



**THE AMERICAN LEGION**  
**DEPARTMENT OF WASHINGTON**  
**L. HARRY EASLEY**

**LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR APPLICATION**

Award to be presented at the Department Convention to an outstanding Law Enforcement Officer selected from local, county, state, or federal agencies. The individual selected will be chosen from candidates submitted by Post Law & Order Committees. Nominations must be received at the Department HQ by February 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. See Department Operating Procedure 28, **Award Eligibility and Criteria** for eligibility requirements for Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

Candidates Name: RYAN RATHBUN Cell Phone # [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]  
Home Address: [REDACTED] City: [REDACTED] Zip: [REDACTED]  
Nominating Post: ALBERTS, HAMILTON Post Commander: \_\_\_\_\_  
POST 7  
Commanders Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Post Address: 1688 W. BAKERVIEW RD. City: BELINGHAM Zip: 98225  
SHERIFF  
Agency Chief: [REDACTED] Phone #: [REDACTED]  
Agency Address: [REDACTED] City: [REDACTED] Zip: [REDACTED]

Please complete the answers to the below questions. Attach additional sheets of paper to fully explain your answers if needed. Also, attach all documentation that is available. If your candidate is selected as Law Enforcement Officer of the Year you will be required to fill out additional applications so that the Officer can be put in for National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. The Law-and-Order Chair will assist you in this.

1. Why is candidate outstanding? Endorsed by his peers or superiors. SEE ATTACHED
2. Did candidate commit and act of Valor? YES  NO ( ).
3. If an act of valor occurred and given publicity, please attach newspaper clippings, photos, or time and date of radio or TV coverage.
4. Has the candidate received local recognition from other organizations, including the Legion Post? NO
5. Has the Legion Post presented The American Legion Law & Order Certificate and or plaque? NO

**WHATCOM COUNTY  
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

**BILL ELFO**  
SHERIFF



PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING  
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Bellingham, WA 98225-4038  
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January 25, 2023

American Legion, Post # 7  
1688 W. Bakerview Rd.  
Bellingham, WA 98225

Dear Committee Members,

On behalf of the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, it is my honor to nominate Deputy Ryan Rathbun and Deputy Jason Thompson for the American Legion Law Enforcement Officer of the Year award. Based on actions they took on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022, these men are the embodiment of courage and professionalism and are outstanding candidates for this award. Over the last year, both deputies were supported by and held in high regard by their peers and supervisors, who wholeheartedly endorse these heroes and are inspired by their resilience and dedication. Both have recovered from their injuries and recently returned to duty to serve and protect their community.

Based on Deputy Rathbun's and Thompson's heroic response in a violent and potentially deadly encounter, and in recognition of actions that placed the lives of the innocent public and their partner above their own, I believe they are both outstanding candidates for the Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

The following is a synopsis of the events that unfolded on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and detail the heroic actions taken by both deputies:

*On 02/10/22, at approximately 1618 hours, Deputies Jason Thompson and Ryan Rathbun responded to a neighborhood dispute in the Kendal area that involved firearms. During the investigation, probable cause was developed to arrest the suspect for felony harassment. While attempting to communicate with the suspect from behind cover and waiting for more units to arrive to assist, the suspect shot and injured Deputy Jason Thompson.*

*Deputy Thompson went down, and Deputy Ryan Rathbun immediately stepped over Deputy Thompson, attempting to address the threat while covering his downed partner. Deputy Rathbun did this even though he knew that he was moving towards a suspect that had just shot Deputy Thompson. While covering Deputy Thompson, Deputy Rathbun was also shot by the suspect. Deputy Rathbun suffered injuries to his eyes that were greatly affecting his vision. Despite the fact that Deputy Rathbun had been seriously injured, he provided critical radio traffic to other responding units advising of their situation. He then moved back towards the threat and dragged Deputy Thompson out of harm's way to an area of cover so aid could be rendered. Deputy Thompson was also able to provide critical radio traffic to responding deputies, as well as cover their retreat as Deputy Rathbun dragged him to safety.*

*Deputy Rathbun intentionally and knowingly placed himself in a situation that presented a substantial threat to his own life, so that Deputy Thompson's life could be saved. He did this not once, but twice.*

