

Trooper Robert G. Smith
End of Watch: Saturday, July 26, 1997



'Ride for Remembrance' stops in Fort Pierce
Published on Thursday, December 8, 2005, in the Ft. Pierce Tribune

Law enforcement officers representing agencies throughout the state stopped at the Fort Pierce Police Department Wednesday for "A Ride For Remembrance," honoring officers killed in the line of duty during 2005. The 9th Annual Tour de Force police charity bicycle ride began Monday in North Miami Beach and will culminate in Daytona Beach Shores Friday.

The five-day ride averages approximately 50 to 55 miles each day at a moderate pace of 15 to 17 m.p.h. and will travel through 42 law enforcement jurisdictions. The tour is supported by police escorts provided by Florida Highway Patrol, Sheriff's Departments and police agencies throughout the state. The bike tour is not a race, but "an awareness ride," according to the agency. The inaugural 1997 tour was dedicated to Trooper Robert Smith, who was killed in the line of duty by a drunk driver.

The tour has grown in size each year and the non-profit charity organization has raised more than \$75,000 for families of fallen officers and law enforcement organizations since it began in 1997.

This year, the goal of the remembrance ride is to raise \$15,000.

Last year, 500 law enforcement personnel from across the state participated with 32 riders completing the entire 270-mile ride to Daytona Beach Shores. A total of \$16,000 was distributed to eight families for the 2004 tour.

Officers roll through Indian River for fallen lawmen

Published on Thursday, December 8, 2005, in the Vero Beach Press Journal

Deputy Ron Bair said he rides his bicycle at least 40 miles every other day to stay in shape.

However, his bike ride Wednesday was for a more rewarding purpose; to raise money for families of law enforcement officers who were killed this year in the line of duty.

"This is a ride of remembrance," he said. "Really, it's a tribute to the fallen officers and a way we can help out their families. It's a really neat program they put together."

Bair, 38, joined about 20 other officers from agencies across the state Wednesday in the local leg of the ninth annual Tour de Force bicycle ride.

The 270-mile event started Monday in North Miami Beach and will conclude Friday in Daytona Beach. Each segment is an average of about 50 miles a day.

The officers, who mostly were wearing cyclist uniforms and gear, started Wednesday in Port St. Lucie, rode north on U.S. 1 through Indian River County and finished in Palm Bay.

They kept a continual pace of about 15 mph, Bair said, with the only hindrance Wednesday being the wind at their faces. Besides a few sprinkles, the weather so far has cooperated.

They were escorted by a multitude of volunteers, supporters and police cars. Uniformed officers with their vehicles' emergency lights and sirens on blocked off the outer northbound lane on U.S. 1 and approaching streets so the cyclists didn't have to wait for traffic.

"Try riding up U.S. 1 without a police escort. You will get run over," Bair said about noon Wednesday during a short break at a gas station at 17th Street and U.S. 1.

The ride started in 1997 in remembrance of Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Robert Smith, who was killed in the line of duty by a drunken driver. Since then, more than \$75,000 has been raised for the families of fallen officers.

Cyclists ride through 42 law enforcement jurisdictions.

This year, the event is expected to raise more than \$10,000 for the families of six officers killed this year, said Detective Mike DeMarcus of the North Miami Beach Police Department. He said the ride began small, but has grown to an annual, multi-agency event.

"With this year's hurricanes still affecting most of South Florida, we don't think we will do as well as we did last year. There are less people riding this year," he said, adding previous events had more than 50 officers cycling the whole length. "We pick up an officer or two along the way. We really have a good time with this."

Bair said he only learned of the event about week ago, but managed to obtain about \$350 in sponsorships. Although Bair only could ride through Wednesday's session, he said his goal is to complete the full trip during next year's event.

"I just love to get out there and ride. It's not about going fast, its about doing it for the health aspect," he said. "This probably will become an annual event for me."

Peddling toward relief for families of fallen officers
Published on Thursday, December 8, 2005, in the Miami Herald

Dozens of police officers from around the state took off Monday for the five-day Tour de Force bicycle ride to raise funds for the families of fallen officers.

North Miami Beach police chief Linda Loizzo said the gifts go to help children left motherless or fatherless. So far this year, the tour has raised \$10,000 for the families of six officers who died in the line of duty.

Money came from T-shirt sales, corporate sponsorships, a series of \$10-a-plate luncheons at Outback Steakhouse, and a raffle on Monday that raised \$3,000.

"As a survivor myself, the wife of a slain officer, I can tell you this means a lot to the families," Loizzo said. In 1980, her husband Carl Mertes was shot while chasing a car thief in North Miami, leaving her with three small children.

