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Officer's life cut short

A police officer was pinned under his cruiser after it was struck by a vehicle on Route 1 in Middletown.

FROM STAFF REPORTS

He could have gone home.

Instead, Middletown police Officer Chris Jones chose to work overtime, helping fellow officers catch speeders.

And Jones did his part, pulling over a Chrysler Crossfire on the Route 1 Superhighway.

He was then done for the day. As he walked back to his car at 10:30 a.m. the 37-year-old husband father of three was pinned beneath his cruiser after it was struck by a Toyota that was allegedly speeding, witnesses said.

The Toyota smashed into a Pontiac Grand Prix and then into Jones' cruiser, which was pushed on top of the officer, the witnesses said.

Jones died two hours later.

He became the first Middletown police officer to die in the line of duty in the department's 57-year existence. He is the 11th county cop to die in the line of duty since the 1920s.

As word spread of the accident, police throughout the county rushed to St. Mary Medical Center, where the 10-year police veteran had been taken after he was pulled from beneath his car.

"I've known Chris for a long time and I don't think I've ever seen him in a bad mood," Officer Rob Weber said. Other officers called his loss brutal and unbelievable. They called him a family man, a professional and a good cop. Jones' family couldn't be reached for comment Thursday night, but many co-workers spoke about how important they were to him.

"He always talked about being with his family," Detective Dale Keddie said. "Whether it was camp or just doing a regular family thing."

Chief Frank X. McKenna praised Jones as an officer and a person at a news conference Thursday afternoon, citing a letter from a resident who said Jones had re-established his respect for police. O'Connell had written the police department to praise Jones as well.

One writer who saw Jones make an arrest said he "treated the arrested person with dignity and respect." Another wrote that his friend was in an accident and her children were scared when they saw the police arrive until Jones took the time to calm them down and give them coloring books.

And another said Jones had saved her husband's life.

He was a 1989 graduate of Bensalem High School and spent seven years in the Navy before his honorable discharge as a chief petty officer 2nd class. After two years as a county prison guard Jones signed contracts with patrolmen with Middletown in 1998.

Jones died on the eve of McKenna's retirement, something he hadn't experienced during his 51 years as a cop.

"Officer Jones was the kind of person anyone would like to have as a son," an emotional McKenna said Thursday. District Attorney Michelle Henry said the county "suffered a terrible tragedy."

The accident remains under investigation and charges have not been filed, according to authorities.

When Jones pulled over the Chrysler just south of the I-95 overpass, passing drivers began to slow down and move over to the left lane, said eyewitness Ignacio Gomez, a 57-year-old New Jersey man who was driving the Grand Prix involved in the accident.

Gomez said a Corolla struck the back of his Pontiac before hitting Jones' cruiser.

Gomez recalled: "The police [officer] was giving a ticket. Everybody was slowing down and moving over to the left lanes. The next thing I know, I was hit from behind. The (Toyota) swerved around me and hit the back of my car, and the police (officer) was pushed to the ground. I called 911."

Another witness, a woman who declined to give her name, said: "All I saw was the policeman was standing outside, trying to give a ticket or something. All I saw was 'boom, boom' and the cop was pinned under the car."

Jones was pinned under the car near the driver-side door, witnesses said.

Numerous drivers stopped to help as emergency crews tried to lift the patrol car off Jones. Police rescue crews, who witnesses said arrived within minutes, used two jacks to hoist the police cruiser

The driver of the Toyota reportedly suffered a broken leg and was taken to St. Mary Medical Center well. Authorities declined to identify the driver, but confirmed he is a Middletown resident. Henry de comment on the investigation; however, county detectives obtained warrants for blood samples to I from the hospital Thursday night.