*Both Deputy Rathbun and Thompson used teamwork to continue to update incoming law enforcement units, protect the public from the continuing danger posed by the suspect, and to provide medical aid to themselves and each other. All of this was done with calm professionalism, despite the fact that they had both been shot and had lost some of their vision. Deputies Rathbun's and Thompson's courage and dedication to duty was undiminished. The integrity that this showed while facing a deadly threat is impressive and admirable.*

*Once other units began to arrive and take over the scene, Deputies Rathbun and Thompson continued to exhibit excellence through their calm professionalism as they devised a plan to evacuate themselves to a safe location so they could meet aid units and receive medical care to save their lives. Deputies Rathbun and Thompson needed to get to a vehicle so they could reach aid units. This plan would require the two deputies to leave cover and move through an area where the suspect could have another opportunity to murder them.*

*Deputy Thompson used clear communication to help guide Deputy Rathbun to his patrol vehicle that was parked on the roadway. Deputy Thompson was then able to guide Deputy Rathbun in to the rear seat of his patrol vehicle so that he could drive them away from the scene to aid units. This required Deputy Thompson, who was seriously injured and having a difficult time seeing due to his injuries, to drive past the suspects residence in order to get himself and Deputy Rathbun to safety. Deputy Thompson did this despite the mortal danger that it put him in, so that he could save the life of his partner. Deputy Thompson intentionally and knowingly placed himself in a situation that presented a substantial threat to his own life, so that Deputy Rathbun's life could be saved.*

Their acts of valor have been described and reported on by media outlets around the country. I have attached some printed copies of articles, as well as provided links to media stories related to the incident and their return to duty.

Both of these men have been dedicated public servants for many years. In the face of great danger, they responded as they were trained and survived to fight another day. Through pain and multiple surgeries, they overcame the challenges and returned to do what they have been called to do.... serve and protect. For their actions and their resilience to return to duty, I respectfully nominate and recommend Deputy Ryan Rathbun and Deputy Jason Thompson for the American Legion Law Enforcement of the Year.

Respectfully submitted,



Doug Chadwick  
Undersheriff

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CRIME

## Injured Whatcom sheriff's deputies share pain, frustration and appreciation after shooting

BY DAVID RASBACH

MARCH 06, 2022 5:00 AM



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el Berck Young was arraigned in Whatcom County Superior Court on Friday, Feb. 18, 2022, in Bellingham, Wash. Young is facing charges connected to the shooting of two sheriffs in the Peaceful Valley area. BY WARREN STERLING



Only have a minute? Listen instead

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One man already has had two eye surgeries and likely faces a third, has constant headaches, sinus and jaw pain and isn't sure how much of his eyesight he'll regain.

The other suffered a broken nose and still has 12 or 13 pellets in his face, including one behind his left eye and one in the bridge of his nose, and he also is suffering from headaches and memory issues resulting from a traumatic brain injury.

 This story is a subscriber exclusive

But both Whatcom County Sheriff's Office deputies are alive and slowly recovering more than three weeks after each was shot in the face with birdshot while responding to a 911 call for a Feb. 10 dispute between neighbors in the Peaceful Valley neighborhood.

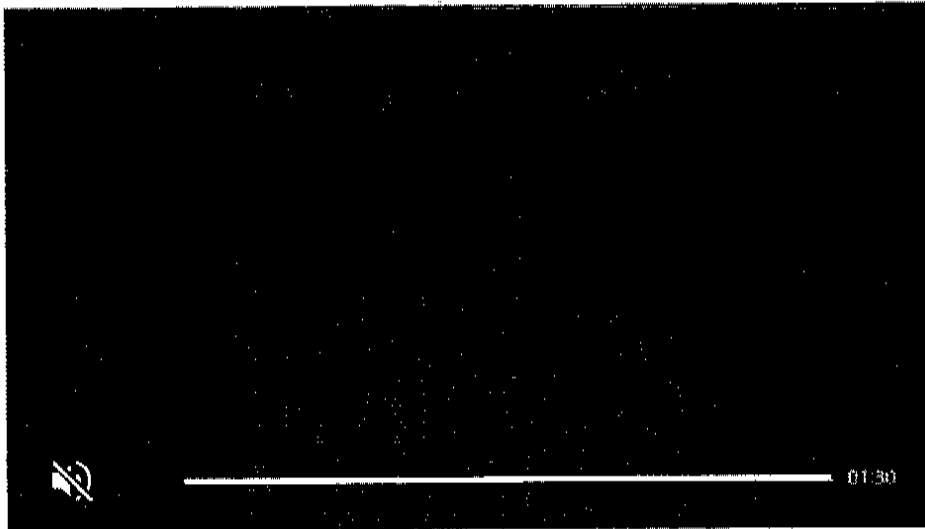
"For me, given the circumstances we responded to, it didn't need to go this way," Deputy Jason Thompson said. "There was no reason for shots to be fired at us. That just adds to my frustration.

