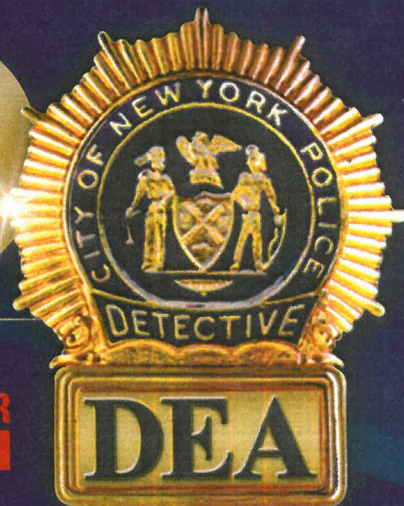


# THE GOLD SHIELD

WINTER  
2021



The Union Representing the Greatest Detectives *in the World*

## DEA *Remembers*



Det. Raymond Abear



Det. Robert Cardona



Det. Cedric Dixon



Det. Christopher B. McDonnell



Det. Jack Polimeni



Det. Jeffrey A. Scalf



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# The DEA Remembers







Through the tremendous efforts of our union, and our work with City and State legislators, on May 29, 2020, the COVID-19 Line-of-Duty Death Benefit bills (S. 8427 and A.10528) passed both the New York State Senate and the New York State Assembly; and on May 30, the Governor signed the bills into law. This provides line-of-duty death benefits to our active members who died because of the coronavirus. This devastating pandemic, which has wreaked havoc on the entire world, struck in full force in February 2020, and, by mid-March, both New York City and State were in lockdown with businesses shuttered and shelter-in-place orders mandated throughout the State.

But the work of our members never slows down; and, in fact, it increased exponentially as the City also erupted into a frenzy of social protests, including rioting and looting. Amidst this chaos and disorder, the DEA lost six active Detectives to COVID-19, while many others became seriously ill. The May passage of the Death Benefit law ensured that our LOD families will remain financially stable and be provided the health benefits they richly deserve as they deal with the devastating loss of their loved ones in this frightening, unpredictable, and unprecedented era.

On July 20, 2020, NAPO notified us that Congress, which originally contemplated two different versions of a coronavirus bill, worked together to pass S. 3607, the Safeguarding America's First Responders Act, which establishes a presumption under the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program that an Officer's death or disability due to contracting COVID-19 is deemed in the line of duty. On August 14, 2020, the President signed the bill into law.

This is a big victory for NAPO. More than 125 active Law Enforcement Officers in the United States have died from COVID-19, and now their families will get death benefits. To qualify for the presumption, an Officer must have engaged in a line-of-duty action or activity between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021, and received a diagnosis of COVID-19 (or evidence indicates that the Officer had COVID-19) during the 45-day period beginning on the last day of duty for the Officer. For death benefits, evidence must indicate that the Officer had COVID-19 or complications from COVID-19 at the time of death.

# Det. Christopher B. McDonnell



Det. Christopher Brian McDonnell was born April 2, 1966, and grew up in the "Bulls Head" section of Staten Island. He graduated from Port Richmond High School, worked for UPS, and spent a few semesters in college while waiting to be called up for the Police Academy and for the profession he was destined to epitomize. He was appointed to the New York City Police Department on April 30, 1991, and was first assigned to the 78th Precinct in Brooklyn South. He made pit stops through the 70th Precinct and PSA #7, but was eventually reassigned to Staten Island Narcotics where he earned his gold shield on December 17, 1999.

One of McDonnell's early career partners was Det. Jeffrey Ward, the DEA's former Staten Island Welfare Officer and Trustee, and now the DEA's Treasurer. Ward notes, "They call us *The Greatest Detectives in the World*, and Chris McDonnell completely exemplified that. He was my partner in Narcotics and I trusted him with my life. He was quiet, yet strong and very determined. I would describe him as reserved, but also adventuresome and caring, and very professional. He was always very professional."

Around the time McDonnell was ending his stint in Narcotics to head to the NYPD's Intelligence Division, he met his future wife Andrea Beatrice, a Bronx-born

flight attendant who spent almost 30 years flying the world for Continental, which in 2010 merged with United Airlines. Their first date, she recalls, was in Manhattan in December 2000.

"Chris was such a gentleman," she says. "He had such a kind and gentle nature. He was a kind human being." Her assessment wasn't simply a first impression; it was who he was throughout their marriage and his entire career. "He never complained about anything and he never had an unkind word to say about anybody." They married on April 30, 2002, while on vacation at Sandal's in the Bahamas. "There was no fuss, and it was just us." Andrea wistfully recalls, "I had already lost both of my parents, and Chris lost his mother in September of 2001, a few days before 9/11. So we didn't want to have to worry about plans or parties. It was a wonderful, unbelievable time. I remember when we were sitting in a restaurant and the first time I ever called him 'my husband.' I was so thrilled, I thought, 'Wow. I am really lucky.'"

