

# In memoriam

## Investigator Michelle Lawless

By Carol Pratt



DAVID BINGHAM

Officer Michelle Lawless loved the Everglades. She is pictured here giving Capt. Carl Schultz, of the U.S. Coast Guard, a tour.

She was petite, but she lived life large.

This well-respected officer died on Oct. 27. Her all-terrain vehicle collided with a gate during a routine patrol in the Rotenberger Wildlife Management Area in Palm Beach County. Lawless was 47 years old. She died while doing what she loved best, at a job which allowed her to live life large.

At 4 feet 11 inches tall, one might assume Officer Michelle Lawless was a pushover – but she wasn't.

Lawless' law enforcement career with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission began on May 25, 2003. She did well in the law enforcement academy and held a black belt in karate, but it wasn't her training

that made her powerful – it was her maturity and her easy-going, understanding way. She disarmed people with her humor, intelligence and broad smile.

Lawless spent most of her time in the Everglades or wildlife management areas searching for poachers, trespassers or people fishing or hunting without licenses. She was good at her job. Though Lawless wrote many citations, she had a way about her that left the people she cited feeling respect for her and the agency she worked for.

Officer Scott Caske was close to Lawless and worked with her for four years. He describes Lawless as fair, but people on the wrong side of the law received only one warning.

"She cared about the

environment," Caske said. "She loved wildlife and the outdoors."

Her love of the outdoors was reflected not only in the type of work she did, but in her off-time as well. She scuba-dived, snorkeled and went on weeklong hiking and mountain biking trips.

"She was an excellent woodworker," Caske said. Lawless' skills impressed her coworkers when she and Caske volunteered to replace a 40-foot boardwalk to a dock where they kept their patrol boats. Working side-by-side, they completed this project in two days. She was the kind of person who did what needed to be done.

Caske, like many others, thinks about Lawless every day. Those who knew her miss her. Those who didn't know her, wish they had.