

# A Life of Service drives John 'Jed' Jedrejczyk on the Unity Tour

Navy Vet, Longtime Passaic Cop and Clifton Resident keeps 1,000 Cyclists moving from Jersey to Washington

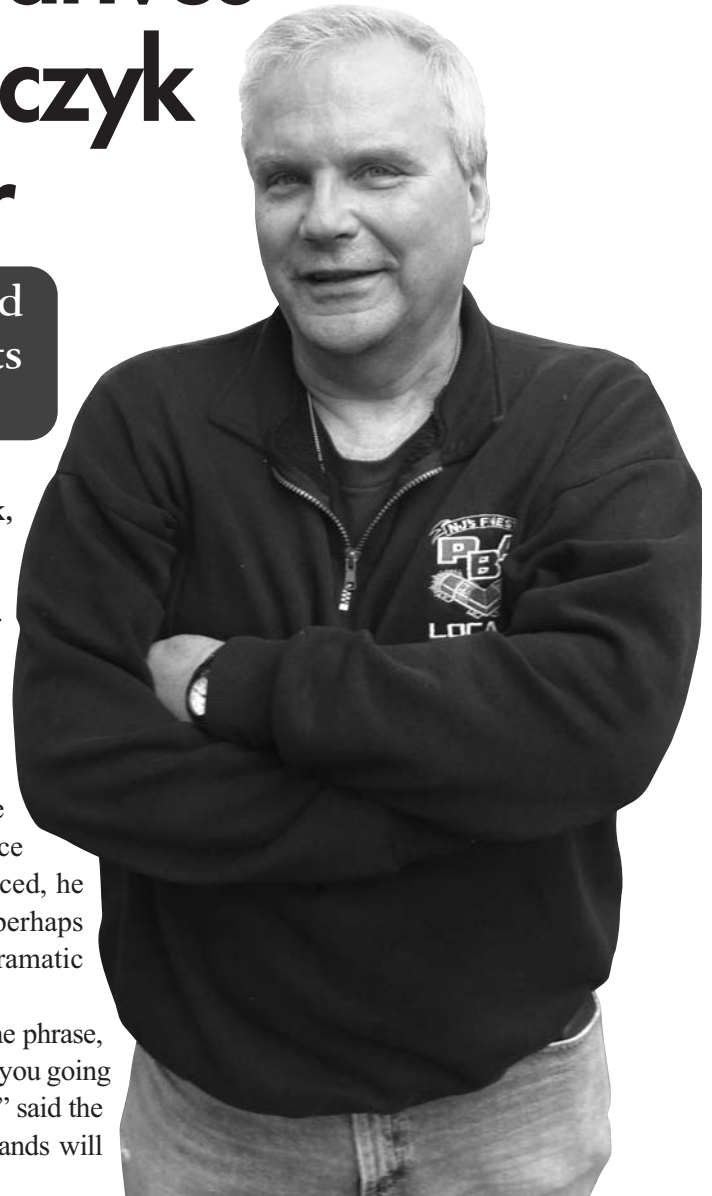
by Joe Hawrylko

To really understand the life of John 'Jed' Jedrejczyk, you've got to visit the TV room in his Martin Ave. home.

A single, plush recliner sits in the center of the chamber, illuminated by the sun's rays that beam in from the patio door and sunlights in the ceiling. Dozens of lush plants and ferns hang from the ceiling and walls, making it difficult to navigate the snug, warm and calm room.

Plaques, awards, photos of family and friends and other items on the walls and shelves of his modest Cape Cod home help tell the story of his 35-year career in the Passaic Police Department, where he is a Detective Sergeant. Twice divorced, he is a man who seems to place duty before anything else—perhaps John McClane from the *Die Hard* movies—minus the dramatic explosions and angry terrorists.

His bachelor lifestyle is why 'Jed' is able to fully embrace the phrase, 'to serve and protect', going beyond his role as a cop. "What are you going to do, come home and sit in a rocking chair and wait for death?" said the 61-year-old. "You gotta do something," True enough—idle hands will get you in trouble, or at the very least, leave you very bored.

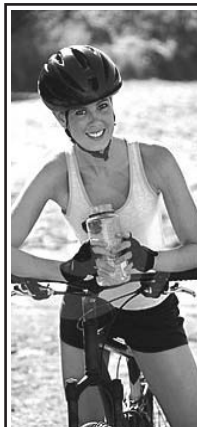


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But how many people would voluntarily spend their weekends running drills with the Coast Guard Auxiliary or the Naval Militia? The night shift sergeant also found time to teach ESL classes at Passaic High School.

But now on May 9—and actually for weeks leading up to it—Jed will shift his efforts to the Police Unity Tour, which deploys from Florham Park. A 10-year veteran of the event, Jed is a national board member of the Tour. But as the cyclists get underway, he rolls up his sleeves and serves as the advance support team on ride days.