The couple moved to Staten Island and Andrea's job as a flight attendant afforded them the chance to fly away on spur-of-the moment vacations, even weekend jaunts, whenever they could. "We both love to travel, and one time Chris and I went to an Italian seaside village,





Viareggio, near Florence. It was so beautiful. We were always doing something together. Chris also loved the theatre. We recently saw *Bat Out of Hell* off-Broadway at the New York City Center. We always kept so busy."

While working, McDonnell also went back to school at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York, and he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in criminal justice and political science. He was a member of Alpha Phi Sigma National Criminal Justice Honor Society and Alpha Phi Omega.

After three-and-a-half years, the couple decided to move to the suburbs in Westchester, where their son Trevor was born in 2006. At first, his wife relates, McDonnell was a bit hesitant, because the area was so tony, but she says, "He fit right in. It was everything Chris didn't have while growing up and he was so proud to be able to send his son to good schools and enjoy our beautiful life in these quiet surroundings."

Trevor, now age 14, was very much the center of Chris McDonnell's world. "He lived for his son," Andrea says, noting the two enjoyed playing and watching sports together. "When I flew out of town for work, I would worry about the guys. Flying is very stressful and it added to the worry. But the truth is I didn't have to worry, because when I was away, that was their bonding time. They both loved baseball and the Yankees. They even took a trip together to Dallas to see their beloved Cowboys play. It was a group event, so they went on the field, visited the locker rooms, and took pictures with the cheerleaders. Trevor plays lacrosse and basketball, and when I was away, they were fully occupied with each other. Chris was the greatest father, ever. He lived for his son. Trevor was his pride and joy."

Retired first grade Det. Milton Lopez echoes that point of view. "Chris was very close with his son," he says. "They were real buddies." Lopez worked with McDonnell on cases all over the City for seven years in the NYPD's Intelligence Division, where McDonnell earned second grade on August 5, 2009. McDonnell and Lopez first partnered in TIU, the Terrorist Interdiction Unit, which turned out of the Brooklyn Army Terminal.

Another TIU colleague was first grade Det. Frank Bianco, who retired out of Intel in 2013. "I was in the same high school class as McDonnell's younger brother Kevin," he

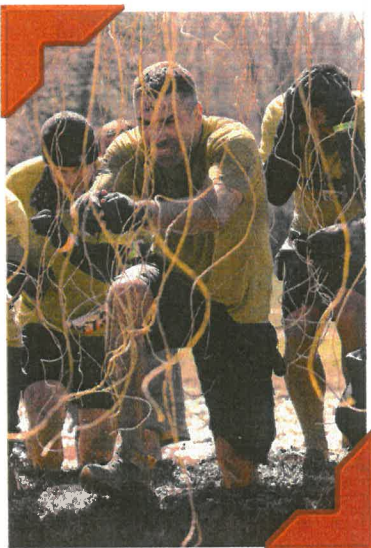
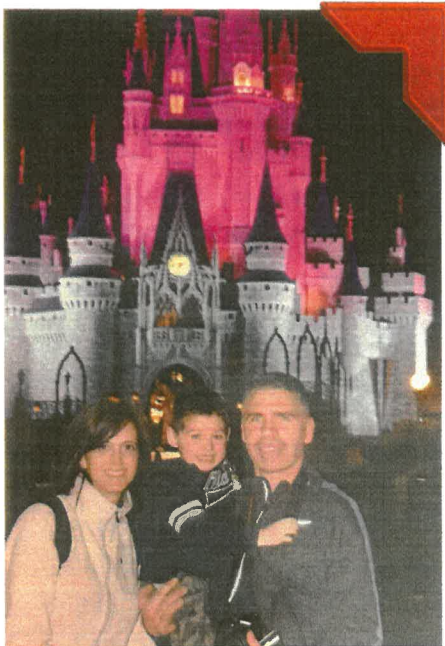
says, "and I also knew Chris' sister Peggy. Our career paths were similar and we came from similar backgrounds. Chris was always a dependable, reliable, and good person to be around. He loved to laugh and people just naturally opened up to him."

One of the stories Bianco relates was when one of McDonnell's confidential informants barricaded himself in a location during a domestic incident and wouldn't speak to anyone, except McDonnell. "This CI just loved Chris. They had to bring Chris over to handle the guy. The perp refused to speak to anyone else. Chris was the type of guy anyone could talk to, whether you were a perp or a cop, he was never judgmental. He was someone you could confide in like a Priest."