"There are certain circumstances where I can think of where maybe I would expect to be shot at, as crazy as that sounds. This was not that. To me, that makes it all the

seemingly benign dispute, or for benign reasons at least, and to be unsuccessful in being able to negotiate that without getting shot at.”

Thompson and fellow injured Deputy Ryan Rathbun filed a civil lawsuit against Joel Berck Young for assault and battery of the two deputies while they were in the line of duty. Thompson and Rathbun are seeking damages including those for past and future medical costs, pain and suffering and loss of income.

#### TOP VIDEOS



Bellingham mayor, police chief urge people to report hate crimes

Young already was facing a number of criminal charges from the incident, including two counts of attempted first-degree murder.

The two deputies announced the lawsuit in a press conference with lawyer Daniel Horne Friday, March 4, in Seattle. Afterward, they spoke with The Bellingham Herald.

While both deputies, along with their families, are still clearly working through the physical and mental scars and the uncertainty of how much they can expect to recover and possibly return to their lives before Feb. 10, both expressed extreme gratitude for the support they have felt from their community and colleagues in the past three weeks.



Two Whatcom County Sheriff's Office deputies who were shot in the face while responding to a call in the Peaceful Valley neighborhood announced Friday, March 4, in Seattle that they are bringing a civil lawsuit against the man who is charged with shooting them. Pictured at the press conference in Seattle, from left are, Tawsha Thompson, Deputy John Thompson, attorney Daniel Horne, Deputy Ryan Rathbun and Jessi Lawson. Campiche Andrews Horne PLLC *Courtesy to The Bellingham Herald*

## **'IT'S HEROIC'**

While Rathbun has been a community deputy in the area where the shooting occurred for a number of years, Thompson recently joined him after serving as community deputy in the southern portion of Whatcom County. Both are veterans with the sheriff's office — Rathbun for 16 years, Thompson for 13.

"We're both familiar with community policing and how building those relationships really matters within the community," Thompson said.

But never were those relationships more important than on Feb. 10, when Thompson and Rathbun responded to the 911 call and minutes later found themselves shot with pellets from a 12-gauge shotgun.

After the deputies had been shot, according to court records, Jesse Marshall, a friend of Cody Docter, who lives two houses down from Young, stopped in and returned fire

pulled into a neighbor's garage and received first aid while additional law enforcement responded to the area.

"It's uncommon for a citizen to step forward to that degree," Thompson said. "I'm not aware ... where citizens returned fire on behalf of law enforcement officers. Not only did they put themselves in harm's way, but they don't have the protective gear we have or the training, etc. etc."

"For us to both be wounded and have citizens standing over me while my partner is dragging me out of harm's way and fire rounds, it's really incredible. It's heroic. There's no other way to put it."

Thompson said the neighbors continued to step up to aid them and deputies as they arrived, adding that he's not sure that would have occurred in other in many other jurisdictions around the country in the current climate.

"We're definitely eternally grateful to them, and so is the sheriff's office," Rathbun said, adding that he's heard the neighbors will be formally recognized in the future.

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Two Whatcom County Sheriff's Office deputies were shot Feb. 10 in the Peaceful Valley area while trying to break up a dispute in which two people were shooting at each other. The sheriff's office said both deputies were "in stable condition." BY [JOSHUA BESSEK](#) | KIRO 7

## **'HUMBLING' SUPPORT**

The support for Rathbun and Thompson did not end after Young was arrested.