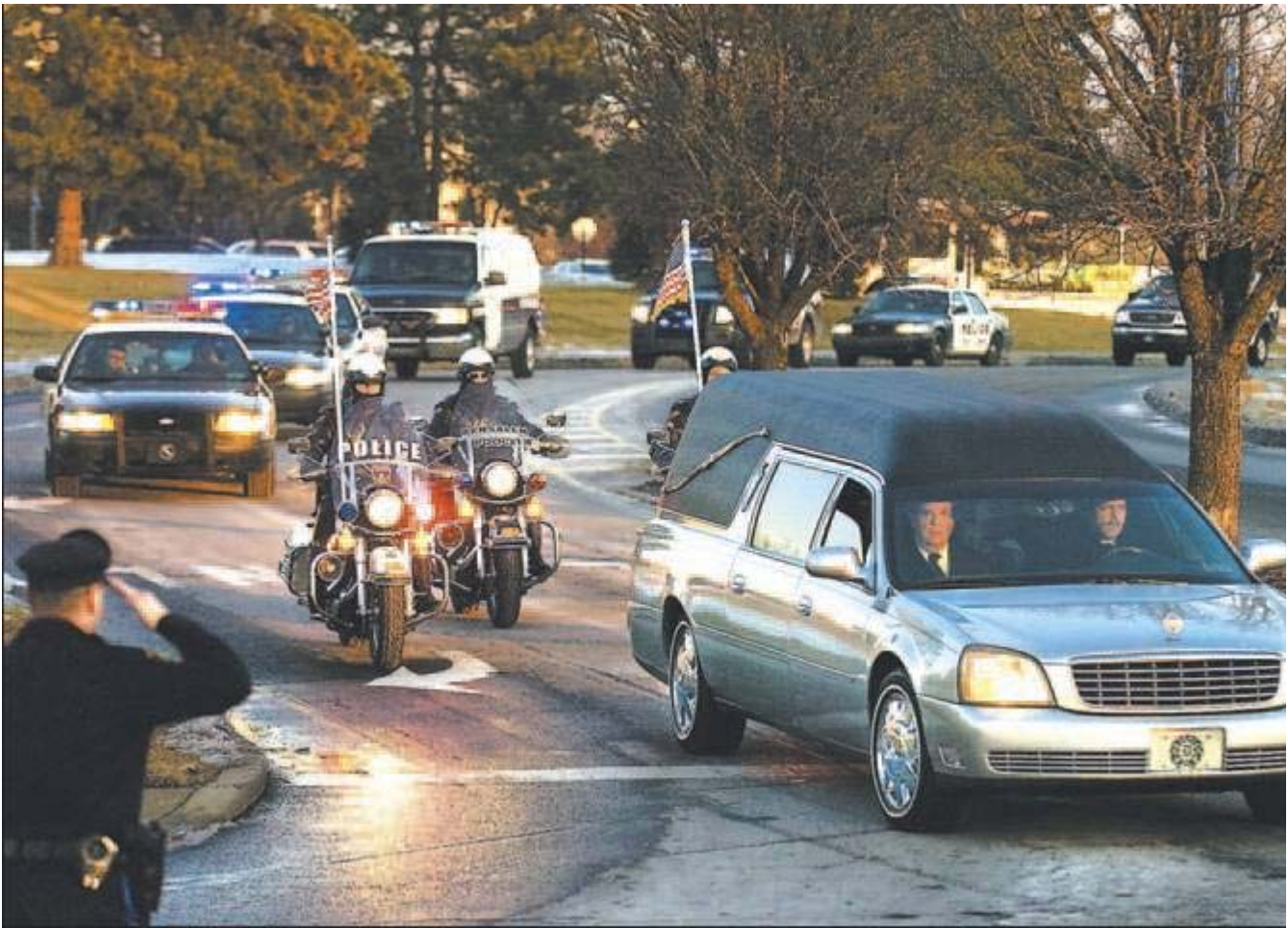
Route 1 between the Oxford Valley exit and the Maple Avenue exit was shut down until about 8 p police from several jurisdictions investigated the accident. Other officers escorted Jones' body to the in Northampton after his donated organs were removed in hope they could be given to transplant re The closure of Route 1 and the procession caused massive traffic jams in the area and several minor accidents were reported.

Middletown police were taken off duty overnight to grieve and police from surrounding departments handled their emergency calls until at least this afternoon, officials said.

Jones is survived by his wife Suzanne, two sons, Christopher, 16, Brendan, 12, and a daughter Julia 13. Authorities said plans for Jones' funeral weren't complete.

His fellow officers were trying to deal with Jones' death Thursday night. Some gathered around him at the police station.

Several years ago Middletown police issued their own baseball cards with officers on them and each put his own quote on the back. Jones wrote: "Treat other people the way you would like to be treated always do the right thing and take responsibility for your actions." They said that's exactly who he was. Ben Finley, Matt Coughlin, George Mattar and Gema Duarte contributed to this article.



A hearse carrying the body of Middletown police Officer Chris Jones is escorted by police after leaving St. Mary Center in Middletown on Thursday. BILL FRASER / **STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**





Officer Chris Jones