgt. Sottile was not wearing a bullet proof vest because Troopers are given the option not to wear them.

Breaking News: Florida Highway Patrol Officer Shot And Killed During A Traffic Stop Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the All Headline News

Lake Placid, FL (AHN) - Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nicholas Sottile, a 24-year veteran, was shot and killed Friday afternoon.

Sottile stopped a 2003 Toyota Camry for a traffic violation northbound on U.S. 27 north of Lake Placid at about 3:22 p.m., said FHP Spokesperson Lt. Doug Dodson.

Shortly after the stop, the passenger exited the vehicle and ran into a nearby orange grove. Sottile radioed for backup and to alert other officers that a passenger fled on foot, Dodson said.

The driver, later identified as Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, of Sebring, allegedly shot Sottile and drove off, Dodson said. Sottile died shortly after arriving at Florida Hospital in Lake Placid.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow Troopers. Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line everyday for the safety and security of our state and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices," said Governor Charlie Crist.

After interviewing dozens of witnesses and following up countless leads, Dodson said the Camry was located in an orange grove in Sebring. Officers found Altersberger at a Sebring residence. He was arrested and charged with 1st degree murder.

The passenger, identified as Quintin J. Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga., surrendered to a team searching the perimeter in an orange grove, Dodson said. Kinder was being questioned by FHP.

Dodson said the firearm used in the shooting has been recovered and the investigation continues by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

**Two men being held in the Highlands County Jail after fatal shooting of trooper
Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the Tampa Bay 10 News**

Lake Placid, Florida - Sgt. Nicholas Sottile was a popular face in Highlands County. He's described as an amazing trooper, as well as, a good husband and father, someone with a sense of humor. Sam Weaver says Sgt. Sottile often visited the Lake Placid Family Restaurant, "I've watched his children grow up, along with my children, my grand children it's a sad day for us, it really is."

Sgt. Sottile had made traffic stops for the last 24-years. But on Friday it was the stop on Hwy. 27 that took his life. Investigators say 19-year-old Joshua Altersberger shot Sgt. Sottile in the upper part of his chest. Passenger Quintin Kinder ran out of the car and into an orange grove, right before the shooting, realizing Altersberger was about to use his gun on the trooper. Kinder later turned himself in.

Since Sgt. Sottile did not call in a license plate number before stopping the car, investigators got help from witnesses in tracking down the alleged shooter. A woman named Shyne says Altersberger came to visit her son in Sebring after the shooting, "They were hanging out last night and this kid started bragging about it. Started bragging about it and some of the kids got together and my son and they all called police." She says it was a parent who actually notified authorities about Altersberger, "He was always so quiet and polite I would have never thought he would have done anything like this never."

It's being called a senseless death by residents and Florida Highway Patrol leaders like Colonel Christopher Knight, "He was an excellent trooper it's a great loss for this agency."

Sam says it's also a loss to the public he helped protect, "Everybody needs to pray for Nick's family, that's all they need right now. Tell all your family members that you love them, because you don't know...it could happen to you."

Altersberger was arrested in 2004 for possession of drugs within 1,000 feet of a school. Altersberger is charged with first degree murder. Kinder is charged with trespassing. Both make a first appearance in court on Sunday.

Trooper with Tampa ties is killed in traffic stop
Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the St. Petersburg Times

It was a routine traffic stop, the kind 24-year Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nick Sottile Sr. had surely done hundreds of times before.

But on Friday afternoon, after he stopped a car in Highlands County on U.S. 27 north of Lake Placid, something went terribly wrong.

At 3:22 p.m. Sottile was fatally shot, authorities said.

Deputies from several counties were searching for two people late Friday. They were last seen heading north, one on foot and another in a white or beige Toyota Camry with tinted windows, the News-Sun in Sebring reported. Lake Placid is about 100 miles southeast of Tampa, in the central part of the state.

Sottile, 48, worked in Tampa for two years before returning to his home turf in Highlands County a year ago, Trooper Larry Coggins said. He leaves behind a wife, Elizabeth; a daughter, Heather, of Orlando; and a son, Nick, of Tampa, who also works as a Highway Patrol trooper.

On Friday night, friends and colleagues remembered the veteran trooper as a jovial man who loved his job, his family and his community.

"This is not only a sad day for FHP, but it is a sad day for the state of Florida," Coggins said.

