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THIRTY YEARS AGO

Memories of a fallen father



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Police Officer William Sheehan's son remembers the night his dad was killed in the line of duty

By Sean Murphy
DAILY NEWS STAFF

WESTWOOD - It's been 30 years since Dr. William Sheehan Jr. made the longest car trip of his life. On the night of Feb. 11, 1975, he rode home from college in a police cruiser to be told his father was shot dead in the line of duty in an incident that remains the only one of its kind in the department's history.

And even now, in an interview on Friday, the anniversary of the shooting, Sheehan remembered all of it, the numbness, the disbelief, the pain, just as vividly.

"It's something that I've thought about every day since 30 years ago," Sheehan said.

His father, William, was shot and killed during what was supposed to be a run-of-the-mill stop that evening.

According to news accounts of the time, it happened at around 7:30 p.m. on Canton Street near the Norfolk golf course.

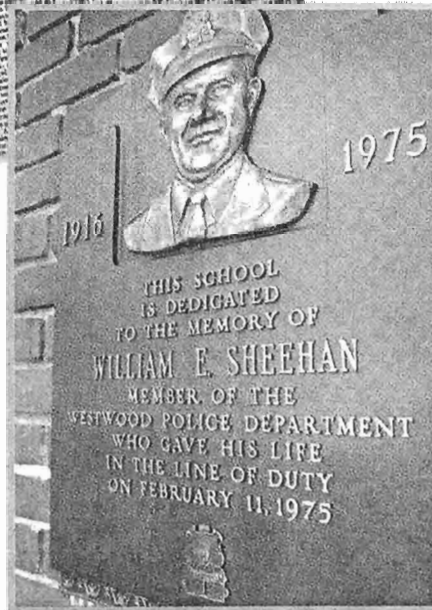
Officer Sheehan, a more than 30-year veteran, pulled up behind a car he saw parked on the side of the road. He and his partner, Officer Robert P. O'Donnell, got out of the cruiser and approached.

Then a man, Armand Therrien, then 44, a former New Hampshire state trooper, got out of the car, and tried to head off the cops by saying, "My friend is sick, but it's OK. I can handle it."

SHEEHAN, Page A14

Top, Officer William Sheehan who was murdered in the line of duty. At right is a memorial plaque for Sheehan inside the lobby at the Westwood elementary school named for him.

DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY JEFF GAHRES



"It's something that I've thought about every day since 30 years ago."

Dr. William Sheehan Jr.

WALPOLE PARK SOUTH

Officials want to keep on wal

Sewer commission pushes for more to track contamination

By Geoff Mc
DAILY NEWS STAFF

WALPOLE - Steven Davis, of the Board of Sewer and Water Commissioners, is expected to ask the engineering firm monitoring Walpole Park South to consider installing more groundwater monitoring wells around the contaminated site.

At the close of his board's Monday night meeting, Davis said he would propose the move for discussion at the next forum on the South Walpole Rd. 1 where hazardous materials have been detected in groundwater over the past several years. WALPOLE, Page A12

NORWOOD

YMCA town board on track

By Brian L
DAILY NEWS STAFF

NORWOOD - There is a clear, but both town and state are working together to clear the line and bring a facility to the town.

That was the message at the town's YMCA Due Diligence and YMAA officials.

Although nobody would be surprised to see a proposal frame when a proposal

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Son recalls historic murder

SHEEHAN, From A1

His "friend," John Oi, 29, a U.S. Army captain and son of a Chinese restaurateur, who lived in Norwood at the time, was in the front seat, bleeding from a gunshot wound to the head. Once both officers saw this, Therrien opened fire.

First, Therrien pointed a .38-caliber pistol at O'Donnell's face and pulled the trigger. Therrien would have killed O'Donnell, had his pistol not misfired. Instead, he grazed the rookie in the face.

As O'Donnell, who had barely a month of experience on the force, fell backward, Therrien fired twice more, hitting O'Donnell once in the chest. The third bullet bounced off O'Donnell's belt buckle.

Therrien then turned on Sheehan, shooting him once in the head and once in the elbow, killing him almost instantly.

But O'Donnell didn't let Therrien get away. He grabbed the man by the leg, and then shot Therrien in the back while the ex-trooper was trying to run off.

By then, off-duty officer John J. McCarthy Jr. happened upon the scene, and helped call for help.

Therrien and O'Donnell survived, but it was too late for Sheehan, who was pronounced dead at the scene. Oi was pronounced dead shortly afterward at a local hospital.

Dr. Sheehan, now a dentist,

was 21 years old at the time and in the pre-med program at Dartmouth College. He was at his dorm studying that night when a campus police officer came to the door.