Jed and his crew go ahead of the riders, making sure supplies—Gatorade, water, fruit, Fig Newtons—are there for 1,400 participants (cyclists and others) at each of the four daily pit stops. “It’s amazing to see a mile of bicycles,” said Jed. “And boy these guys can eat.”

It takes lots of planning and coordination, and Jed knows his job is critical to the success of the tour and the safety of the riders. For the four days during the ride, the crew is up at 5 am and their day doesn’t end until as late as 11 pm.

His daughter, Lisa, has followed her father’s footsteps and joined the support crew. She is his “right arm” at the many fundraisers that go on in the weeks leading up to the ride down to Washington D.C.

“I do all of the cooking and we have a good time,” said Jed, a sometimes-chef who managed the kitchen for the recent spaghetti dinner at the Boys & Girls Club “People know it’s for the Police Unity Tour and not some politician.” Last year, close to \$1.3 million was raised by the Tour, and the funds will help to build a national museum in Washington to honor Law Enforcement Officers.



*Above, the young sailor, circa 1968, and the veteran today, on the facing page.*

Whether it’s with the Tour or in some other capacity, if there’s a way to help, Jed’s your guy.

His childhood might have a lot to do with it as well. He grew up in poverty, and his parents did the best they could for him as a kid. “I was born and raised in Passaic—it was a tough little town,” Jed recalled. “I was a little street urchin who ran around all the time.”

Jed first left Passaic in 1965, when the 17-year-old was faced with a decision: voluntarily enlist in a branch of the military in anticipation of going to Vietnam, or have Uncle Sam select one for you.

Opting to choose his fate, Jed and a bunch of friends went to the neighborhood post office and signed up for the Air Force. But Uncle Sam had the last say, as the recruiter decided the Navy needed more warm bodies and Jed managed to enlist in the US Navy.

“It ended up being a great experience—the best I ever had,” Jed said. “It (boot camp and time in the serv-

ice) helped prep me for the police academy. You can tell the military guys from the ones who aren’t. They know how to wear a uniform, fall in line, and other things.”

For the next three years, Jed toiled away in the sweaty, cramped confines of the engine room aboard the USS *Greenwich Bay*, the Navy’s flagship for the then relatively unknown Middle East region. It wasn’t the most glamorous job, but it beat trying to cheat death in the jungle.

Jed returned to Passaic in 1968 and was able to pick up a job servicing vending machines. No yet having a plan, he only decided to take the civil service exam out of boredom. “One of the neighborhood guys was doing a police test at Passaic High and I drove him,” Jed said. “They wouldn’t let in non-testers, so the lady said why not take the test and I passed it.”

A veteran Passaic lieutenant suggested to Jed that he would do good patrolling the same streets on which he grew up on, so he quit his job, took a pay cut and donned the blue uniform that would come to define his life.

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Some 35 years later, Jed is still on those same streets, preparing to end his career where it began. He's served in several different capacities, working as a detective, an investigator for the robbery department, as an officer with street crimes and even auditing his peers for internal affairs.

It's the line of work that generates plenty of bar room conversation and makes an interview with him so entertaining. Outrageous crimes, hilarious arrests and puzzling murders are all standard fare.

"We got a call about a dead guy on River Dr. in a car" Jed recalled. "I knew him from the Y—he was a hand ball player. He got shot with a .22 right behind the ear. It looked like a mob hit."

Initial inspection of the crime scene revealed no clues. Detectives chased leads for over a year—even going as far as Florida—before getting a tip about a woman who lived in the Carlton Towers on Passaic Ave., which is where the victim lived.

"She used to run the stairs for exercise and so did the guy," said Jedrejczyk, who knew the woman from a local pizzeria that local officers were fond of. "We found out they had an affair."

Further investigation lead to another informant, who claimed that the woman appeared at a relative's house one night bloody and distraught. Still, even after intense interrogations, it took Jed to crack the case. "The captain couldn't break her. She kept on crying," he said. "So I kept comforting her and got her a blanket and then she says, 'I want to talk to you,' and she admits it."

The husband ended up finding out about the affair and gave her an option: kill your lover or I'll kill you. With the soft-touch confession, the Passaic PD was able to close the case.



*Jed's partner in many of his volunteer endeavors is his daughter, Lisa. The pair recently manned the kitchen at the Clifton-Passaic Police Unity Tour spaghetti dinner which fed a few hundred. They also work as a team on the trip to Washington.*

It's a story that seems like it could be the focal point of a plot on some cop series, but it was just another day on the job for Jed. The arrest is just one of the many accomplishments that has been immortalized in the form of an award on the walls of his room. It's a pat on the back for hard work, for staking out in a church during the holiday season to catch a burglar instead of spending time with family and friends.