During his career, Sottile worked in Tampa, Miami, Bradenton and Highlands County, Coggins said. His personnel file, Coggins said, is "jam packed with commendations from the public."

Sottile's son and namesake followed in his footsteps, largely influenced by his father, a friend said.

"He saw how much his dad enjoyed what he did," said Ralph Carr, 59, who works with Sottile's brother in Sebring and first met the trooper in 1985. "I have never heard that man complain about anything - not the first thing."

Carr, who was once a booking officer for the Highlands County Sheriff's Office, recalled a time when he and Sottile were preparing to testify in a driving under the influence case when the judge sent a bailiff out of the courtroom to ask them to hold it down.

They were laughing so hard, Carr said, they were disturbing court proceedings. "He had a wicked sense of humor," Carr said.

Nickie, as he was known to his friends, was sandy-haired, a "robust, outdoors type," Carr said.

"He reminded you of a well rounded country boy."

Sottile was pronounced dead from a single gunshot wound after being flown to Florida Hospital Lake Placid, said Kathy Albritton, a spokeswoman for the Florida Hospital Heartland Medical Center, which owns the Lake Placid hospital.

Hillsborough County Sheriff David Gee recalled Sottile as a highly regarded trooper while he was in Tampa, said Gee's spokeswoman, Debbie Carter.

The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office dispatched a helicopter to Highlands County to assist in the search, which involved 400 law enforcement officers. Authorities did not immediately release other details of how the shooting occurred.

Sottile is the 41st trooper to die in the line of duty, Coggins said. The last time a trooper was shot and killed was in May 1998, in Pasco County. James B. Crooks, 23, was

attempting to apprehend a man who had just killed two Tampa Police Department detectives. Crooks had been with the highway patrol for nine months.

2 in custody in FHP trooper's shooting death in Highlands County
Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel

LAKE PLACID -- Two suspects in the shooting death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper were arrested Saturday, authorities said.

Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, was arrested at his home in Sebring about 4:30 a.m. Saturday and was charged with first-degree murder in the death of Sergeant Nicholas Sottile a day earlier. A second man, 21-year-old Quintin Jerome Kinder, 21, of Bainbridge, Ga., was also arrested, after giving himself up to a search team at about 6 a.m., but charges were pending.

Sottile, 48, observed Altersberger driving erratically Friday and pulled him over. As Sottile approached the vehicle, Kinder, the passenger, fled on foot to a nearby Orange grove, said Ernie Duarte, a spokesman for the highway patrol. Sottile went back to his patrol car to call for backup and then began walking toward the suspects' car when Altersberger shot him in the chest at 3:22 p.m., Duarte said.

Altersberger fled; Sottile was flown to Florida Hospital Lake Placid and pronounced dead. The suspects' vehicle was later found in an orange grove in Sebring.

Sottile had worked for the FHP for nearly 24 years. He is survived by a wife, Elizabeth; a daughter, Heather, of Orlando; and a son Nicholas, of Tampa, who also works for the FHP.

The last time a Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed was in May 1998, in Pasco County. James B. Crooks, 23, was attempting to apprehend a suspect who had just shot and killed two Tampa Police Department detectives. Crooks had been with FHP for nine months.

Sottile's funeral will be held Tuesday in Sebring. His death was noted by Gov. Charlie Crist.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow troopers," Crist said in a statement. "Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line everyday for the safety and security of our state and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices."

ON-DUTY TROOPER SLAIN
Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the Highlands Today

LAKE PLACID — A Florida Highway Patrol trooper died Friday evening after being shot during a routine stop along U.S. 27 between Lake Placid and Sebring.

Nick Sottile died after being admitted to surgery, according to Cathy Albritton, director of marketing and public relations for Florida Hospital Lake Placid.

Sottile made a routine traffic stop on northbound U.S. 27 near Witmore Curve, south of State Road 66, when one suspect fled the vehicle on foot. As Sottile chased the suspect on foot, the suspect turned and shot him, according to reports. The driver of the white Toyota Camry fled the scene in the car.

About 200 law enforcement officers from surrounding agencies descended on the scene of the shooting, searching for the suspects. Troopers from Florida Highway Patrol were joined by officers from Sebring, Avon Park, Lake Wales and Lake Placid police departments and deputies from Polk, Orange and Highlands counties sheriff's officers, who all helped with the search. Law enforcement poured into Highlands County to assist, hauling bicycles and ATVs.

