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IN THE LINE OF DUTY

A dinner Dec. 11 will raise funds to build Hawaii's first memorial to law enforcement officers who gave their lives in the line of duty



Wednesday - December 01, 2010

By [Steve Murray](#)

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HPD solo bikes seem to stand at attention during a memorial service for fallen officers

It's the phone call every family in law enforcement fears. An officer is coming to get you. No questions are answered. No information is given. Someone will arrive shortly and please stay home.

Renee Gaspar knows all too well how difficult these calls are. She got hers March 4, 2003, after her husband Glen, a 12-year veteran of the Honolulu Police Department, was shot to death while trying to arrest a suspect at the Baskin-Robbins ice cream parlor in Kapolei. She kept asking questions: Is Glen OK, did something happen to him, who is going to pick up the kids? She didn't get a response. She didn't need one. The dedicated officer Gaspar described as "an amazing, amazing, amazing man," was dead at the age of 40, leaving behind two young daughters, who to this day still struggle at times with the loss of their father.

"It was devastating," says Gaspar. "Anyone who knew Glen knew he was the most hands-on father. He coached every sport they played, and they played sports all year round. To lose him was debilitating and devastating, and some of that never goes away. They are 19 and 21, and we still deal with it during milestones and memories and holidays and that sort of thing."

Tiffany Johnson knows that feeling. She was 7 and remembers being in an office building with family when the call came. The panicked voices signaled something was seriously wrong.

“I just remember running up the stairs to my mom, saying, ‘There is something wrong with my daddy, there is something wrong with my daddy,’ and I remember not wanting to go to sleep, not wanting to go school,” she says. “I wasn’t allowed to watch the news.”

Still, she held faith her father would be OK. And why shouldn’t he be? He wasn’t just her dad, he was her hero. Somehow he would find a way. Make a fire. Build a tent from wood and branches. Something. Anything. After all, Superman is invincible.



Nathalie Walker photos nwalker@midweek.com

Tiffany Johnson and her mother Joan
Gribbin-Aiu

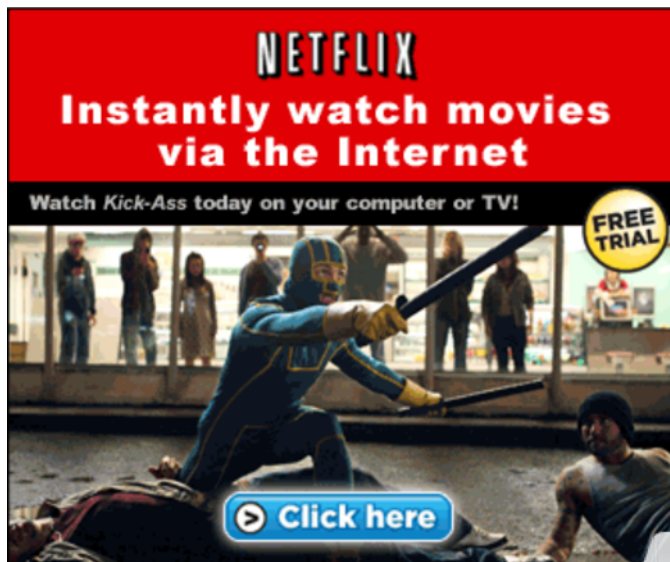
Johnson and Gaspar are not alone. Nationally, more than 17,500 law enforcement officers have lost their lives in the line of duty, and each one’s name is enshrined in the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C. But for the 60 Hawaii-based officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice, there is no place at home for families to gather, no place for these men and women to be honored, no place for history to record their passing - at least not yet.

On Dec. 11 at the Sheraton Waikiki Grand Ballroom, the Hawaii Law Enforcement Memorial Foundation is holding a fundraiser to right that historic wrong. The \$125-a-plate event features cocktails, dinner, entertainment by Jake Shimabukuro and A Touch of Gold, and a vigil for the fallen officers and their families that Joan Gribbin-Aiu, the foundation’s executive director and president, says will be memorable.

“It’s going to be intense,” says the group’s founder. “I explained to my board, ‘I don’t care what else anyone remembers, I want them to leave remembering the faces of the family members during the vigil when they are

asked to stand.””

A family member of each fallen officer has been invited to the ceremony and will be announced and escorted down the red carpet to their table by a U.S. Marine just weeks removed from duty in Afghanistan. The Marines come courtesy of Johnson’s husband Matthew, a lance corporal in the Marines who left for Afghanistan a month after they were married earlier this year.



