

# Police mourn death of officer

▲ Monetary contribution from officers and the Lakeside community will go towards a memorial at the Public Safety Center for Lt. Aaron G. Tise

By SAMANTHA MCKENZIE  
Chronicle Staff Writer

"After sitting down to eat lunch the other day some of the guys left a tip of about a dollar and change on the table. The waiter gave it back to them and told them to put it towards (Tise's) memorial," one police officer said Tuesday.

The 11th officer in Winston-Salem's history to die in the line of duty will be remembered by his fellow officers and the community with a memorial at the Public Safety Center on Cherry Street — one of the first of its kind.

The tragic death of Lt. Aaron G. Tise, a 24-year veteran with the Winston-Salem Police Department, came as a shock to the entire city last Friday. Four black teenagers have been arrested and charged in

the death of Tise, a white police officer.

According to police reports, Tise was struck by a grader after responding to a call that people were operating heavy construction equipment in the Lakeside area off New Walkertown Road. Tise died instantly. Officer Dan Dodder, who also responded to the call, was slightly injured.

Officials at the department said at least \$2,300 has been collected for Tise's memorial, two hundred of which came from the Lakeside community. Officers said cards and flowers have come from other communities who also share in the loss of a police officer.

The 46-year-old lieutenant joined the department in 1968. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant in 1978 in the Field Services

Bureau. His experience in the force included vice and narcotics, training, detective and patrol divisions.

Officers who attended Tise's funeral on Sunday, which was filled to capacity, described him as a warm and caring person.

"He was an outstanding person and he was an outstanding officer," said Captain Frank Holman, Tise's supervisor.

"Tise was a true asset to this community. I wish we could find some more like him." Holman added that Tise was the kind of officer who really cared about the community and its needs. "He didn't just do his job, he really cared about the crime and the corruption. His death was tragic."

Assistant Chief H. R. Tuttle, an old friend of Tise who worked closely with him for the past 24

years, said he will be missed dearly.

"I grew up with him and went to high school with him. He was about the best worker anybody could want. He was an individual who just always had something good to say."

While it's always tragic to lose an officer in the line of duty, Tuttle said Tise was a person that touched everybody he met.

The mood in the department since Friday has been quiet and reserved, he said. "It was like losing a family member."

The Rev. John Mendez, convener for the Citizens United for Justice group, said he had met Tise.

"He was really a decent guy. We knew him personally. He helped us out on the march with getting the permit," Mendez said.



Lt. Aaron G. Tise

"The black community is extremely sympathetic that this kind of thing would happen," he said. "It's his kind of sensitivity that we wish others in the police department would share."

Assistant Chief Oliver Redd said, "Most people who I've spoken with have expressed their regrets and concern. Everyone is still in shock."

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## Was officer's death an accident?

"Everything I've heard has been all lies. I was out there and the people who are saying they are witnesses were not the people I saw out there that night," said Craig Thompson, 30, a Lakeside resident. Thompson said when he walked home to his Harrington Drive apartment he saw the grader traveling west and someone was driving it. He said he could not identify the driver. But Thompson said by the time the grader appeared on East Drive, no one was operating it.

"No one was in that grader when it hit that officer. I saw the officer out of his car. He tried to jump up and stop the grader but he

got hit with the door. That's when he fell off and hit the ground," Thompson said, refuting police reports that Tise was struck while trying to exit his vehicle through the passenger door.

Other residents in the area agreed with Thompson. They also said there were at least 10 people who participated in riding on the grader. According to North Carolina statute, a felony murder, even without premeditation or intent to kill, is still classified as first-degree murder.

District Attorney Thomas Keith said first-degree and second-degree murder charges are possibilities, with first-degree murder carrying a

sentence of life imprisonment or the death penalty.

Wanda Crews, mother of Conrad and Jamarus said, "Everyone was riding that grader. The whole community was out there and my sons and the two others just got picked out of the crowd. Those kids were just joyriding and it turned out to be a tragic accident," she added. Crews says her sons were singled out because of their criminal record.