The suspect on foot was described as a black or Hispanic male of small stature wearing a white tank top, shorts and a baseball cap.

The man in the car is described as a light-skinned Hispanic or white male and was driving a car with T2 in the license plate.

At press time, neither suspect had been apprehended.

Helicopters and planes searched the orange groves on either side of the highway in regular search patterns. Officers and canine units also searched on foot.

Grim-faced officers comforted one another at the scene, as crime scene investigators used metal detectors to search the ground for shell casings or other evidence around the patrol unit of the officer.

Traffic was backed up along U.S. 27 in both directions, with one lane open at the crime scene.

Highway Patrolman Killed Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the Tampa Tribune

Dying from a gunshot wound, Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Nick Sottile Sr. mustered just enough strength to radio for help.

Minutes later, he lay on an operating table at Florida Hospital-Lake Placid, a couple miles south of where he had been shot on a bucolic stretch of U.S. 27 rimmed by orange groves.

Sottile, 48, was pronounced dead shortly before 5 p.m. Friday. For hours afterward, hundreds of troopers and law enforcement officers from across the state scoured the area for the two men said to be involved in his killing.

At the same time, investigators tried to stitch together the events that made Sottile the 41st Florida trooper to die in the line of duty since 1936.

Highway patrol spokesmen Larry Coggins and Sgt. Daniel Taylor gave this account:

Sottile pulled over a car at 3:22 p.m. between Lake Placid and Sebring.

A passenger hopped out and started running. As Sottile chased the man toward an orange grove, the man turned and shot the trooper.

The driver of the car took off, driving north on U.S. 27.

Sottile then radioed for help.

Friday, the patrol and hundreds of other law enforcement officials were searching for the two men.

Officers with police dogs roamed area citrus groves. Elsewhere, troopers and other law enforcement officers searched the region for the car, described as a white or cream-colored Toyota Camry with T2 on the license plate.

"Right now we have a job to do, and that job is we have to find a cop killer and we have to bury a trooper," Coggins said.

"When something like this happens, it ripples throughout the whole law enforcement community," he said.

Law enforcement officers from several branches and across the state were assisting in the search. A command post was set up near the shooting scene. A Florida Highway Patrol helicopter was deployed, Coggins said.

Traffic on U.S. 27 was backed up in both directions.

A 24-year veteran of the highway patrol, Sottile once worked in the Tampa area but most recently was assigned to Troop F, which has its headquarters in Bradenton and covers 10 counties including Highlands, Sarasota and Manatee.

"His personnel file is just jammed with commendations," Coggins said.

Sottile, who lived in Lake Placid, leaves behind a wife, Elizabeth; a daughter, Heather, of Orlando; and a son, Nick, of Tampa, who works for the Florida Highway Patrol at Troop C in Tampa.

Bill Jeter of Sebring, who was Sottile's stepfather for about 10 years while married to Sottile's mother, Ruth, recalled Sottile as a "church-going man" who loved tending to his cows and horses.

He said he hadn't spoken to Sottile for a few years but remembers him as being proud of his highway patrol service.

"He liked it very much. He was that kind of guy. He was a good guy, a family guy. He always talked about his family," Jeter said.

Forty troopers, in addition to Sottile, have died in the line of duty since 1936, according to an online memorial set up by highway patrol.

The trooper last shot and killed was James B. Crooks in 1988. He was shot in Pasco County.

Man Charged In Connection With Trooper's Death Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the WESH News

LAKE PLACID, Fla. -- Police charged one man with the murder of a FHP Trooper who was shot and killed Friday afternoon.

According to police, Joshua Lee Altersberger, 19, was arrested at 5 a.m. Saturday after a massive search for him and the Toyota Camry he and another man were driving was found, WESH 2 News reported.

The other man in the vehicle, Quintin J. Kinder, 21, was also in the vehicle and led investigators to Altersberger, police said.

Kinder was charged with trespassing on a cultivated grove and is being held under \$10,000 bond, according to police. Police said his cooperation is why he is facing a minor charge.

Police said Altersberger has been charged with first-degree murder.

The car was found in an orange grove in Sebring after dozens of witnesses were questioned, police said.

Sgt. Nicholas Sottile, 48, a 24-year veteran of the FHP, was conducting a traffic stop just north of Lake Placid in Highlands County.

