

Highland Beach's Public Safety Hero

This is a continuing series of stories about your neighbors and citizens who help make Highland Beach a three-mile stretch of paradise.

John Shoemaker

This is a story of a journey that started in Ajmer, in the Province of Rajasthan, India. Ajmer is located southwest of New Delhi, close to the Pakistan border, the birthplace of Dwayne Fernandes. Dwayne's father was from Goa, a State in southwestern India with coastlines stretching along the Arabian Sea. It has a long history as a Portuguese colony prior to 1961.

As an infant, Dwayne lived on a ship with his mother and father, a Chief Engineer and Merchant Mariner. During his early years, he traveled the oceans. Later, members of his family emigrated to New York, and eventually, Dwayne and his family followed. As fortune would have it, Dwayne's father got a job at IBM in Boca Raton during the early days of personal computers.

Dwayne went to St. John Paul High School in Boca Raton, and with his parent's approval, he joined the Marines at the age of seventeen. He wanted to join them since he thought they were the "toughest outfit" and "if I can make it with the Marines, I can make it through most anything in life," he said. He smiled when he also admitted they have the best uniforms.

So, Dwayne went to Paris Island, S.C., and Tustin, CA, in 1986 and was selected to go to supply school based in Camp Lejeune, N.C., and later at the Marine Corps Air Station at El Toro, CA. This gave him a chance to learn all that is involved in supply/parts support for Marine helicopters. Soon, he would be reassigned as an aviation supply clerk at bases in Okinawa and later at Subic Bay, Philippines.

Dwayne finished his enlistment as a Marine in October of 1990 and came back to Florida. With his experience in the Marines managing equipment and supporting a large organization, he took a low-entry, very low-paying job as a front desk clerk for the Delray Beach Police Dept. It would prove to be a time to show his discipline and work ethic while giving him the opportunity to read and study volumes of police reports. Soon the Chief of Police asked him if he would like to be a police officer.

While Dwayne was a Marine, there was no war to fight, but little did he know he would be directly involved in the drug war.

Returning from the Police Academy with high honors, he started in "Community Policing" on a bicycle. It was a time to learn, meet residents, and understand the community's problems and needs. One event propelled Officer Fernandes to public notice when he and his partner came across a home on fire. They immediately went inside to rescue what turned out to be an elderly, blind amputee. After being hospitalized and recovering from smoke inhalation, he was awarded the Medal of Valor.

Later, he was reassigned to Carver Estates in Delray, which at the time was a Federal Housing community with high crime. Again, working with the residents, his team dramatically reduced

crime and was nominated for the Herman Goldstein Award. This led to another new assignment working with the DEA Task Force for three years. During that time, he was also an undercover agent dealing with drug problems in our area.

As a police officer in Delray, Officer Fernandes was awarded "Police Officer of the Year" six times. He did emphasize that he got excellent mentoring from another officer, Craig Hartmann. Currently, the Highland Beach Chief of Police, at the time, Officer Hartmann was a Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain, and Major for the Delray Police Dept.

Chief Hartmann hired Officer Fernandes in 2009 on a part-time basis and became full-time in 2020. Today, Officer Fernandes is our town's Detective and supports investigations of crimes, background checks of personnel, crime analysis, IT requirements, and data management. He emphasized that with the outstanding support of our citizens, the Police provide continuous training while expanding to adjust to the growth of our area.

Detective Fernandes won Officer of the Year for Highland Beach in 2022.

It is true that Highland Beach is one of the safest communities in Florida and the U.S. The worst problems involve relatively minor "crimes of opportunity": cars unlocked and/or have key fobs in them, theft from open garages, thefts of bicycles, and such. However, there are significant crimes that don't happen in Highland Beach but hurt its residents, which are crimes of Internet fraud, especially among the elderly.

Detective Fernandes is a family man and has been married 28 years to Joan and with two daughters, Ilani and Leiani, both with college backgrounds. His wife works in correction compliance and as a fraud investigator at a credit union, while Dwayne's mother is a special education teacher in Boca Raton.

He has high praise for residents being so accepting and cooperative with the police department. He describes Highland Beach as a wonderful place with great community spirit. Detective Fernandes strongly believes that there is a foundation of mutual trust within the department and a level of camaraderie that creates an effective team spirit.

Detective Fernandes and the entire Police Department are strong evidence that we have an effective Public Safety Team that we can trust in a world of volatility and concern.

Clearly, they are our heroes who take the risks and prove their worth every day for our safety and security.

We salute all our police officers.

JCS





Officers Fernandes and Hartmann





Officer Fernandes left end on the second row