Gribbin-Aiu has a personal reason for heading up the effort. Her husband, Thomas K. Aiu, is a retired DEA agent, and her daughter’s father, HPD SWAT officer Bryant Bayne, was killed July 21, 1995, while on a search-and-rescue mission at Sacred Falls. His partner, Officer Tate Kahakai, also perished when the cable to the rescue basket they were riding in broke after the helicopter crashed into the mountain. Honolulu Fire Department firefighter and pilot Peter Crown, who was flying the helicopter, also died in the crash.

Crashes have taken their toll on more than a few fam-

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Johnson and Gribbin-Aiu look through a family album

ilies. Krissy Winn had just moved to Hilo in 1991 with husband Alan and two daughters, Whitney and Lauren. They still hadn't gotten all the boxes emptied when, while watching cartoons with the girls, a news bulletin reported a DEA pilot had been killed in a helicopter crash. She called the hangar and a person she never met asked her to stay put while someone came for her. Sadly, the family had unknowingly prepared for such a horrific event. One of Alan's best friends, a fellow DEA agent who was very close to Krissy and the kids, was killed during Operation Desert Storm. It fell on the parents to explain it to the girls. Using the same message, the girls were able to comfort their mother.

"We had a talk with the girls about Uncle Gene, that he died and that he had an important job to fly helicopters with God. That evening when I was putting them to bed, I was sad and was crying, and we were all in bed together trying to get them to calm to down, and Lauren (who was 4 at the time) said, 'Don't worry, Mommy, Dad is in heaven with Uncle Gene flying helicopters for God.'"

The idea for the memorial came after Gribbin-Aiu, daughter Tiffany and husband Thomas visited a police museum five years ago in Titusville, Fla. Inside the building was a replica of the D.C. memorial, which showed Bayne's name and those of the the other Hawaii officers. "I just couldn't believe that here, in this town in the middle of nowhere, they could afford to build a memorial but we could not.

I didn't understand that," she says.

The project became even more emotional a few years later during a service for a Neighbor Island sheriff's officer. A mother came to Honolulu to mourn her dead son and there was no place to grieve. Gribbin-Aiu said it broke her heart. So after Thomas retired, they decided the time was right to act.



Nathalie Walker photos nwalker@midweek.com

HPD officers march from headquarters to the Capitol for a memorial service May 10

They petitioned for land on the state Capitol grounds, and both houses agreed unanimously.

"The area is perfect," she says of the spot they found near the Kalanimoku building. "You want a place for people to go with their families so they can reflect either alone or with their families to celebrate."

The memorial will be designed by the University of Hawaii School of Architecture. Two-hundred-and-fifty students turned out for the presentation. A scale model of the top three plans as chosen by the board and the school will be presented at the dinner, as will the young architects and designers. Attendees to the dinner will vote for the winning design.

For those deeply involved, the memorial is more than just a list of names. It is a tangible reminder of what they have lost.

“There is such a sense of finality to it when you look at the wall and see your loved one’s name there, but there is also such a sense of pride to know that there is somewhere that recognizes the sacrifice. I think a memorial serves so many purposes,” says Gaspar, who is a local board member of COPS (Concerns of Police Survivors), which provides assistance and counseling for family members.



Officers bow their heads at the May memorial service

“Of course it serves the surviving families. I think it does a great service to the community to have somewhere to honor public servants. I think it also serves officers who are currently serving and protecting to have a place to go to not only remember their fallen brothers, but to serve the purpose of reminding them about why they do what they do. The benefits are so far-reaching that for us not to have one does our survivors, our community, our current officers such a disservice.”

For Johnson, the memorial will be just another way to connect with the father who took her to school in his SWAT truck, had her attend role call at the station where she got candy and her own nickname, Little B.B (dad was Big B.B.), and whose talent as a singer still helps her through the tough times.

“When you’re a kid, you’re used to having your parent around, and when they are not around you don’t have anyone to hold,” she says. “I guess it is something you can touch and you can feel. When I went to the memorial in D.C., I did the rubbing the first time. I’ve always had the rubbing on me all the time because it is something I can hold, and when I get sad I can pull it out of my wallet and hold it ... it helps me know they are not forgotten.”

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Gribbin-Aiu estimates it will take \$1 million to have the memorial built and maintained. Shopo kicked in a \$50,000 donation to get the ball rolling, and she figures when they hit the halfway point, they can start putting shovel to dirt.

The Dec. 11 event is open to the public. Anyone interested in attending or purchasing a table can call 294-0715. For more information, visit hlemf.org.

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