According to the police reports, Kinder told investigators that Altersberger was swerving in and out of traffic and cut off a truck driver and that is why the trooper pulled him over.

Kinder also told police that Altersberger drove for two minutes before stopping the vehicle and that is when he confessed he planned to shoot the officer.

He told investigators he ran into the orange grove immediately when the car stopped because he knew Altersberger had a handgun and believed he would shoot the trooper.

The truck driver, who was cut off by Altersberger, stopped behind the trooper during the traffic stop and witnessed the shooting. He told investigators that Sottile approached the vehicle, told the driver to put his hands outside the car, leaned in the window and was shot by Altersberger in the neck.

According to police, the truck driver also told police that Sottile reached for his radio but was shot again by Altersberger 15 seconds after the initial shot.

Sottile died shortly after arriving at the Florida Hospital in Lake Placid.

Police said Altersberger then fled to a female friend's house and confessed to the shootings, and took her to the orange grove to clean up the vehicle and get rid of the gun and the car.

After returning home alone, she later called police, investigators said.

Gov. Charlie Crist released a statement to the trooper's family Saturday afternoon.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the family of Sgt. Nick Sottile and his fellow Troopers. Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line everyday for the safety and security of our state and I speak for all Floridians in offering our deepest gratitude for their sacrifices," he said.

Funeral arrangements for Sottile are already set.

Viewing will be on Monday from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. at the Memorial United Methodist Church at 500 Kent Avenue in Lake Placid.

The funeral service will be on Tuesday at 1 p.m. at the Restoration Church of the Highlands located at 8475 Sparta Road in Sebring at the corner of State Road 66 and Sparta Road.

Manhunt bears down on killers of trooper

Published on Saturday, January 13, 2007, in the Orlando Sentinel

Florida Highway Patrol investigators conducted a massive manhunt late Friday after a veteran trooper was shot and killed while making a routine traffic stop among the orange groves of rural Highlands County.

The slaying at 3:22 p.m. was north of Lake Placid, a hamlet of about 1,800 people near Sebring.

Sgt. Nicholas G. Sottile was on U.S. Highway 27 south of Lake Francis Road -- less than two miles from the town's Highway Patrol station -- when he pulled over a small, light-colored sedan.

Two men were inside. One took out a handgun and fired a single shot at Sottile at close range, hitting his chest, said Sgt. Jorge Delahoz, an FHP spokesman.

Fatally wounded, Sottile radioed for help. The two men took off. One drove north in the sedan on U.S. 27, and the other dashed into the orange groves.

The trooper was rushed by ambulance to Florida Hospital Lake Placid, where he was pronounced dead about an hour later. Sottile, 48, had worked for the Highway Patrol for 24 years. He was the 41st trooper to die in the line of duty.

A passing motorist who witnessed the incident told troopers the stopped sedan resembled a Toyota Camry, and that a "T" and "2" were on the license plate. The witness gave a vague description of the sedan's driver. One occupant wore a white shirt, blue jeans and a ball cap, Delahoz said the witness told investigators.

Authorities said anyone who saw the traffic stop or the fleeing car should call the FHP at 1-239-938-1800. By late Friday, tips were already coming in.

Lake Placid is about 100 miles south of Orlando, just northwest of Lake Okeechobee.

Troopers recall comrade

Troopers remembered Sottile as a dedicated lawman with an excellent record. During his time with the agency, he worked from South Florida to Tampa doing everything from patrolling roads and investigating traffic homicides to supervising other troopers. He was assigned to the Arcadia-area troop at the time of his death.

"He died doing what he enjoyed doing, and that was law enforcement," said another Highway Patrol spokesman, Trooper Larry Coggins.

Sottile passed his love of policing to his son, Nicholas G. Sottile II. He graduated from the Highway Patrol's training academy in 2005 and is assigned to the Tampa area.

The elder Sottile also is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and his adult daughter, Heather.

Officer fatally shot in '98

The last trooper shot and killed in the line of duty was James B. Crooks, 23, who was trying to capture Hank Earl Carr, 30, a gunman who had just shot two Tampa police detectives May 19, 1998, during an investigation into the death of the young son of Carr's girlfriend.

Carr killed himself several hours later, at the conclusion of a standoff, and his girlfriend, Bernice Bowen, was eventually convicted of helping him kill the officers and her son.