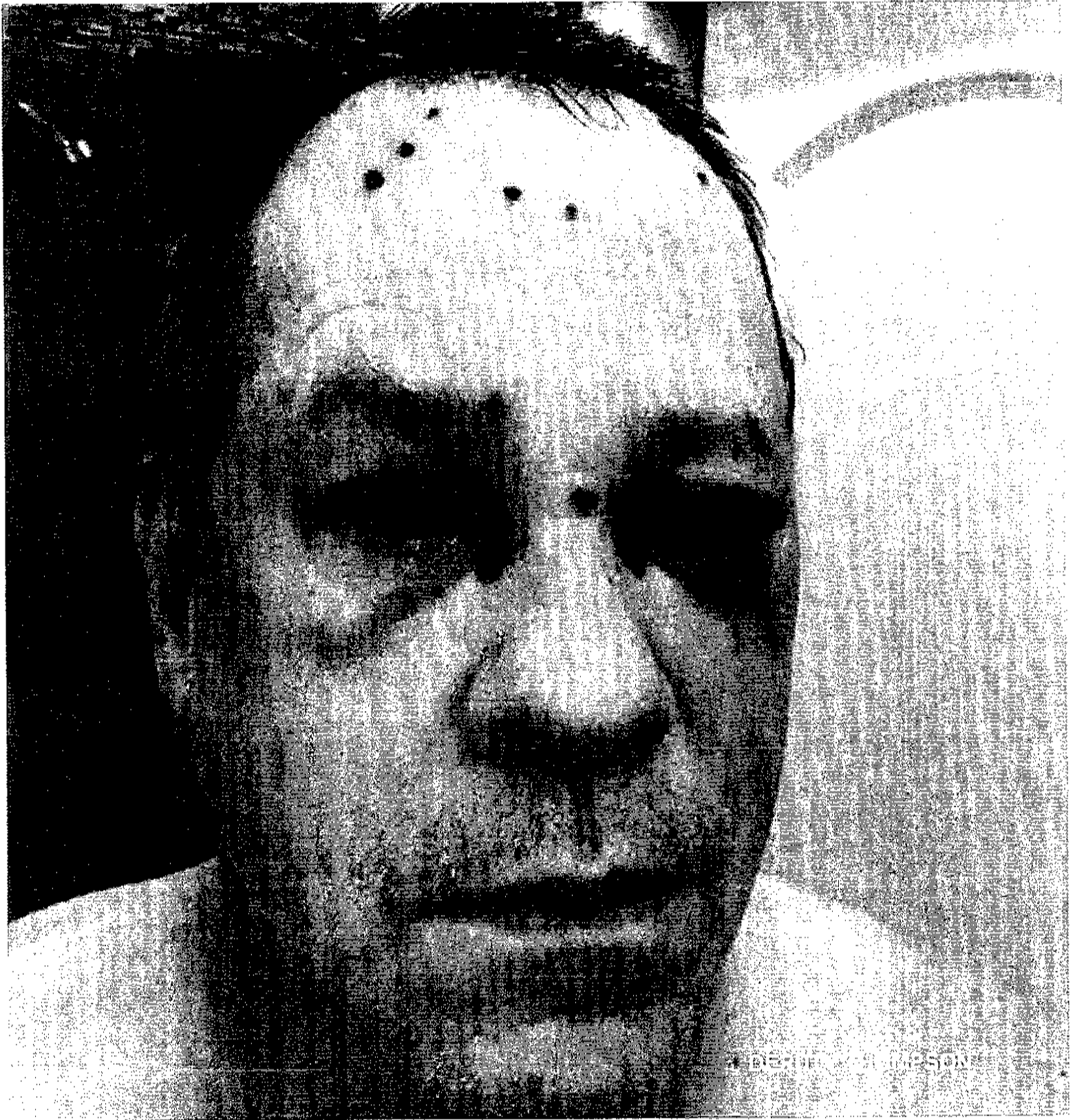
fundraisers, including a pair of GoFundMe efforts started by the Whatcom County Support Officers that generated nearly \$35,000 combined.

“It definitely helps restore your faith in humanity, really, and what we do and why we do it,” Rathbun said of the support the deputies have received. “As that has been chipped away and eroded aggressively, this is something that has made me prouder than ever to do what I do and serve.”

Both repeatedly thanked the Whatcom County community and those outside the community who not only helped financially, but also sent moral support the past three weeks.

“The word I keep using is humbling,” Thompson said. “There’s a lot of anti-police rhetoric right now nationwide, particularly in our state with some of the laws that have come down the last year or so making our job a lot harder to do. It’s easy to feel like we’re not very well supported. ...

