

Cassopolis community rallies to support injured officer

Culton, Sarah . TCA Regional News ; Chicago [Chicago]01 Feb 2018.

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FULL TEXT

Feb. 01--CASSOPOLIS -- Friday evening, on the Ross Beatty Jr./Sr. High basketball court, Cassopolis native and community service trooper with the Niles Michigan State Police post Jesse Binns stood in front of the crowd and thanked them for supporting his brother-in-law.

"I'm sure you've all seen the news to know that one of our troopers was shot just a couple days ago," Binns said. "Not only is he a brother in blue, but he is a brother at home. He is a close family member. If you don't know, tonight, everybody that is here, your proceeds are going to help my brother."

A video of Binns' speech has been viewed more than 32,000 times and shared nearly 500 times, with the comments section flooding with support for Binns' brother-in-law Aaron Steensma, who was injured in a shooting last Wednesday.

MSP troopers Steensma, of Cassopolis, and Daniel Thayer were involved in a shooting which occurred the morning of Jan. 24 while they were executing a search warrant related to a cold case investigation in Union Township in rural Branch County. When troopers announced their presence prior to making entry into the residence, the suspect, 62-year-old David Kidney, leveled a long gun at the officers.

During the shooting Steensma, of the Marshall Post, was shot in the chest and Thayer, also of the Marshall Post, received a grazing wound to the hand and chest. The round that struck Thayer in the chest was stopped by his ballistic vest.

Steensma, a Cassopolis graduate with children in the Cassopolis Public School system, was transported to the hospital, and was reported to be in serious but stable condition, according to Director Col. Kriste Kibbey Etue. Steensma is reportedly improving and doing "remarkably well for the seriousness of his injury," according to a press release issued by Etue.

Since the incident, the Cassopolis community has come together to support Steensma and his family from supporting Facebook posts to monetary donations to help cover his medical costs.

Most recently, CPS donated all the proceeds from Friday's home basketball game to Steensma and his family, totaling more than \$1,200.

"We want to lend a helping hand and let [Steensma] know that we appreciate his service," said CPS Superintendent Angela Piazza. "His kids go to our schools. We wanted to make sure that they knew that they had our support and the community's support as much as we can."

The Cassopolis Police Department has also shown its support for the fellow officers who were injured last week. Members of the department put together a card for Steensma, which was hand delivered to him in the hospital by Police Chief Brian LaValle.

The shooting hit close to home for LaValle, as he worked with both Steensma and Thayer at a post in White Pigeon, Michigan in the 1990s.

LaValle said that officer shootings like this are difficult for him as a police chief, because he knows that something similar could happen to him or one of his officers.

"It's not something you ever really prepare for," LaValle said. "People think of things like this as something that only big city cops need to worry about, but this happened in a rural area, and it is happening more and more. We have to

keep a tactical mindset and know that something like this could happen at any time."

Though LaValle said that officer shootings are something that he always has to keep on his mind, he said that he is heartened by the way the community has rallied around Steensma and supported officers in the aftermath of the shooting.

"It's very humbling to have a community that is so supportive. In my 10 years or so of being here, Cassopolis has shown tremendous support for their local officers, whether they are state, local or county," LaValle said. "We are all thinking of Aaron. He seems to be doing well, and we are all very happy about that."

People may support Steensma by making a donation to the Michigan State Troopers Assistance Fund, and writing "D/Sgt. Aaron Steensma" in the "Memory/Honor/Support of:" box on the form. Checks may also be mailed to 1715 Abbey Road, Suite B, East Lansing, MI 48823.

Binns is also selling stickers in support of Steensma that can be purchased by contacting Binns at (269) 683-4411.

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