But while recognition for a job well done is nice, accolades and praise aren't enough to keep you showing up at your job every day. The grind of long graveyard shifts, gruesome crime scenes and a never ending stream of bad guys is enough to wear any man's spirit thin.

But Jed loves his job. He loves his community and he wants to be one of the guys who fills his niche in the effort to keep it safe. As a result, Jed's off days from the Passaic PD tend to be pretty busy. Sometimes he's patrolling the Delaware River with

the Coast Guard Auxiliary, occasionally plucking distressed swimmers from the choppy waters (there's a plaque for that one, too).

Less adventurous days were spent teaching English-as-a-Second Language to new immigrants at Passaic High School. But after 15 years, he decided to scale back and took a temporary leave of absence.

"It's just giving back to the public," said Jed. "They've been paying me for 35 years, and this is the time you pay it back, and it doesn't hurt."

His involvement with the Police Unity Tour is an extension of that mentality. That's just typical Jed, putting others before himself.

Jed's bachelor lifestyle is why he's able to dedicate himself to so many causes. Public service is a full-time job in itself for him.

But like all good guys, he's got to ride off into the sunset eventually. But after meeting Jed, it won't be long before he finds himself involved in the community again.

# Police Unity Tour • Riding for Those Who Died

With dual goals of remembering officers killed in the line of duty and raising money for a National Law Enforcement Memorial and Museum, a Clifton team of 10 are riding bicycles in the annual Police Unity Tour to Washington, D.C. on May 9-12.

Bicycle riders include Randy Colondres, John Kavakich, Robert Bais and Tom Hawrylko. They will be supported by Derek Fogg, Brian Fopma, William Bais, Stephen Berge, Gary Giardina and Michael McLaughlin. The Clifton group will join over 1,000 others participants from across the region and the nation who will participate in the annual 300 mile bicycle ride.

The Clifton group must raise a collective total of \$17,500. Over the last few months, many firms and individuals have contributed. We held a spaghetti dinner, hosted a fundraiser at Pub 46, and on April 30 at TGI Fridays, (after we went to press and where the winner of a bicycle and Quad raffle were held), the community has helped us near our goal.

On April 28, we visited some of our sponsors to say thanks, including Allwood Bicycles, (above) Athenia Mason Supply (at right), Shook Funeral Home, Gams Automotive, NOC/Telep Motors, Clifton Building Supply and Signarama, to name just a few. To all that have donated, we say thanks—your contributions will help build a permanent tribute to fallen Police Officers from across the United States. For more info, go to [www.policeunitytour.com](http://www.policeunitytour.com). To help out, see any police officer or call 973-253-4400.





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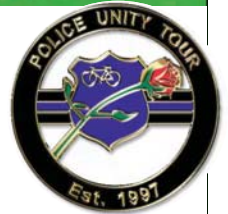
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April 15 • Clifton, Passaic, WPU Police Unity Tour Fundraiser at Pub 46



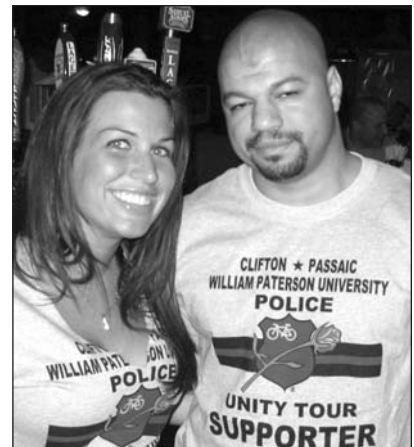
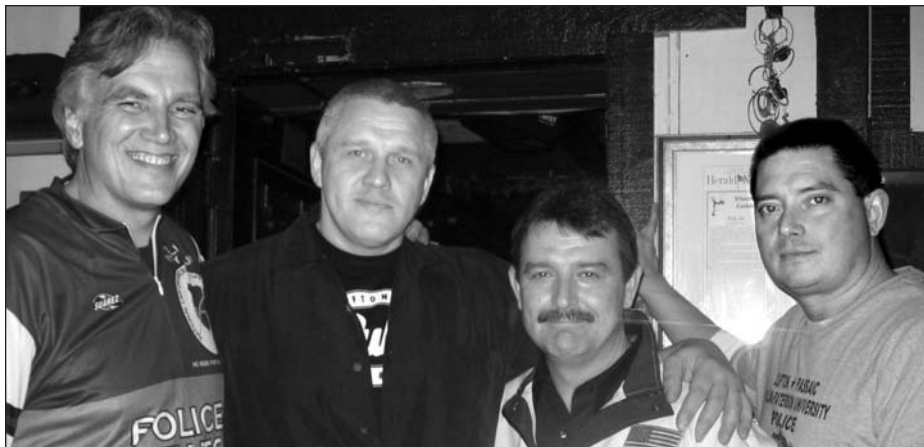
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