“The outpouring has been immense. I’ve gotten hundreds of cards, emails, text messages from all over the country, not just our community. People taking the time to have their prayer group sign the cards and send them to us, some from several states away. Literally every day, I’m opening mail that makes me cry because it is so touching and enduring.”



hatcom County Sheriff's Office Deputy Jason Thompson, who was one of two deputies shot in the line of duty on Feb. 10, had 12 or 13 pellets strike his face, many of which remain in his head three weeks later. Campiche Andrews Horne PLLC *Courtesy to The Bellingham Herald*

## **THE HEALING CONTINUES**

The past three weeks have only been the beginning for Thompson and Rathbun.

Rathbun said that just last week he was forced to lay face down 22 hours a day because of the effects of his injuries and let his fiancée, Jessica Lawson, take care of him. He'll likely have to have a third surgery on his eye.

his daughter when she pointed out he began telling the same story for the third time during the call. The head injury has also causes him to tire quickly, he said, though he said he was lucky to be wearing his eyeglasses on Feb. 10, as they prevented two pieces of shot from possibly puncturing his left eye.

Both men face long roads to recovery, including the possibility of further medical procedures and likely will live with lead shot from Feb. 10 in their heads for the rest of their lives.

“Losing time from work, losing normal time with her (Lawson), and then just all the normal pain and the pain of facing another eye surgery ... it’s not pleasant having your eye operated on,” Rathbun said.

Neither man has ruled out returning to the sheriff’s office, though neither is certain if they will be able to see active duty again.

“That’s the unknown now,” Thompson said. “With the vision, it’s a wait-and-see. With the head injury, it’s a wait-and-see. I’m getting good care. I’m happy about that, but they can’t give me a specific timeline on how much better it’s going to get or when that’s going to be.

“What I’m going to discuss with my wife and the rest of the family is when the doctors tell me this is as good as it’s going to get and what that looks like, then I can make the determination of whether I’m able to go back to work or not. If I’m physically able to, I’d like to. I still have some years of service I’d like to put in, and I really enjoy working in Whatcom County.”

Rathbun also said he will have to take a wait-and-see approach, as he is expected to have some permanent vision loss and impairment from his injuries, but he does not yet know to what extent.

“My plan would be to return to full duty,” Rathbun said, “but not at the expense of my eye and not at the expense of me being able to return mentally and emotionally healthy enough to serve the community the way I have been.”

Rathbun said he was thankful to the community, the sheriff’s office, his and Thompson’s families, the other first responders on Feb. 10 and the doctors and nurses who have helped in their recovery since.

“There’s not enough words to say how much you all are loved and appreciated by us,” he said.

Thompson described the incident as “life changing,” not just because of the injuries, but also because of all the love and support he’s received since then, even though he said he usually likes to live outside the spotlight.

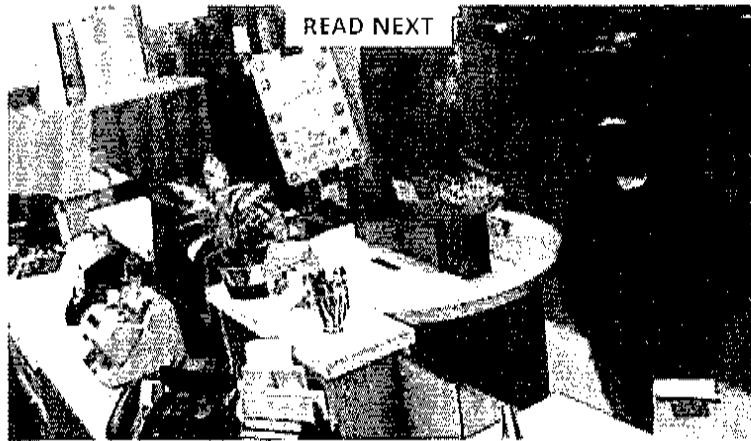
“I’m a man of faith, and I’ve told a few people I think Deputy Rathbun and I where we were needed to be when this happened for a reason. It needed to be us for whatever reason. I’m grateful to have survived. And the outpouring of love and support since has been outstanding. I can’t say enough about it.”



DAVID RASBACH

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David Rasbach joined The Bellingham Herald in 2005 and now covers breaking news. He has been an editor and writer in several western states since 1994.



