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Movie screening commemorates fallen police officers

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The law enforcement officers who gave their lives protecting others were honored Friday with the screening of the documentary film "Heroes Behind the Badge."

The film was directed by Academy Award-winning film and television director Wayne Derrick, grandson of former Texas State President Leland Derrick. Derrick's connection with Texas State served as reason for the Kyle Citizens' Police Academy Alumni Association to host the event on campus, as well as an opportunity to introduce the new organization to the local community.

"Heroes Behind the Badge" presents viewers with an inside look at the actions taken by law enforcement officers every day. Some officers lived to share their tales of heroism and loss, but the stories of those who sacrificed their lives are shared by those closest to them, officers and family alike.

"We wanted (the film) to be real, raw and powerful," said Executive Producer Bill Erfurth. "We wanted to show something that creates a greater sense of respect for the officers of law

enforcement."

The evening commenced at 7 p.m. in the Evans Liberal Arts auditorium, beginning with the presentation of the United States and Texas flags by the Lehman High School JROTC and the singing of the national anthem by Sgt. Mike Wood of the Hays County Sheriff's Office.

A short memorial service honoring the past year's fallen law enforcement officers followed, accompanied by Texas State student Christopher Diaz's playing of taps, and finally the singing of "Amazing Grace" and "You'll Never Walk Alone" by Ron Ulen, School of Music assistant professor.

Those who performed were met with silence. Pastor Cole Phillips of Connection Church in Kyle led the audience in a brief invocation before Cynthia Vetter, widow of a police officer, took the stage to receive a plaque from the Kyle Citizens' Police Academy. Vetter then shared the story of her late husband's passing.

As Vetter exited the stage, Dallas Lee, master of ceremonies, introduced Erfurth to the audience. Erfurth spoke to the crowd about the film's importance for the law enforcement community, as well as its meaning to him as a "labor of love" because of his 26 years as an offi-

cer with the Miami-Dade Police Department. He retired five years ago.

The audience then viewed the film, which told seven stories of officers at the federal, state and local levels. The documentary placed a strong emphasis on an officer's job having the potential to switch from routine to serious in a matter of seconds, sometimes resulting in loss of life.

"It's a wonderful film that portrays law enforcement in an area most don't see it in," said John Helenberg, Director of Agency Operations for the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education. "It brings a better understanding to the community and will increase officer safety."

The screening was sponsored by the Kyle Police Department and Kyle Citizens' Police Academy Alumni Association.

"We wanted everyone to feel that we have an investment in our law enforcement officers," said Maria Lee, president of the association.

The film brought attention to National Police Week, an annual event held in Washington, D.C. during the week of May 15, honoring the sacrifices of law enforcement officers.

"It reveals both the humanity and tragedy of our profession without utilizing a graphic portrayal of the violence we live with," said Earl Bolls, a 37-year detective with the Austin Police Department.

According to Erfurth, the documentary has already impacted the law enforcement community. Texas became the first state to mandate that the film be shown in all state police academies, with six other states already following suit.

A private screening will be held on Thursday at the Texas State Capitol in Austin for the Texas legislature at 5 p.m.

DVD and Blu-Ray copies of the film can be purchased at the film's website, <http://www.heroes-behindthebadge.com/>, from which 50 percent of the proceeds will go to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund.