

# Deaf man realizes dream of being cop

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Former NTID student, 28, who worked at RIT, joins Hoonah, Alaska, force

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(July 17, 2006) — A familiar face on the Rochester Institute of Technology campus is pursuing his dream, one that makes him a rarity: becoming a police officer despite a hearing loss.

Anthony Wallace, an All-American wrestler when he attended RIT, had worked as a campus safety officer there since 2003. His last day of work was June 30. He flew to Alaska two days later and was sworn in as a police officer in Hoonah, Alaska, on July 6.

"I'm so intrigued with Alaska," he said. "I love the outdoors. I love hunting and fishing, and to be a police officer there is just icing on the cake."

Wallace, 28, whose father, grandfather and uncle were also police officers, is also responsible for firefighting and emergency medical services in Hoonah, on an island inhabited by 1,000 residents about 50 miles southwest of Juneau.

Wallace was born with spinal meningitis that affected his hearing. His knowledge of sign language was an asset at RIT, where more than 1,100 deaf and hard-of-hearing students attend RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf.

Wallace, who speaks well, also helped train area police officers in the academy about interacting with deaf people.

"There was absolutely nothing he couldn't do," said Bob Craig, RIT's former director of campus safety. "His ability to speech-read is phenomenal."

No records exist to determine how many deaf police officers there are or have been. But Susie Cambre, a deputy with the Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff's Department in Louisiana, said people like Wallace are extremely rare.

"He's doing the impossible," said Cambre, who is deaf but hears well enough with hearing aids to use a telephone. She knows of only one other deaf police officer, a woman in Maryland who retired after starting a family.

Cambre said police departments are usually hesitant to hire patrol officers with a hearing loss for the officer's safety.

"It took me three years of fighting civil service, so I started working for free, I wanted it so bad. I showed them what I could do," she said.

In March, Wallace began looking at law enforcement openings. He only applied in Alaska.

"I like that small-town feeling where everybody knows everybody," he said.

After telephone interviews and a background check, Wallace accepted the job, even before ever seeing Hoonah. The closest he had ever been to Alaska was Iowa.

He was slightly apprehensive about going to a city that has no traffic lights or fast-food restaurants, but he's only a 15-minute flight away from Juneau.

"I'm very excited. Who gets to do what they're dreaming of?" he said.

Hoonah Police Chief Hugh Miller, who commands the four-member department, said Wallace was welcomed after he passed a physical that showed he could meet the basic requirements.

"Tony struck me as being someone who wanted the job very badly," Miller said. "He's the kind of person who sets a goal for himself and reaches hard for that goal. He's very loyal to his department. I think he'll be a good fit for the Hoonah Police Department."

While there aren't any individuals who are deaf in Hoonah, "May through September, we have several cruise ships that come in weekly. That floods our community with a couple thousand people from all walks of life. Tony's ability in sign language should supplement our department," Miller said.

Wallace will be paired with another officer for up to 12 weeks, while he gets qualified with firearms.

After the tourist season winds down, he'll spend three months at a police academy, either in Fairbanks or Sitka.

"From what I've seen from Tony's records, I believe he shouldn't have any problem in the academy," Miller said.

Hoonah has numerous calls for domestic disputes and sexual assaults, often linked to alcohol use, Miller said. At least two police officers respond to serious calls.

Wallace credits Craig and friends Chris and Patty Ryan of Greece and Monroe County Sheriff's Deputy Tom Manzarella for their support in pursuing his dream.

And he hopes his determination will be a model for others.

"I just hope it opens doors up for other people," he said. "There's no limit what you can do if you put your mind to it."

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