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Jasper native patrols Big Apple as NYPD rookie

May 11, 2020



Photo provided

Caleb with his parents on graduation day at Western Kentucky University. There was a

baseball game that day and he still went to the game. The baseball field is in the background in this picture.

By BILL POWELL
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NEW YORK — A member of a local law enforcement family has hit the ground running during the current pandemic as a New York Police Department rookie.

NYPD Officer Caleb Lehman, 26, is the son of Steve and Stacey (Tanner) Lehman of Jasper.

“I’m very thankful for how much my parents have supported my decision to move away and pursue the NYPD,” Caleb says. “From the day I told them I’m going to New York to take the NYPD exam to the day I was sworn into the NYPD academy, they believed in me and have been 100% behind me. And I’m super lucky to have a fiancé who 100% supports what I do.”

Caleb’s fiancée is a woman named Brenda, a born-and-raised, Mexican-American New Yorker and first-generation college graduate. Brenda had to look at a map to know where Indiana was after she met her Hoosier, which is something they still laugh about to this day.

The path Caleb is on should come as no surprise.

His father retired from the Dubois County Sheriff’s Office after 27 years as a Dubois County jail officer. His grandfather is former three-term sheriff Terry Tanner, and his uncle is veteran Dubois County Sheriff’s Office Deputy Chris Tanner.

That’s more than 90 years of familial background in law enforcement, and it doesn’t even count the 16 years a great-grandfather (Terry’s dad, William “Ben” Tanner) logged as a justice of the peace in Huntingburg.

Caleb says he has always looked up to those law enforcement professionals in his family.

“It all started with them,” he says.

But baseball also helped pave Caleb’s path to the Big Apple.

He was a student-manager for the Jasper High School baseball program and, in college, for the baseball Hilltoppers. After college, he barnstormed the country helping stage Cal Ripken baseball camps at ballparks large and small.

When those Ripken instructional camps took an East Coast swing, Caleb got to New York and stayed.

It was a risky move that paid off.

“A few people told me my plan was crazy but I was confident I was going to make it work and call New York home,” he says.

He landed paid positions at an elementary school and as a coach for a traveling youth baseball program in New York City while waiting for the hiring process with the NYPD to play out.

The 2 1/2-year process of joining the NYPD actually began during Caleb’s senior year at Western Kentucky University (he graduated in 2017) when he took the department’s written exam. The NYPD had contacted

him about the hiring process while he was doing the Ripken traveling clinics.

The NYPD has a six-month training academy. Caleb, who started the academy in October, was supposed to graduate at the beginning of April, but officials fast-tracked his recruit class when COVID-19 arrived.

A formal graduation that was put on indefinite hold was to have been held at Madison Square Garden. Caleb's entire family had been dialed in to attend.

"I was definitely looking forward to that," the rookie officer says. Maybe it will be rescheduled at a later date, he says.

Caleb resides in the Bronx, works in Manhattan and lives in personal protective gear. He is in a field training program spending two months bouncing around the available shifts, starting with midnights. And he's being paired with multiple officers who have varying times on the force.

"It's been good learning from multiple cops," he says. "You learn new pointers from each cop and listen to what they have to say. I've been fortunate that the cops where I'm at have been welcoming.

"Back in the day, old cops didn't talk to rookies. The times have changed."

Caleb's precinct is divided into four geographic sectors. Each one has a sector car responding to its designated area. There are also additional response cars going to calls anywhere inside the precinct's confines.

On any given day, Caleb might be assigned to do a transport to central booking, pull duties inside the precinct or be in a sector car.

"I pretty much have a different assignment every day," he says.

He always liked metropolitan areas, knew he wanted to come to New York City and had read books on the NYPD. Even though he is paying his dues as a rookie, he is liking the job.

The opportunities presented by the NYPD's many specialized units are especially to his liking.

"That is one reason I wanted to come to a very large department," he says.

And then there are possible future opportunities to pull duty during sporting events at venues like Yankee Stadium and Madison Square Garden.

Right now, as he works midnight shifts in Manhattan, Caleb says NYC's streets are quiet. Maybe not Jasper, Indiana, quiet, but comparable to downtown Indianapolis at night.

"I was in Lower Manhattan not too long ago in the middle of the night on a transport to Manhattan Central Booking and, to be honest, it reminded me of driving through downtown Indianapolis at night," Caleb says. "Even though Indianapolis is a big city ... everything closes around 10 p.m., a lot earlier than what it does here in New York."

Pre-COVID-19, when Caleb was still a daily commuter on trains and buses, he says NYC's bustling streets were packed, even at night.

“During this COVID[-19], people really are staying in at night,” he says. “It might sound silly, but I kind of miss the everyday life that characterizes the city and creates the high energy of the city.”

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