Another story Bianco relates was the time McDonnell was questioning a suspect and the man was in possession of a passport: "Chris ran this guy's name through the computers. It turned out he was a violent felon wanted by the 68 Precinct. Three years prior, the perp had put an ad in a magazine soliciting gay men. He would lure people, tie them up, and rob them. One victim broke loose and called the police, but the perp had a machine gun. The system still let him out on bail. He fled to Trinidad and started doing home invasions, kidnappings, and other extortions. He was deported back to America. About four years later, we picked him up. He was about to flee again, this time to Michigan. Chris was the first guy to identify him. During the arrest, there was a scuffle. Chris finally got him handcuffed, but during the fray, Chris got cut. It left a scar on his left hand. We arrested this guy in a house of worship and it was a very unusual, highly sensitive situation, one of the rare times that ever happened.



# Det. Christopher B. McDonnell



Chief Pulaski heard about it and on April 18, 2006, our Lieutenant, three Sergeants, Chris, me, and three fellow Detectives received a commendation for our work."

"One of my most memorable moments with Chris was in April 2012. Right before I retired, Chris and I participated as part of an Intel team in a Tough Mudder race in the Poconos in Pennsylvania," says Bianco. "It was a great event. He was always in great physical shape and took very good care of himself. He even brought in his own lunch on the job."

From 2012 to 2013, the McDonnell family moved to Virginia, where Chris was the Special Operations Division liaison between the NYPD and the Drug Enforcement Agency. When he returned to New York, McDonnell

reunited with Lopez at SIU, the Strategic Intelligence Unit. Along with their Intel colleagues, in the wake of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, they assisted the Boston Police Department and various upstate New York agencies in developing their own Intelligence units: teaching them how to cultivate sources, seek out confidential informants, and establish footholds in communities where individuals might be radicalizing.

"There was no one," Lopez says, "who did not respect McDonnell and his meticulous work. Chris was a true gentleman, the salt of the earth. He was very tolerant of everyone and never confrontational. He was a great Investigator, extremely responsible, and a very hard worker. Every Supervisor loved to have him on his team."

That impeccable work ethic earned McDonnell first grade on August 31, 2018.

Sgt. Robert Olsen worked with McDonnell at the Strategic Intelligence Unit, and says the two planned to retire together and looked forward to the days when they would be doing private security work. "Chris was my right hand. He was always there for me. I always spoke to him for guidance in life, as well as on the job. He always knew how to handle any situation or any task I assigned him with professionalism and integrity. He didn't need direction. He worked extremely hard and earned his promotion to first grade, not an easy feat."

McDonnell was still assigned to the Intelligence Division when the pandemic hit. He was also approaching 30 years on the job, and he knew the time was right to start planning for the future. He and Andrea were thinking of retiring someday to a location less expensive than the suburbs of New York, depending upon where their son would go to college, even though that was a few years away. But with Andrea finally retired from the airlines, and Chris starting to think about the future, the family was excited about planning the second chapter of their lives.

"Chris worked so hard for everything he had," Andrea says. "He grew to love where we lived. It was a great place for Trevor to grow up. Chris was able to have a few man caves: one for sports in the basement with his son, and one for an office. But at some point, Trevor would go off to college. And we travel every year. Our last family trip was San Francisco, and before that we took a cruise in Alaska. We were eventually hoping to go to Ireland, the land of Chris' heritage. He had never been there before. That's what Chris really wanted." In the summer of 2019, the family took a trip to Cooperstown, and they were already



booked to take Trevor back to that beautiful Italian village of Viareggio when the coronavirus outbreak forced the trip's cancellation.

With the City and State on lockdown and the Police Department out in full force to handle the marches and episodes of looting, McDonnell, like many Detectives, was temporarily assigned for a few days in uniform, something he didn't often get to wear as a business-suited Intel Investigator.

"He was so proud when he put on that uniform," Andrea says, "and I wanted to take a picture of him in it. I had to run out to the bank and told him not to leave the house until I came back to say goodbye for the evening tour he was doing. I raced home to take his picture."

DEA Intelligence Division Delegate second grade Det. Vincent Zerafa was partnered with McDonnell on those last two days of patrol. "I knew McDonnell for 13 years, and we both spent the past seven working together in SIU. Through the years, we had worked on cases that sent us on a few road trips together: to Virginia, Maryland, and Boston. He was the nicest guy in the Police Department. The nicest guy you ever met. We went out on patrol on a Monday and Tuesday in uniform, driving around and answering radio runs. Chris seemed fine. We both wore masks. We talked about our families, we had meals. He didn't exhibit any signs of illness at all."

