

## DETAILS OF THE NOMINEE'S SERVICE AND WHY THE NOMINEE IS BEING HONORED

Robert "Dennis" Cooper was born February 4, 1961, to Robert Amos Cooper and Thelma Louise Cooper in Sylva, North Carolina.

As a young boy Dennis always enjoyed and cherished the time firemen, EMS, local police, deputies and highway patrolmen would stop in the family business in Sylva to visit his dad. Their dedication to public service did not go unnoticed and had a profound impact on his desire to pursue public service himself.

After excelling academically and athletically at Sylva-Webster High School, he attended Southwestern Community College and Asheville Buncombe Community College, where he studied accounting.

As his desire to be involved in community service increased, Dennis joined the Black Mountain Fire Department as a volunteer EMT in 1980 and was eventually hired as a paid fireman. He served with pride for over two years as he continued to hone his skills.

Dennis joined Biltmore Forest Public Safety in 1983 as a Public Safety Officer and served until 1988. Dennis was mentored by Grover Honeycutt, Chief of Public Safety, who was his role model for the early part of his public service career. His interest in law enforcement steadily increased at Biltmore, and he successfully completed Basic Law Enforcement Training in 1984. Dennis was enticed to leave law enforcement and go to work in the private sector by the offer to use his accounting education and personnel management skills, however, his interest to be a law enforcement officer and serve the people in the community grew stronger after leaving the profession.

In 1990, he and his wife Patti moved to Kure Beach, and in 1992 the desire to serve people overcame the desire to make more money. He was hired as a patrol officer in March 1992 and became the fifth full time member of the Kure Beach Police Department. Dennis came to know almost every resident of the town by first name. He quickly became a certified state instructor, K9 handler and investigator. He was well liked by the residents and fellow officers, and his enthusiasm was well received in the town.

In January 1996, Dennis was appointed Chief of Police, after the retirement of Chief Troy Hamilton. His management skills were severely put to the test several months later with the arrival of the devastating hurricane Bertha in July and then hurricane Fran in September. The tremendous 1-2 punch destroyed many homes and businesses, knocked out utilities in Kure Beach and closed the town down for months. Dennis coordinated with local, state and federal agencies to provide food, water, services and security for the town, emergency personnel and its residents. He personally made contacts with private individuals and companies who

donated their time, money and resources to help pull the town through the devastation. He worked tirelessly for months to help get the town back on its feet.

In preparing to submit his name for this award many people were asked to briefly describe Dennis briefly. Some of the responses were: humble, intelligent, compassionate, fair, honest, patient, friendly, ethical, happy, thoughtful, family man, team player, great leader, religious, selfless, trustworthy, calm, caring, highly competitive, and the list goes on. One thing that people generally don't call him is "Chief". He is known by the residents and employees as "Dennis", and he wouldn't have it any other way. He is the man in the finely pressed pants and button down shirt with the warm and friendly smile. He wears a uniform about once or twice a year for public events when required of his office. Many of the residents in town have his cell phone number, which he answers 24 hours per day. No problem is too big or small for him to handle.

In 2001 Dennis's vision for Kure Beach Police Department became a reality as he oversaw the migration of the department from a tiny office in town hall to the development of a new building for the Kure Beach Police Department. Dennis, officers of the department, local contractors and citizens all pitched in to build the new Police Headquarters. A plaque in the foyer, with the list of 36 names of people, businesses and groups that provided significant effort for the construction of the facility is a tribute to the leadership skills of Dennis. Incidentally, Dennis Cooper's name is not on that plaque, which is typical of his humility.

In 2001, Dennis was nominated and accepted in Class 207 the prestigious F.B.I. National Academy in Quantico, Virginia, whose mission is to "support, promote, and enhance the personal and professional development of law enforcement leaders by preparing them for complex, dynamic, and contemporary challenges through innovative techniques, facilitating excellence in education and research, and forging partnerships throughout the world. He became the class treasurer and was instrumental in raising funds for the 911 Memorial at the academy.

Dennis brought his refined and improved skill set back to Kure Beach and gradually began a makeover. Education, training, and community policing were strongly encouraged. Officers became a reflection of the values Dennis possessed. The town of Kure Beach went through a huge real estate boom in the late 1990's and early 2000's. The full time population tripled from 800 in 1996 to about 2200 currently. Tourism brings about 700,000 visitors each year to area attractions and to Kure Beach to vacation and enjoy the beaches and facilities. The Department has grown to 12 full time officers, five reserve officers and a full time administrative assistant. The Department has seen the creation of a canine unit and special investigations unit in the process. Dennis has made sure his officers are the first to receive the latest tools and training. AED's, Crisis Intervention Team training, Tasers, computer and cell phone forensics equipment

and related training have made our officers and community safer, and a better place to live. In 2015, Kure Beach police were the first in New Hanover County and one of the first in the state to obtain bodycams. He has partnered with the Secret Service, ATF, F.B.I. and many other agencies to provide training and support to Kure Beach, something not available to small towns and many large cities.

Outside of police work, Dennis has been a great supporter of helping the community. He has created a Senior Watch Program; assists the hungry through the Kure Beach Blue Line. He reaches those in need of food throughout the year and holidays; supports the Waccamaw Boys and Girls Homes through donations and he created a fund that helps the homeless, indigent or unfortunate who are in need of food or gas money to get back home. He has provided many a dollar from his own pocket. too!

Living and working in a beach community brings certain risks when dealing with Mother Nature. In 2002 Dennis received the National Weather Service and Sea Grant Award for his efforts to inform vacationers of the hazards of rip currents. He worked with the North Carolina office of NOAA Sea Grant and the National Weather Service to prepare, publish and distribute educational brochures to motels and tourist center. He had signs posted at all beach walkways, ensured lifeguards were well trained, and spoke to organizations to promote rip current awareness. He was recognized for his leadership and cited for being proactive to reduce tragedies. He has participated in and promoted annual hurricane preparedness seminars for residents and visitors to help them understand the impact it can have on our community and steps to minimize that impact.

In addition to looking after our residents and visitors, Dennis has helped the citizens he has helped his own officers in a very unique way. He cooks lunch and dinner for working officers on holidays and summer weekends, when area businesses are packed with tourists. Occasionally he will prepare breakfast, too. This gives his officers the opportunity to relax, get out of the spotlight and catch their breath.

Dennis has strived and lived his life in an exemplary manner. He has sacrificed birthdays, holidays, anniversaries and family time to make his town a better place to live. His contributions to the people of Kure Beach are immeasurable. He has treated his officers like family, counseling them when needed, pushing them when they need a push, and putting them in a position to succeed and grow.

If Kure Beach had not already been named, it just might be called COOPER BEACH!

Thank You Dennis for your lifetime of service to the citizens of North Carolina.

