

Officer Anthony P. Morelli

Westerville Division of Police

**HONOR &
REMEMBER**
OHIO PEACE OFFICERS'
MEMORIAL
CEREMONY

The countdown to retirement was underway for Officer Anthony “Tony” Pasquale Morelli and four of his fellow officers at the Westerville Division of Police.

The five had started on the same day in 1988. They’d gone through the State Highway Patrol Academy together. They’d vacationed together. They’d joked that their kids would grow up to marry each other. And they’d all signed on to the deferred retirement program.

Using an app on his cellphone, Sgt. Tony Rudd was counting off the days, hours and even the seconds until April 27, 2021.

“The ‘Fab Five’ were all going to go out and have one giant party,” Rudd said.

Then Feb. 10 happened.

“I remember looking at that app, and it made me sick,” Rudd said. “So I deleted it for good.

“It took tragedy,” he continued, “to wake me up to the fact that — you know what? — tomorrow’s not guaranteed. We all need to make the most of every day.”

By all accounts, Officer Morelli always did.

“Since 1988, any story that I have told — the best times that I’ve had as an adult — inevitably Tony Morelli is part of that story,” said retired Training Officer Dave King, who started a month before the Fab Five and was close friends with them.

Morelli, a father of two, loved his family; the Massillon Tigers (and sharing how he’d played football there with OSU star Chris Spielman); baseball (his team was the Boston Red Sox); AC/DC (he’d play air guitar to “You Shook Me All Night Long”); and working out.

He joined charity runs and races such as the Warrior Dash with his daughter, Beth; wife, Linda; and anyone else he could coax into joining him. He enjoyed golfing with his son, Chris.

“My favorite memories are tailgating with Tony at Ohio State football games,” said Officer Jeff Dixon. “That was his favorite place to be in the world early on a Saturday morning.

“He would always welcome anybody who wanted to come. They always had the food and the drinks and just wanted you to show up. Wouldn’t take a penny from anybody.”

Dixon got to know Morelli when they worked first shift together, after Morelli’s kids grew up and he started volunteering to work on Christmas. That meant Dixon and other officers got to spend the holiday with their young children.



MEMORIAL WALL: PANEL 30

Morelli also worked special duty at the Westerville Library, taught self-defense classes for women, and spent a few years as a school resource officer. He was well-liked in Westerville, where he also lived.

In his 30 years with the police division, he was voted officer of the year in 2003 and 2012, was honored with a Medal of Valor and received many other awards.

One resident wrote to thank Morelli for saving 10 baby ducks from a sewer. Another wouldn’t have sent a thank-you: The 80-year-old woman got annoyed when, after a well-being check, Morelli bought her groceries because she didn’t have any food. She gave him a hard time for picking out sliced turkey.

Colleagues enjoyed working with Morelli, and not just for the fun.

“Especially when we were young, everybody wanted to catch the bad guy,” King said. “So if there was a robbery, no one wanted to go to the scene and catch the paper on it, because that’s not fun. But Tony would always step up and do the right thing” and take on the less exciting parts of the job, such as writing the report.

King recounted how Morelli memorized every Westerville street, even ones in odd corners, when they were new to the job.

“He never wanted to be the guy who didn’t know the answer.”

Morelli’s friends said he could be critical of his bosses’ decisions.

“I can’t tell you how many arguments we got into at roll calls, and I had to clear the room because he and I were going at it,” Rudd said. “Then we’d hang out together. It was like having a brother.”

Three days after Morelli’s 54th birthday, on Feb. 10, he and K9 Officer Eric Joering were dispatched to a home where a gunman ambushed them. Both officers were hit and fired back, wounding the shooter.

Morelli died at Ohio State University’s Wexner Medical Center.

“Tony was the second guy through the doorway that day, and he probably could have retreated out of there,” Rudd said. “But there’s no way — that’s not Tony.”

Morelli is survived by Linda, his wife of almost 29 years; Elizabeth, his daughter, who married Danny Frank in June 2018; Christopher, his son; his parents, Anthony and Carolyn Morelli; brothers David (Ramneet) and Michael; nieces and nephews Sukhjot, Jasjit, Simi and Lucas; and friends in Westerville and Massillon.

“He was full of life, and every day was something special to him,” Rudd said. “The thing is, you don’t realize how much you’ve lost until he’s gone.”