Patricia Johnson, mother of Witherspoon, said her son was with her the entire night. "I was the one who called the police at 1:30 to tell them that some kids were joyriding on that grader. My son was in the house with me and his grandmother.

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We went outside (at least three times) to see what was going on, but he was not involved in that," Johnson said.

She added that with all the confusion that night, it was hard to tell who initiated the theft of the grader or who was last seen riding it. All three mothers of the suspects and community residents say they are hoping the charges will be lessened.

Captain Linda Petree said the incident is still being investigated. The Crews brothers, Fierson and Witherspoon, are all being held without bond and have been assigned court-appointed attorneys. A preliminary hearing will be held July 10.

## Need for better race relations

knew him.

This week, more than a few thoughtful people are asking: Is Winston-Salem poised for race riots? Should the Human Relations Commission take the forefront on race relations issues? Should the board of education, board of aldermen, and county commissioners undergo annual sensitivity training?

Local polarization of the races is exacerbated by the nation's political and economic scene, but local politicians also shoulder much of the responsibility.

"The Board of Education's recent decision to move ahead with redistricting plans before the black members come on board showed a real lack of judgment and sensitivity," notes Dr. Cindy Farris, a sociologist and dean of students at Salem College.

Mayor Martha Wood is one of a growing number of people who feel that the Human Relations Commission should actively monitor race relations, respond immediately to race relations crises such as we now have, and keep diverse groups of the community talking about what is on their minds and coordi-

nating together.

"The Human Relations Commission is a reasonable group to look to for assistance in diffusing racial tensions," said Wood. "I have said that for five or six years. For some reason they've not wanted to deal much with matters of race outside of housing."

Emery Rand, director of the Human Relations Commission, says his office is holding a six-week series of sessions in which an interracial group of ten to sixteen people meet weekly to discuss race relations.

But asked if he thought the commission should be at the forefront of race relations in Winston-Salem, Rand answered, "I don't think that responsibility should fall on one group, because if that group fails people have a place to point their fingers. I think the whole community needs to be involved. We can't be the answer, the cure-all."

Khalid Griggs, the Imam of the Community Mosque of Winston-Salem, says the commission's public image is blurry.

"The commission is not as clearly defined to the public as it

needs to be. In spite of its years of existence, it's not explicitly known what the commission's mission is, beyond housing complaints and employment complaints. There has to first be some charge to the commission to play a particular role!"

Sue Hendricks, who chairs the Human Relations Commission, says the commission is "vitaly concerned and involved with assuring that we establish and maintain positive race relations, but we have no political power. Our only authority is through influence."

Hendricks defended the commission's recent recommendation against a citizen's police review board, saying, "We investigated everything we heard about police brutality, rumors about black girls being strip-searched, black males being strip-searched in front of search lights, and all the other stupid rumors going around, and we never found a person who claimed it happened to them."

Asked if she felt the commission should actively foster communications between diverse factions of the community as a preventative mechanism, Hendricks answered,

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"We had the idea up until about a month ago that everything in our community was going along about as well as it could."

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## Chronicle names Hill Managing Editor

Chronicle Staff Report

Sheridan Hill has been promoted to managing editor of the Winston-Salem Chronicle. She has been working with the Chronicle for more than a year, most recently as assistant editor. Prior to that, she was vice president of marketing at B&C Associates, Inc., an international public relations firm specializing in minority affairs and based in High Point. For two years prior to that, she directed public relations for the Tarheel Triad Girl Scout Council.

Hill has been writing and editing for more than twelve years. She is a former assistant editor for McFarland & Company, Inc., publishers of scholarly and reference books. Her articles and essays have appeared in national and regional publications, including *The Charlotte Observer*, *Hospitals* magazine, *Minorities and Women in Business*, *North Carolina Homes and Gardens*, and *Winston-Salem Magazine*.

"I'm excited about the future for the Chronicle as we continue to share the black perspective," said Hill.

She and her husband and three children have lived in Winston-Salem for six years. Her husband, Patrick J. Condit, works for the same Corporation.



Photo by Mike Cunningham  
Sheridan Hill

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