

In memoriam

By Gary Morse

There's a quote from a famous movie that states a person is measured not by how much they love, but how much they are loved by others. True to that thought, 1,000 friends and relatives, including more than 300 law enforcement officers from as far away as Kentucky, paid their last respects to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Capt. Delmar Teagan, age 32. He was laid to rest Thursday, April 19, the result of a tragic and senseless auto accident.

The 10-year FWC veteran officer was returning home on the evening of Friday, April 13, from the FWC's law enforcement academy in Tallahassee. He'd just spent time with 35 new law enforcement recruits, teaching them the profession as he had been taught. In a mere instant, a young man at the wheel of large commercial pickup lost control and veered into Del's oncoming lane. It happened in a bend on a narrow backwoods road in north Lakeland, 5 miles from the officer's home.

Del is home now, but with his Lord.

When searching for words to describe Del, it's hard to come up with just one. Clichés notwithstanding, he was a husband, father, active church member, a fine FWC officer and outdoorsman. To all those in the FWC family who knew him – he was also a valued friend.

He leaves behind his wife Melanie, two sons, Merrick, age 5; and Morgan, age 2; and an unborn child. Del's father Robert, his wife Dorothy and sisters Beth Andrews and Sherry Pollard also survive.

Born on March 12, 1975 in West Palm Beach, Del grew up on the shores of Lake Okeechobee, fishing and airboating with his dad. He was a BMX racer. Del's sisters and his stepmother were there too, to help guide him through his youth, helping to foster a love of the outdoors.

"Del was a good kid and smart as well. He could play outside all day and not get dirty and he never got caught doing the things boys tend to do," said his sister Sherry Pollard.



Capt. Delmar Teagan 1975-2007

As Del matured, his interest in boating and fishing took him down a path to Palm Beach Atlantic University where, in 1996, he graduated with a degree in marine biology.

It was while attending college chemistry class there he first met Melanie Long. But it wasn't until Feb. of 1996, when they were on a church mission trip together, that chemistry entered into their personal equation. By September, the two were engaged. They married Jan. 4, 1997.

Del's and Melanie's deep-rooted religious faith connected and held them together. Growing up, both had attended Christian schools in Florida. Melanie's parents, Pennsylvanians Rich and Carol Long, were missionaries who spent considerable time working with native Indian tribes in South America before returning to make a home in Florida and raise their family. Melanie has a sister Katie, and three brothers, Ron, Ben and Jacob.

Having just graduated from Palm Beach Atlantic University, Del was confident but not cocky about his future. As fate would have it, Del came by the FWC's Lakeland regional office to inquire if there was a place for him with the then-Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. At the time, the only call the old agency had for those with a marine background was in law enforce-

ment as an inspector, working with captive wildlife at zoos and marine parks. He set his sights on that goal and sure enough, he made it - and then some.

Del rose quickly through the ranks. He started his career as an officer patrolling Lake Okeechobee in 1997. He reached his goal in only a few short years when he was promoted to wildlife inspector in Tallahassee, where son No. 1, Merrick, was born.

But the high-pressure demands of his job and new parenting roles took their toll on Del and Melanie. Del so loved Melanie and respected her that he put her above his career and himself. He took an investigator's position in Lakeland so they could be near Melanie's parents. Del eventually was promoted into the regional staff lieutenant's position, also in Lakeland. As a result, their family life prospered and blossomed. Son Morgan came along in 2004. A little girl is due in September.

The career sacrifices Del made for his family only brought him a higher degree of respect from his peers and supervisors. Del's stated career objective was to make Captain. Major Dennis Post, regional law enforcement commander and Del's supervisor, thought so highly of him, that he instigated the effort to promote Del posthumously to that rank. Del is the only FWC law enforcement officer ever honored in this way.

On May 8, 2007, the East Hillsborough Law Enforcement Appreciation Association recognized Del as its Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Officer of the Year. About 400 people attended the awards dinner in his honor.

Del's dad, Bob, had these words to say about his only son that night. "He taught me more about life than I could ever have imagined."

The measure of one's life at least in part – is not how much they love, but how much they are loved by others. No one could be loved any more than Del. **FW**