Dr. Sheehan, who spoke quietly on Friday about his recollections of the night, remembered getting the news that his father was dead, followed by an offer from the officer to drive him home.

It was fitting, perhaps, given that the junior Sheehan had grown up in a culture of policemen. His father was a longtime and well-liked member of the force, and little William was used to seeing his father's friends wearing badges.

But there was no preparing the son for his father's death. There were no cell phones then, and he didn't have a chance to call home before he left, so the three-hour trip back to Westwood with a stranger, uniform or no, was awkward at best.

He said he avoided talking about the shooting, and did his best to make small talk during the trip, all the while inwardly asking himself if this were real.

"It was a long ride home," he said.

It was only after arriving at the Westwood Police station that he faced the reality of what had happened. He saw many officers, practically the whole department, some in uniform, some not, all with grim, sub-

dued expressions, a far cry from the happier times the son of Bill Sheehan usually associated with these men.

"I think that's when it hit me," he said.

From there, officers took the younger Sheehan home to his family to grieve, and seek answers to what had happened and why.

After a trial, Therrien was convicted on murder charges for both victims. The motive for the first shooting has never been made clear, but accounts suggest Therrien shot Oi over a life insurance policy the two bought as part of a business deal together.

Dr. Sheehan said he remembered being in the courtroom during the trial. He said his family thinks about the shooting almost daily, but he doesn't express rage or bitterness when asked what he thinks of Therrien.

"I don't have a desire to say anything specifically to him," Dr. Sheehan said, but when asked what he would do if Therrien tried to talk to him, Dr. Sheehan said, "I would be open to that."

Today, Therrien remains in prison, but several years ago went on the run briefly after walking away from a work detail. He was later caught in another state and brought back to prison.

"It was disturbing in that it

was so easy for him to have done this," Dr. Sheehan said of the escape.

Today, Dr. Sheehan still has fond memories of his dad, the policeman. Originally a carpenter, Sheehan helped build St. Margaret Mary's Church, the building where the town would ultimately hold his funeral. In deference to his service, the town later named an elementary school after him, too.

Sheehan became a police officer, his son said, because at the time the public sector was more stable and paid better.

That meant long hours away from family, a cop's hours, but the junior Sheehan never missed his father, since he saw him driving around town all day in the police car, a source of safety and comfort for him.

"It seemed like he was always there," Dr. Sheehan said.

The thing that made him a good cop, his son believed, was his patience and infectious, calm demeanor. Dr. Sheehan recalled a letter he received shortly after his father's death from a woman, who told of a car accident she had once had, and "this kind police officer," meaning Sheehan, who not only calmed her down, but eventually had her laughing at the scene.

"I could picture my father in that situation, turning a difficult scene into, you know, putting it all under control," Dr. Sheehan said.

Dr. Sheehan may not have become a cop himself, but it seems law enforcement is in the family. His son, he said, has just graduated from Anna Maria College in Paxton, and is seeking a job as an officer at a number of departments, including Westwood.

"I think he's cut out for it," Dr. Sheehan said. "It's just in his nature."

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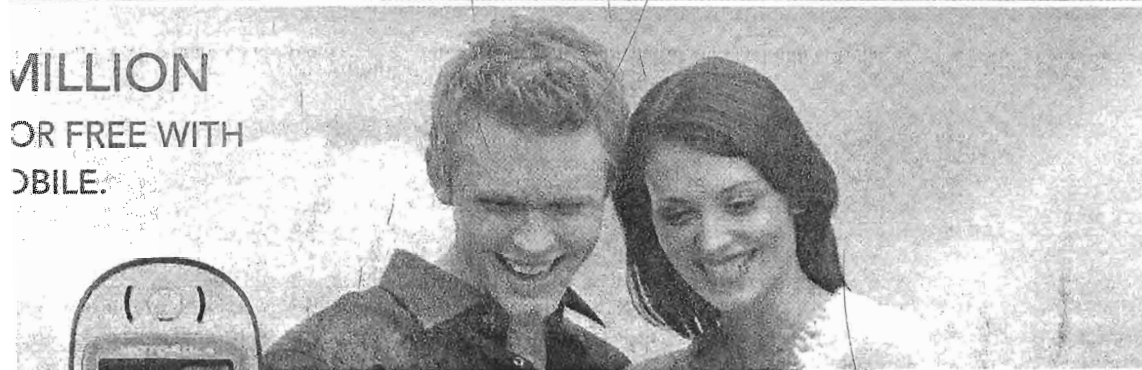
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State takes heat for river pollution

By Michael Kunzelman
 DAILY NEWS STAFF