The tour started in 1997, with the help of North Miami Beach Det. Mike DeMarcus, to help the family of Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Robert Smith, a father of 4-year-old twins who was killed on Interstate 95 in Broward when a drunk driver rear-ended his cruiser. Since then the tour has raised more than \$75,000.

As the riders headed out from North Miami Beach, dignitaries read letter of appreciation from survivors and the "honor roll" of those who died this year in Florida. They included Fort Lauderdale patrolman Jose Diaz, who died in a fall Oct. 8.

One letter of appreciation came from a couple who adopted Tucker, the son of Andy Brown, a Florida Highway Patrol sergeant killed in a car accident while chasing a suspect in Columbia County last year. The family received \$2,000, which they said they'll put aside for Tucker's college fund.

"He's got a lot of sadness, but we can't help but think that these acts of kindness along the way have lifted his spirits," the letter states.

Three officers were killed by gunfire, one by vehicular assault and one suffered a work-related illness.

Riders will pedal 54 miles a day through 42 police jurisdictions to reach Daytona Beach Shores on Friday.

To donate, call North Miami Beach police at 305-949-5500 and ask for Yvette Darden. For more information on officers killed in the line of duty, see the Officer Down Memorial Page at <http://www.odmp.org/>.

Trooper Burns To Death On I-95
Published on Sunday, July 27, 1997, in the Sun-Sentinel

Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Robert G. Smith dedicated his career to getting drunken drivers off the road.

On Saturday, Smith, 34, was killed by one, police said.

Smith, a father of two and a four-year veteran of the force, was parked in the northbound emergency lane of Interstate 95 about 3 a.m. when police say a white Ford Mustang driven by Julio C. Gonzalez rammed his patrol car from behind near Northwest 95th Street.

Shortly after impact, the patrol car burst into flames and the trooper burned to death, police said.

“He was trapped inside,” said Highway Patrol spokesman Lt. Ernesto Duarte. “He died inside the car.”

Police blocked off the highway for eight hours after the accident.

Gonzalez, 21, of the 5400 block of Northwest 192nd Lane in north Dade, suffered minor injuries in the accident. He was treated at Jackson Memorial Hospital and released into police custody.

Police say Gonzalez had been drinking before the accident. They also think he was speeding. Gonzalez is charged with manslaughter while driving under the influence.

“Our officers found enough evidence at the scene to charge him,” said Duarte. He declined to say what specific evidence officers found.

Smith, who police say was wearing a seat belt, was filling out paperwork in his car when Gonzalez rear-ended his car. Smith had just completed an unrelated traffic stop of another vehicle. That other driver had left the scene before the collision, police said.

Smith is the second Florida Highway Patrol trooper to be struck on the interstate in less than five weeks. In June, trooper Charlotte Thompson suffered a broken ankle, kneecap and head injuries when a distracted driver sideswiped her as she worked on I-95 just north of State Road 112.

“It’s a very dangerous job, and unfortunately it’s getting more dangerous,” Duarte said. “People are just not paying attention on the road out there.”

Smith was well aware of the problems caused by drunken drivers. For the past 18 months, he had been a member of a tricounty Highway Patrol task force on drunken driving.

In each of the past four years, Smith has been honored with the Highway Patrol’s prestigious “One Hundred Club,” _ given to officers who make more than one hundred arrests of drunken drivers in a year.

“This is a real loss,” said Jim DiBernardo, a spokesman for the statewide Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Several members of the group knew Smith well. “It’s a loss not only for his family and for the police, but for the entire community. He was one of those officers that went the extra mile to get these drivers off the road, and that’s something that affects all of us.”

Smith, a 1981 graduate of Miami Southridge High School, joined the Florida Highway Patrol in January 1993. Originally assigned to Collier County, Smith has worked in Dade County since December 1995.

Smith was a pitcher for the Minnesota Twins between 1985 and 1989, police said. He is survived by his wife, Lisa B. Smith, and a young son and daughter. His brother Daniel Smith is an officer in the Coral Gables Police Department.

On Saturday, Gonzalez was being held at the Turner-Guillot Knight Detention Center.

His father, James Gonzalez, went to the jail Saturday in hopes of taking his son home, but left empty-handed. Officials told him his son, who has no previous arrest record, was scheduled for a bond hearing today.

“I don’t know what happened. He called me this morning crying and very upset,” James Gonzalez said. “I told him that we would handle the situation.”

James Gonzalez said he thinks his son, who works as a telemarketer and is the eldest of two children, was visiting with a friend in the hours before the accident. He did not know whether his son had been drinking before the accident.

“We’ve talked about it before, and I told him that if you ever feel tired or feel like you need help, just pull into a gas station and call me,” James Gonzalez said. “I will come for you.”