"And when he came home much later that Tuesday night," says Andrea, "I asked him to tell me about his evening. But it was very late and he was tired, and he took shower and went to bed."

"It was so unexpected and so sudden. There was no indication at all that he was sick. He exhibited no symptoms that we knew of." But in the wee hours of the morning, on Wednesday, May 6, 2020, the 54-year-old McDonnell died in his sleep. "The shock has not worn off. We had no inkling. We had no clue that he was COVID positive. Never in a million years would we have known this was going to happen," said Andrea. The Medical Examiner's report attributed the death to the coronavirus.

"Chris was always the first to step up and help, even when it came time for guys to work on the Corona task force. He stepped up when asked, and yet, he didn't have to, because he had seniority. He was so careful, too. He always wore gloves and a mask, he even walked up steps

Dear Mr. DiGiacomo:

*On behalf of the entire McDonnell family, please accept our deepest and most sincere gratitude for the overwhelming response to the tragic loss of my husband, Detective Christopher McDonnell.*

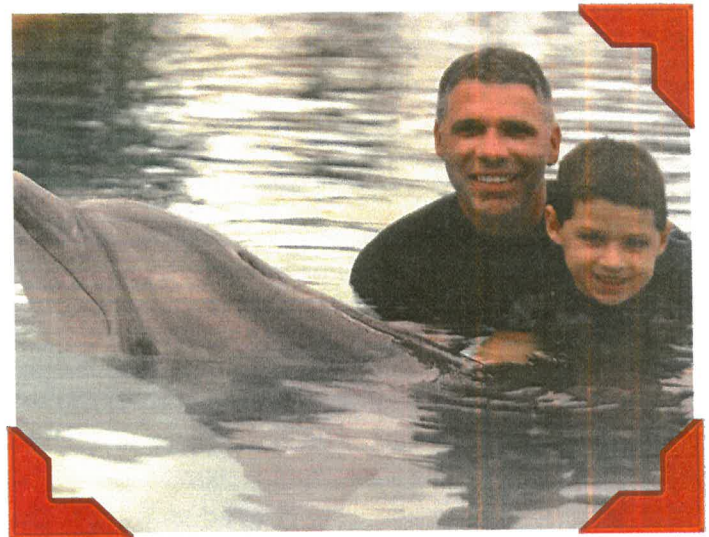
*I would especially like to reach out to Chris' brothers and sisters in SIU for the support and love they have extended to my son, Trevor. We have always felt a part of the NYPD/DEA family, but in the wake of these heartbreaking circumstances, we now realize just how strong this bond truly is. Chris would have been so very honored to be recognized as such by his beloved NYPD.*

*There are dozens and dozens of people I would personally like to thank in this letter, but I am afraid I would leave someone out, so I say thank you from the bottom of my heart to all who love and care for us now and in the future.*

*Thank you so very much, Mr. DiGiacomo, for all you have personally done for us. We are honored to be a part of such a beautiful, extended family. Finally, we would like to thank the entire NYPD for their service and we hope and pray that everyone stays safe and healthy in these very difficult times.*

*Sincerely,*

*Andrea Beatrice-McDonnell*



instead of taking the elevator." Sgt. Olsen's voice trails off, the enormity of the loss leaving him speechless. Olsen retired on July 31, 2020, after 28 years on the job: his plans also shattered by the sudden loss of his close friend.

Says Lopez, "It's heartbreaking that this happened. Chris was such a good person. He was quiet and unassuming, and just a wonderful man. I considered him a brother."

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## Det. Christopher B. McDonnell

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I'm a better person having known Chris," says Ward. "He was a great, really affable, terrific guy."

Andrea's sister, Karen, who was also extremely close with her brother-in-law, has been staying with the family to help out and offer support during these hard weeks and months since Chris' death. Andrea, Trevor, and Karen have all tested negative for the virus.

"Everyone has been so supportive," says Andrea, thankful for the outpouring of support from her husband's colleagues. "They gave my son a beautiful birthday party. He turned 14 a week after his father died. Trevor got a drone and put it together by himself, and he was outside flying it alone, and it broke my heart."

"Chris was *such* a good man and a great cop. I am absolutely lost without him. The fact that he will never walk through the door again, or that I will never see him again ... the permanence of it. I keep asking myself, when am I going to wake up from my bad dream?"



I lost my best friend, my hero, my right arm. He was an unbelievable father, husband, and Detective. He was so loved by everybody: by my family and my friends ... his cousins, his whole family admired him. He came from humble beginnings and was a self-made man. I was so lucky to have him. I can't imagine my life without him. I miss him beyond words."