



## COMMENTARY

## One final ride through place he once patrolled

Outside the Dougherty Funeral Home, members of the Middletown Police Department waited for Officer Chris Jones. So did the horse-drawn hearse, which would take Officer Jones several miles to Our Lady of Grace Church for a viewing.

The spectacle of a cop's funeral impresses. There is a quiet magnificence to it. The multitude of police cruisers, vans and motorcycles, all polished to a diamond's gleam, and in an apparent endless stream. Dress uniforms and white gloves. Commands delivered as crisply as winter air. Razor-sharp salutes and gently billowing flags. Faces of ordinary people at roadside. Some with children. Some with hands over their hearts.

Officer Jones, 37, a 10-year veteran of the Middletown force, was killed Jan. 29 in a crash on the Route 1 Superhighway during a morning traffic stop. He leaves a wife and three children.

At dawn today, he will be taken to the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Philadelphia, where his funeral Mass will be celebrated. He will be buried at Resurrection Cemetery in Bensalem.

He is the fourth police officer (three others were city cops) killed in the line of duty in the last 14 months to be buried in Bucks County.

Once again, roads will be closed and nearby Bensalem schools will have an early dismissal to accommodate the crush of people who will come to Resurrection to say goodbye.

While that will likely dominate the news today, perhaps no part of the public ritual of Officer Jones' funeral could be as poignant as his final ride through the place he once patrolled. It happened Wednesday, amid fresh snow, under sunny skies.

The route took Trenton Road, a main artery through Middletown and its quiet bedroom neighborhoods. It descended gently into neighboring Hulmeville, then turned sharply onto Bellevue Avenue and into Pennel, where Officer Jones lived. From there, it was just a few blocks to the church.

As his family arrived at the funeral home, the places along the route buzzed. Everyone seemed to know what was about to happen. At a Trenton Road Wawa, customers discussed getting out before the roads closed. At intersections along the way, people waited to stand respectfully as the hearse rolled by.

Along Bellevue Avenue, flags were out, one set at half-staff in someone's front yard.

At Herbert Hoover Elementary School, Principal Karen Wychock was prepared, too.

All three Jones children attended Hoover. The youngest, Brendan, 12, is a student there. On the morning of Jan. 29, the police called the school to say they were coming to take Brendan to the hospital, where his father had been rushed after being struck on Route 1.

"At that time, we only knew his father was injured," Principal Wychock said, sadly recalling the day.

The school decided to show its support for the Jones family. Hoover's 650 children, teachers and staff would assemble outside, each holding small American flags, as the hearse passed.

"We wanted to do this as a tribute," Principal Wychock said.

A few minutes before the hearse left the funeral home, she made an announcement on the public address system, and explained what would happen.

"As you know, Officer Jones was killed in the line of duty," she began.

She explained that they would go outside, stand on the sidewalk, and wave their flags. If the procession paused, they were to stand in silence, remembering Officer Jones.

"I know each and every one of you will make me and every one of your teachers proud," she said

The children, their small flags in hand, assembled on the sidewalk in front of the school sign. Trenton Road, normally busy, was empty of traffic.

A large blue ribbon, symbolizing police, was on the school sign. A message was on the marquee: "Our thoughts and prayers are with Officer Jones and his family."

The kids were bundled against the cold. A little girl held a small sign, drawn in pencil and adorned

with hearts: "We will miss you, Officer Jones."

"Here they come," someone said.

Police cars, lights flashing, crept past. After a group of rumbling motorcycles came the horses and the hearse bearing the flag-draped coffin. The children, animated and chatty, quieted. Some waved their flags. Others held them aloft.

The hearse was followed by a long gray limousine. Inside, the Jones children sat forward in their seats, looking. Mrs. Jones, who was next to the window, gave a small wave. Several Hoover teachers seemed as if they would burst into tears.

A strong breeze came up, blowing powdery snow from high in some pines across the street. The snow settled coldly on some of the kids, who did not complain, and who stood in respectful silence as the procession passed.

Mullane's column appears Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. He blogs at .





(Above) Herbert Hoover Elementary students stand outside the school on Wednesday to pay their respects to fallen police Officer Chris Jones. Local police and fire departments



**STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER** (left) escort a horse-drawn hearse carrying Officer Jones' body from the funeral home to Our Lady of Grace in Penndel for a viewing.



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