Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: May 2, 2019
Print PDF

WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney today honored all Indian Country law enforcement officers in her address at the 28th Annual Indian Country Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial service. The event was held on the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers' campus in Artesia, N.M.

The Indian Country Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial Service honors tribal, state, local and federal law enforcement officers who have given their lives in the line of duty while serving on federal Indian lands and in tribal communities. It is also the occasion when the names of officers to be added to the Indian Country Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial monument at the academy are formally announced.

The names of three officers were added at this year's ceremony bringing the total number listed on the memorial to 119:

- **Sac & Fox Nation Police Department Officer Nathan B. Graves** who, on January 24, 2017, was killed when his patrol car was struck head-on by an oncoming vehicle that was attempting to pass another car.
- **Omaha Nation Law Enforcement Services Police Sergeant Uga'shon Curtis W. Blackbird** who, on March 26, 2017, was killed in a vehicle crash that occurred when he was responding to a call and, while driving along a closed section of Nebraska Highway 94 in a period of dense fog, his patrol car struck a construction crane.
- **Salt River Police Department Officer Clayton Joel Townsend** who, on January 8, 2019, was struck and killed while approaching a vehicle on a traffic stop. The subject driver who struck him admitted to texting and driving at the time of the crash.

"Public safety is a dutiful calling. Officers and their families become a part of the fabric of a community, and when an officer's life is lost, it is felt by so many," Sweeney said. "Although no amount of words from a compassionate nation can replace them, we are thankful for their years of dedicated service to the tribal communities they protected every day. As the names of these three dedicated officers are etched into the memorial, may their bravery and courage be everlastingly etched into our memories and hearts."

The 28th Annual Indian Country Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial Service was live-streamed. To view the event, visit the memorial service's website.

The event is held annually on the first Thursday in May. BIA-OJS conducts the memorial service in conjunction with the International Association of Chiefs of Police Indian Country Law Enforcement Section and other law enforcement organizations and agencies including the National Sheriffs' Association and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers in Artesia. FLETC is home to the memorial, service and academy.

The formal ceremony consists of full law enforcement honors with flag presentation, 21-gun salute, honor guard, traditional drum song and prayer, officer roll call, and family recognition. Each year, invited dignitaries provide keynote remarks at the ceremony.

The Indian Country Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial was first dedicated on May 7, 1992, at the Indian Police Academy, then located in Marana, Ariz. The academy and memorial were later moved to their present site where the latter was re-dedicated on May 6, 1993. The memorial's design is based upon indigenous design concepts. Comprised of three granite markers sited within a circular walkway lined with sage, a plant of spiritual significance to many tribes, the memorial includes four planters filled with foliage in colors representing people of all nations. The planters represent the four directions and are located near the walkway's entrance.

The earliest inscribed name dates back to 1852. In addition to those from Bureau of Indian Affairs and tribal law enforcement, officers listed represent numerous law enforcement agencies including U.S. Border Patrol, Alaska State Police, New Mexico State Police, Arizona Department of Public Safety, Navajo County Sheriff's Office, U.S. Customs Bureau, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The list includes one female officer from the Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety who was killed in 1998; a father and son, both BIA officers, who died in 1998 and 2001, respectively; and two FBI agents killed on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1975.

To view an image of the Indian Country Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial and a list of the officers' names inscribed on it, visit the FLETC website.

-DOI-