

Dangerous duty

A good cop gone

Middletown Officer Chris Jones lost his life trying to keep our highways safe.

The dangers of police work are well known to all of us. But our concerns mostly focus on encounters with criminals, which for most suburban cops aren't that frequent.

What escapes our attention is the much more common dangers police officers face while patrolling our highways. Such encounters are regular and occasionally deadly — as it was Thursday morning on Route 1 in Middletown also known as Superhighway. It is a fitting name as traffic moves at a superfast pace. That's why police Officer Chris Jones was on duty there.

Tragically, it was the last duty he'd pull.

Jones, just 37 with a wife and three children, was returning to his cruiser after tending to a motorist who might have been speeding. As he approached the door, his patrol car was struck and Jones was pinned underneath. He died a few hours later, becoming the first Middletown officer killed in the line of duty in the department's 57 years of existence.

News of Officer Jones' death hit like a hammer blow for everyone who serves the public in police, fire and emergency services. And while all of us feel the pain when such a senseless tragedy occurs, within that special fraternity, the loss of a colleague is a bitter experience.

Most of us have a hard time understanding the unique bond that joins those who give so selflessly of themselves to protect others. It arises from their realization that anytime they respond to a call for help, they put their own lives on the line.

By all accounts, Jones was a fine police officer, exemplifying all the qualities we too often take for granted. In addition to his service as a police officer, Chris Jones was a familiar figure at Neshaminy's Herbert Hoover Elementary School, where his wife had served as PTO president. Despite the demands of police work, he volunteered for many school functions.

If you missed Courier Times reporter Joan Hellyer's story about Officer Jones in Friday's paper, you should retrieve it from the recycling bin. Like Jones, Hellyer was a Hoover parent and knew the officer personally. Her story is a fitting and heart-wrenching tribute to a man who served his community in and out of uniform.

If we are to learn anything from this tragedy, it is just how dangerous highway work is for police officers. Most states have "move-over laws," which require motorists to move to the far lane when they approach the flashing lights of a stationary police car. Pennsylvania is among those states, but research shows that 70 percent of Americans are unaware of the law. If you were one of them, now you know.

Yet again we turn to the sad task of issuing a final salute.

Police officers and firefighters from all over the region will be in attendance at Officer Jones' funeral to pay their final respects. We should all be there in spirit to do likewise. And we should pray every day for the safety and well-being of all of our public servants. It is only because of individuals like Officer Jones and his selfless colleagues that, by and large, we feel safe and protected while going about our daily lives.