More recently, two troopers were killed in 2004 in chases, including Trooper Darryl Haywood, who crashed into a tree pursuing a motorcyclist on Interstate 4. The motorcyclist was convicted in his death and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

As night fell Friday, saddened Lake Placid residents brought food, water and condolences to the scene for tired troopers.

Hundreds swarm area

About 300 law-enforcement officers from West Palm Beach to Orange County swarmed the orange groves, bringing bloodhounds, police dogs, helicopters and tactical teams to find the assailants.

Seven Orange County bloodhound and K-9 units were on the scene, Delahoz said. Thirty Orlando-area troopers -- including tactical-team members and K-9 units -- assisted as well, said Trooper Kim Miller, an agency spokeswoman.

The gunman is a threat to anyone who crosses his path, Miller said.

"Not that it's a wake-up call for us, but it is," she said. "If he's willing to kill a cop, then all bets are off. He'd kill anyone. I sure hope they catch this guy."

FHP Trooper Shot, Killed During Traffic Stop
Published on Friday, January 12, 2007, in the WESH News

LAKE PLACID, Fla. -- A Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed during a routine traffic stop in Highlands County Friday.

Sgt. Nicholas G. Sottile II, 48, was shot in Highlands County just north of the city of Lake Placid at 3:22 p.m.

Authorities were searching for two occupants of a light-colored "Toyota Camry-type vehicle," who were last seen leaving the area, one on foot and the other in the vehicle, the FHP said in a statement.

The shooting occurred on U.S. Highway 27 between Sebring and Lake Placid.

Sottile was shot while attempting to make a traffic stop. Authorities were searching for two culprits who were last seen heading north, The News-Sun in Sebring reported.

Sottile was pronounced dead after being flown to Florida Hospital Lake Placid, said Kathy Albritton, spokeswoman for the Florida Hospital Heartland Medical Center, which owns the Lake Placid hospital.

About 400 law enforcement officers were searching for the two people, Sgt. Jorge Delahoz, Florida Highway Patrol spokesman, said.

Delahoz said authorities do not know why Sottile stopped the vehicle.

The gunman is considered a threat to anyone who crosses his path, Trooper Kim Miller said.

Sottile had worked for the FHP for nearly 24 years. He leaves behind a wife, Elizabeth; a daughter, Heather, of Orlando; and a son Nicholas, of Tampa, who also works for the FHP.

The last time a Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed was in May 1998, in Pasco County. James B. Crooks, 23, was attempting to apprehend a suspect who had just shot and killed two Tampa Police Department detectives. Crooks had been with FHP for nine months.

FHP trooper shot, killed during traffic stop
Published on Friday, January 12, 2007, in the Miami Herald

A veteran Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed during a traffic stop in Lake Placid in Central Florida Friday afternoon.

The dead trooper was identified as Sgt. Nicholas G. Sottile, 48, of Lake Placid. Sottile worked in Miami-Dade County during the early to mid-1980's, FHP Lt. Col. Ken Howes said.

Sottile, who had been with FHP for nearly 24 years, is married and has two children, one of whom is also an FHP trooper.

The shooting happened at 3:22 p.m., Howes said. As of late Friday police were searching for two men, including one who ran from the scene on U.S. 27. The other fled in a beige Toyota Camry, the FHP said.

Howes said FHP troopers, some with tracking dogs, were called in from throughout Central Florida to help local police search for the two suspects.

Since 1939, Howes said, 39 other troopers and one FHP auxiliary trooper have died in the line of duty.

"It's a dangerous job. It's high risk," Howes said. "Troopers know that. They are out there protecting the citizens of the state of Florida."

Sottile is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, daughter Heather and son Nicholas.

FHP Trooper Shot, Killed in Lake Placid
Published on Friday, January 12, 2007, in the Lakeland Ledger

A Florida Highway Patrol trooper died after being shot at this afternoon at Highway U.S. 27 and Whitmore Curve in Lake Placid, officials said.

The trooper was shot after stopping a car between Sebring and Lake Placid at 3:32 p.m. He had been admitted to surgery at Florida Hospital-Lake Placid before he died.

Troopers are searching for a white or Hispanic male in a white or tan Camry-type sedan.

The Polk County Sheriff's Office and FHP are assisting the Highlands County Sheriff's Office.

No further details are available at this time.