

The Pueblo Chieftain

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Final Salute



CHIEFTAIN PHOTOS/CHRIS McLEAN The casket of Pueblo police officer Nick Heine is escorted by fellow officers and his younger brother, Jason (center), from the Praise Assembly of God Church following services Thursday.



Pat Heine thanks all the people who have offered condolences on the death of her son during funeral services for him Thursday at Praise Assembly of God Church.



The young daughter of fallen officer Nick Heine, Rebecca, looks up at her mother during funeral services for him Thursday.

**By NICK BONHAM
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

It wasn't a knife, bullet or any other danger that got the best of Pueblo police officer Nicholas Heine.

In the end it was the weapon the seven-year veteran was skilled in using, not just in the line of duty, but in life: his heart.

The 30-year-old died on duty early Saturday of a congenital heart defect that neither he or his family knew about. He was running between bar disturbances Downtown when he collapsed on Victoria Street.

On Thursday at his funeral, Heine's badge-wearing brethren came from around the state to pay him a final salute.

Those who knew Heine well described him as loyal, loving, a good cop and an even better friend, husband, son and father. For the first officer to die on duty since 1973, Pueblo gave a grand farewell to one of its finest.

An estimated crowd of 900 officers, family, friends, community leaders and citizens who Heine touched on the job attended services.

"We were not ready for him to go, but we are so thankful, Heavenly Father, to be blessed with Nick's presence and influence in our lives," Police Chief Jim Billings said in prayer. Billings, who also is an ordained minister, officiated the service held at Praise Assembly of God Church in Belmont.

Several officers close to Heine shared memories and fond words of the man they watched grow up, or whom they grew up with on the police force.

None knew him better, however, than mom. She, too is a cop.

"To my son, be my guardian angel, help me find peace. I love you very much. We will always be the mother and son police . . . team," said Detective Pat Heine, a 19-year veteran of the force.

Occasionally blending humor into her comments, Pat Heine expressed thanks and appreciation to everyone who has aided her and family since her son died.

Nick Heine leaves behind a wife of seven years, Melissa; and daughters Nichole, 7, and Rebecca, 4. He also is survived by a younger brother, Jason Heine, 28.

Pat Heine asked her fellow officers to help her, Melissa and Jason in telling younger generations of their family about their lost loved one.

"Make sure you never forget the children who need to know what a good man Nicholas was," she said. "Nichole, Rebecca and Jason Jr., need to hear all the Nicholas stories - although I would prefer that some of them be censored until they are old enough."

Detectives James Martin, Kevin Buck and Dave Beshany knew Nick Heine. Primarily a graveyard officer assigned to the East Side, Heine spent a stint working with the three detectives in investigations while he recovered from a job-related knee injury.

The group were friends long before, though. Together they went on hunting trips, coached in a youth football league, hosted barbecues, hung out together with their families on the holidays.

"Nick Heine was a gentleman, a good, decent, honorable man, husband, father, son and a fine police officer," Buck said. "It was a privilege having him as a friend and colleague. "It's impossible to summarize a life in a few pages, but Nick's life was one well lived. Good men must die, but death cannot kill their name. We love you, Nick."

Heine liked working with kids. He was set to coach his first season with the Roncalli Shamrocks in the Runyon Football League.

A music lover, Nick Heine never played football at Central High School, where he graduated in 1995. He went to the University of Northern Colorado and majored in music, but while he was there he managed to walk on to the Bears football team. He played special teams for a year.

Heine was going to help his close friend, Martin, coach the Shamrocks this season.

"He will be with us on the field for every practice and game. We're dedicating our season to him," Martin said.

Football may have been new in his life, but music was still bigger. Heine enjoyed punk rock and telling co-workers about the guitar skills of his younger brother.

"I was pretty shocked today when we pulled up (to the church) and saw way too many cop cars," Jason Heine said to laughter. "I'm just glad (Nick Heine) affected so many people. I always said I want to be tough like my older brother. Now, things are a little different, but it's OK, we're all in this together."

Being a graveyard officer, it was fitting that members of his crew - the North Crew on Watch 3, as it's called - were honorary pallbearers.

One of those officers is Cpl. Kenny Rhodes. A former partner of Pat Heine, Rhodes knew Nick since his childhood. With long, red hair and tons of freckles, the young Heine resembled Opie, a character on "The Andy Griffith Show," Rhodes said.

"Nick seemed interested in becoming a police officer, but he still reminded me of Opie," Rhodes said jokingly. "Little did I know that he would become one of the best officers on the department. Nick never backed down from a fight. He never left one of us hanging on a call. Nick always had our backs."

He added: "He'll never back down from loving us and he'll always, always, watch our backs."

After the funeral, Officer Heine hit the streets with his fellow officers one last time.

An estimated 200 police cars, motorcycle units, fire trucks, ambulances and other rescue equipment with flashing overhead lights paraded through Pueblo to Roselawn Cemetery in Blende.

The procession stretched for miles. The route was dotted with onlookers, some who displayed American flags, some who wiped tears from their eyes.

From Belmont the procession snaked through town and past police headquarters on Main Street, where an American flag waved from the extended ladders of two fire trucks.

Citizens and officers lined both sides of the arch and saluted or covered their heart as Heine's hearse and the motorcade rolled through.

At the cemetery, American flags were presented to Heine's mother and widow.

With the presentation of the flags, Billings told the two women: "This is presented on behalf of the men and women of the Pueblo Police Department and a grateful community in honor of Nick."

Officers stood at attention for a 21-gun salute, the playing of taps and the bagpipe-rendition of "Amazing Grace," which managed to move even the most grizzled Pueblo cops in attendance.

Then came the final call.

"Unit 322 is 10-42," a police dispatcher said over an intercom.

Heine's call sign was Unit 322. The code "10-42" signals when an officer finishes a shift or has finished a tour of duty.