

WSLEM license plates: helping the survivors of the state's honored fallen

Port Orchard, Wash. -- Day in and day out, month-to-month and year-to-year, they continue to serve: the men and woman who are sworn to protect our communities and citizens; they place themselves and their own families in jeopardy as they go about their business of maintaining the peace and public order.

Unfortunately, sometimes they make the ultimate sacrifice. According to records, 275 law enforcement officers have been killed, within the state, in the line-of-duty.

Most people are made aware of this grim reality on the front pages of newspapers and evening news telecasts. The media tells the story, briefly reporting on the life of the officer and his or her service, the circumstances of the fatal action and the memorial service.

What is left behind, however, is the effect that these deaths have on the families of fallen officers.

“The loss of one of our own is an emotional strain on the officer’s colleagues, and a potentially devastating psychological and financial strain on their surviving family members,” said Sheriff’s Detective Lori Blankenship, departmental contact for Concerns of Police Survivors. “One example, and surprising to most, is that funeral expenses of slain law enforcement officers are not covered or supported by public resources. Travel and lodging expenses of family members, even with airlines’ bereavement fares, are additional burdens.”

The Washington State Law Enforcement Memorial (WSLEM) was established to address the special needs of law enforcement widows, children and parents by providing specific needs assistance. Its accompanying foundation, known as the “10-99 Foundation,” provides personal and family counseling together with financial support. Law enforcement officers severely disabled in the line-of-duty will also be eligible for assistance from the Foundation. 10-99 is a statewide code for “officer in need of assistance.”

One of the means of funding the Foundation is a specialized license plate with the WSLEM logo – based upon the same idea as the state’s university and professional sports license plates. Legislation was passed this past session with a governing bill that oversees all future specialized plates.

WSLEM can now move forward during the upcoming legislative session (January 2004) with its own legislation allowing WSLEM to sell specialized license plates. \$28.00 from the sale of each WSLEM plate will go directly into the 10-99 Foundation fund and will generate additional funds yearly as owners renew their license plate tabs. It is a simple and easy method for citizens to show their support for law enforcement families. The \$28.00 is tax deductible.

2,000 signatures of potential WSLEM license plate applicants are needed to present the initiative to the state legislature during the next session. WSLEM’s goal is 3,000 license plate applicants – sending a clear message that support is there for family survivors of a line-of-duty death. The minimum 2,000 signatures are required by Dec. 1, 2003.

“There are numerous worthwhile charitable causes, that this office supports, for our deputies to give back to the community where they work and reside,” said Sheriff Steve Boyer. “However, this campaign – this cause – is designed to help the families of those whose chosen career in public service is to protect others. Law enforcement entails significant risks on a daily basis; it’s an unfortunate fact that one of the risks is that officers sometimes die in the line-of-duty. The grief process for surviving families is a long and arduous journey. The 10-99 Foundation assures law enforcement survivors that they will not walk alone.”

Persons interested in obtaining the unique Washington State Law Enforcement Memorial license plate for their vehicle should complete and mail the intent form. The form may be obtained from the WSLEM web site: www.wslem.com.

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