

News and stories

State FOP meeting draws nearly 200 to Huntington

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Bishop Nash | [Herald Dispatch](#)

HUNTINGTON - The Pullman Plaza Hotel will be under a heavy police presence this week, but for a good reason.

For three days, the downtown hotel will host the 48th biennial State Conference of the Fraternal Order of Police, which began Monday morning in Huntington. Organized by FOP Gold Star Lodge #65 - to which all Huntington Police officers belong - this is the first time Huntington has hosted the conference in about a decade.

Around 175 representatives from law enforcement agencies across the Mountain State are expected to attend as the state delegation conducts its every-two-year official business, such as hearing officers' reports and electing new state officers.

Like unions of any trade, the FOP's main purpose is to further the interests of police officer at the local, state and national levels.

"As a state delegation, that's also what we do - we try to further and protect the interests of our state for law enforcement," said Lt. Larry Zimmerman of the Huntington Police Department, who serves as a state trustee and vice president of Gold Star Lodge #65.

Local lodges represent individual departments as the bargaining

agent during contract negotiations with the municipality or entity as it serves. Gold Star Lodge #65, for example, negotiates directly with the City of Huntington.

Other nearby agencies, including the Cabell County Sheriff's Office and the Marshall University Police Department, are represented locally by FOP Lodge #122.

Ceremonies were opened Monday by Medal of Honor recipient and longtime Ona resident Woody Williams, who praised the tireless work of the state's police forces. Welcoming remarks were also provided by Huntington Police Chief Hank Dial, Cabell County Sheriff Chuck Zerkle, and Huntington Mayor Steve Williams.

Mike Stuart, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of West Virginia, spoke of the issues today's police face and his office's commitment to their mission, but also proposed a new avenue to help better fund local law enforcement.

Stuart advocated for the creation of a new West Virginia license plate, "Back the Blue," similar to those that exist for other causes such as education and wildlife preservation. At \$94 each, Stuart called for proceeds from the new license plates, if created, to be distributed to local law enforcement agencies.

Stuart said the new license plates may be available by early 2019.

That money would certainly be welcome, Zimmerman said, but the sentiment goes beyond dollars and cents.

"From an individual's standpoint - and I'm sure it can be echoed by other law enforcement - if we see those license plates around the state and we know we have the support of society, that means everything to us," Zimmerman said. "That's who we're here to protect, and it means everything to have their respect."

The conference will convene daily until Wednesday.