

## Township coping after tragedy

— *Chris English, 215-949-4193*

At the Middletown Police and Municipal Center on Friday, the normal byplay and light conversation among employees had been replaced by somber reflection and a stoic determination to get work done in the midst of sadness.

Everyone at the building just off North Flowers Mill Road was trying to cope with the death Thursday of township police Officer Chris Jones, who was killed in an accident after pulling over a motorist on the Route 1 Superhighway.

"It's a tragic loss for everyone," said township Manager Ray Stepnoski. "Of course it's difficult to work, but the township still has to run."

Stepnoski said the police department was at full staffing levels Friday after some officers were given the day off Thursday to deal with the tragedy.

"We had to provide a certain amount of grief counseling and that was done at (St. Mary Medical Center)," he said. "All the local police agencies came out and really gave us a hand. I can't thank them enough for the support they gave us."

Outside the municipal/police building Friday, the American flag flew at half-staff. Volunteer firefighters atop two ladder trucks, one from the Pennel Fire Co. and one from the Langhorne-Middletown Fire Co., hung black bunting across the police and main public entrances to the municipal center.

"It's a tradition in the emergency services to do that when someone goes down in the line of duty," said Pennel Deputy Chief Sam Simon III, who said he knew Jones as a friend and fellow emergency services worker.

"You just couldn't ask for a better guy," Simon said. "He was the kind of guy who would do anything for you and always wanted to help out. I was involved with a lot of activities with him, with families and also emergency services events. He was just an all-around good guy."