

Hundreds turn out to support officers hurt in North Haven blast

9 wounded SWAT members attend fundraiser at Stony Creek Brewery

By Lisa Reisman

6/1/18

BRANFORD — They were handpicked for their laser focus on professional and bravery, their ability to compose themselves in the face of chaos.

They were part of the South Central Regional SWAT team composed of officers from North Haven, East Haven, Branford,

North Branford and Madison.

On a picture-perfect late afternoon on May 10, sirens wailed and bagpipes droned as a procession of motorcades led the nine SWAT officers wounded by a May 2 house explosion in North Haven to Branford's Stony Creek Brewery, their families at their sides.

Some of "the best of the best," as Sgt. Mathew Larsen, of the Guilford Police Department, called them, were still in wheelchairs or on crutches. Others wore casts or had their arms in a sling. The burns didn't show.

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Catherine Avalorie / Hearst Connecticut Media

The New Haven Police Department Motorcycle Unit, Police Honor Guard and the Police Pipes and Drums of Waterbury ride under an American flag hoisted from Branford Truck 1 across the bridge on Indian Neck Road to a fundraiser hosted by the South Central SWAT Team at Stony Creek Brewery in Branford on May 24.

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Nor did the concussions suffered in the blast that rocked the region. Or the psychological trauma some may endure for years.

All were met by applause, cheers and high fives from the hundreds that turned out in their support.

"I'm very proud, extremely proud," said Linda D'Angelo, mother-in-law of Officer Craig Michalowski, of East Haven, who was injured in the blast.

"It takes a special person to leave for work every morning not knowing if they're coming home," said Lenny Iaquinto, a retired New York State transit police officer, as SWAT members mixed with family, friends and admirers and the American flag rippled in the gentle breeze.

"They performed heroically and did what they were trained to do," Officer Marc Andrew, a member of the Branford Police Department, said. "We're all just glad that no one was more severely

injured or killed."

Dennis Kelly, of the New Haven State Attorney's Office, came with a group of colleagues to celebrate the officers.

"They walked into an unknown and faced something they could never have imagined, and they stood tall," he said.

Inside, people industriously filled out long strips of raffle tickets in support of a fund to help supplement the income of the SWAT members who haven't been able to work because of their injuries and depend on the over-time pay.

"All these people who came out for us, it means a lot," said Officer Luke Rasile, of the East Haven Police Department, who suffered a fractured tibia and torn ligaments in the blast. "It reminds me why I got into this line of work in the first place."

To help support the families of the South Central Regional Swat Team, visit gofundme.com/support-southcentral-regional-swat.

As of May 25, some \$19,595 was raised of the \$50,000 goal.