READ NEXT

CRIME

## Police seek man seen in surveillance photo for Whatcom bank robbery

BY JACK BELCHER

UPDATED JANUARY 25, 2023 10:56 AM



The thief was described as a white male, 5 feet, 9 inches tall with a regular build.

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UPDATED JANUARY 24, 2023 4:33 PM

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UPDATED JANUARY 24, 2023 11:59 AM

Here are Trader Joe’s most loved products, but which ones are Whatcom’s favorites?

UPDATED JANUARY 25, 2023 2:26 PM

## WCSDO deputies shot in February to return to active duty

Feb 22, 2022



WCSDO Deputies Jason Thompson and Ryan Rathbun were shot Feb. 10 in Maple Falls. Since then, Deputies Rathbun and Thompson have each undergone numerous medical procedures and treatments and have recently been evaluated and cleared to return to full active duty as Whatcom County Sheriff deputies. (Photo courtesy WCSDO)

WHATCOM – On Feb. 10, Whatcom County Sheriff's Deputies Jay Thompson and Ryan Rathbun responded to a neighborhood dispute in the Kendall area.

While investigating the dispute, both deputies were shot in the head by an armed suspect.

have recently been evaluated and cleared to return to full active duty as Whatcom County Sheriff deputies.

Dep. Thompson has served with WCSO since December 2008. In addition to his duties as patrol deputy serving the Foothills area, he is on the Crisis Negotiation Team.

Dep. Rathbun started his career at WCSO as a corrections deputy in 2006 and moved to patrol deputy in July 2008. He is a member of SWAT and also a defensive tactics instructor.

Both of us are proud and happy to be able to recover and come back to serve Whatcom County," Dep. Thompson said in a Dec. 22 WCSO press release.

Sheriff Bill Elfo said in the press release that deputies Rathbun and Thompson "not only fought to survive the deadly attack that was launched against them last February, they courageously battled to recover from their wounds and return to fulfill their passion for serving and protecting the community."

"We at the Sheriff's Office are eternally grateful to all who made their survival and recovery possible," said Sheriff Bill Elfo. "From the armed citizens who helped protect them on the day of the attack, to the fire service and health care professionals who rendered treatment, to the good people of our community who offered prayers, well-wishes, and overwhelming support for our deputies, we can never thank you enough."

# Two Whatcom County deputies return to service after being shot in the face during line of duty

Brisa Mendez | Published January 2, 2023 | Whatcom County | FOX 13 Seattle |

## Two Whatcom County deputies return to service after being shot in the face during line of duty

Two Whatcom County sheriff's deputies are returning to work after being shot at while on duty.

**WHATCOM COUNTY, Wash.** - Two Whatcom County sheriff's deputies are returning to work after being shot at while on duty.

It's been nearly a year since Deputy Jason Thompson came inches from death or permanent disability.

On Feb. 10th 2022, he and his partner Ryan Rathbun were trying to defuse a tense neighbor dispute in Peaceful Valley - when shots rang out.

Deputy Rathbun said, "my fear was that the suspect was going to be coming out to finish trying to kill deputy Thompson or engage us in a gun fight." Rathbun said, "the focus was on protecting him, myself and the community."

The man they were there to confront - 60-year-old Joel Young - had fired on them with a shotgun at close range.

It was hit in the face and head, ran face and head, but I have pellets lodged in my sinuses, in my skin and various parts of my body," Rathbun said.

All my injuries we're basically from here (bottom nose) to here (top of head), so I had a broken nose, multiple pellets in the forehead and face, one ended up behind my eye, caused me to go blind on my left eye for several weeks, I was wearing these glasses when I got shot," Thompson said. "It took me, what seemed to me like several seconds, to kind of work through the process of, if your dead then why are you still thinking, are you dead, is this the afterlife or is this the kind of thing where you sustained a fatal injury, and you know it but your body hasn't given up yet," Thompson said.

It was their partnership and sense of purpose, which got them through that day, but it's also the community's outpouring of support, which has brought them both back on duty, ready to once again protect and serve.

Do appreciate it. Do love us, do want and respect what we do, so that for me was a big paradigm shift from what's been going on for the last several years, and it's, I think it was great," Rathbun said. "I think it's one of the greatest things for me that's come from this."

Ryan and I, both have something to offer and to give and serve our community and try to return some of that good," Thompson said.

Young remains jailed on attempted murder charges. The deputies' families, also have pending civil suits against him.