



'It's Something in Your Blood'

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In commemoration of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/president-donald-j-trump-proclaims-may-2018-asian-american-pacific-islander-heritage-month/>), which ends today, Focus FAA features Integrated Services Team Manager Peter Nguyen who has served as an auxiliary police officer in Fredericksburg, Va. for nearly 25 years.

Peter Nguyen was working his night patrol shift when he spotted four men in a car.

“I thought, ‘That’s weird —Who wears sunglasses at night?’” Nguyen said. “All of them ran off. My natural instinct as an officer was to go after them.” He called for backup, chased the driver on foot, and detained the man for suspicious activity. He later arrested the suspect for providing a false name and found crack cocaine in his possession.

It was all in a night’s work for Nguyen. “You cannot pay a cop enough money to go into a dark alley for a man with a gun,” he said. “You don’t pay an auxiliary officer any money to go into a dark alley for a man with a gun. It’s the nature of the beast — You don’t know what can happen.” Since 1993, he has single patrolled streets, received calls for service, performed undercover drug buy operations, provided event security and traffic control, and apprehended suspects as a member of the auxiliary police force in Fredericksburg, Va.

For a minimum of 20 hours a month, or two 10-hour shifts, Nguyen shifts from his position as the business suit-attired Integrated Services Team Manager at Headquarters to a uniformed officer in a city with fewer than 25,000 residents. The auxiliary police program allows the small department to recruit, train, and certify volunteer officers to perform various functions at a lower cost. Auxiliary officers receive no pay or benefits.

“There’s not enough cops or a big enough budget,” Nguyen said. “They need more backup. The more people, the better.”

His work has been a natural fit. He previously volunteered for eight years as a paramedic, responding to emergency calls at night while working full-time. He later came across a recruitment listing for the auxiliary police force. His police shifts usually begin on Fridays when he drives after work from downtown Washington, D.C. to Fredericksburg and patrols the area in a squad car until 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. The early morning hours can bring increased activity after local bars close at 2 a.m.

“A different type of customer comes out at night,” Nguyen noted. He has carried out thousands of arrests for minor and serious offenses.

September will mark his 25th anniversary with the Fredericksburg department. He plans to retire at that time and will receive his gun and other retirement police credentials during a ceremony.

The small department once assigned up to 50 auxiliary officers in the early 1990s and now has three auxiliary officers on staff. “It’s a dying breed,” Nguyen said.



Peter Nguyen in a police department photo.



Peter at work at Headquarters in the Office of Finance and Management.

For years, he served as the lone Asian-American officer in the Fredericksburg department. Recently, his department hired a Korean-American officer. “Most Asians go after degrees in high-paying fields and are white-collar professionals,” Nguyen said. He is the only member of his family involved in policing and is a member of the Asian American Law Enforcement Association.

Nguyen’s professional expertise lies in engineering. He was born in Vietnam and immigrated to the U.S. in April 1975. His family first settled in the town of Pryor, Okla., before moving to Jenks, a suburb of Tulsa. His father found a job in the engineering department of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa.

Nguyen spent his junior and high school years in Oklahoma and worked with his brother on a farm for extra money. They wore cowboy hats and boots. “We worked with cows, fruits and vegetables, bales of hay,” he said. “We were farm boys.” The brothers later decided to both study engineering. Nguyen earned a bachelor of science degree in electronic engineering from Oklahoma State University and a graduate degree in Management Information Systems (MIS).

He contracted with federal agencies before meeting a now-retired FAA manager and applying for a position. He was hired in 1991. At the time, he was one of a small number of Asian-American employees within the agency.

“I got a job and I love it,” Nguyen said. “I get to know aviation.” He supports National Airspace System programs, such as System Wide Information Management (SWIM) and En Route Automation Modernization (ERAM), within the Office of Finance and Management (AFN).

Nguyen’s other professional activities include his service as past president of the FAA’s National Asian and Pacific American Association (NAPA) and as the current vice president of operations for the Federal Asian Pacific American Council. FAPAC leadership awards and other recognitions line a bookshelf in his office.

Nguyen has also received praise for his policing work, which has come with brushes with danger. He has crashed his car twice while chasing suspects. He has witnessed officers who have come into contact with the drug fentanyl, which comes in a powder form, during their patrols. The increase in local drug usage has resulted in officers carrying masks and Narcan, also known as Naloxone, to block the effects of overdoses of fentanyl and other opioids.

He has seen the life-threatening risks of the jobs up close. A photo of a Fredericksburg patrol car blanketed with flowers hangs on the wall in Nguyen's office. It belonged to Officer Todd Bahr who was fatally shot while responding to a call about a man threatening his ex-girlfriend. He had worked for the Fredericksburg police for two years and had previously served as an auxiliary officer. It was the close-knit department's first shooting in 30 to 40 years. Nguyen received the call about his colleague's death a few days before his daughter's birthday that June.

"He stopped a man from killing his ex-girlfriend," he said. As officers prepared for their colleague's emotional funeral, Nguyen and other auxiliary officers joined state police in patrolling the city. "It's a small department, he said. "They couldn't function. We ran the streets for a few days."

The larger purpose of his work is connected to the safety of his daughters, Serafina and Angelina, ages 15 and 11. "That's one more criminal off the street," he said. "People get arrested every hour."



Peter in the community to support an event for Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October.



Peter, second from left, with other FAPAC/NAPA officers, at the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) training program in May in Arlington, Va.

The “dark side” of policing” has exposed Nguyen to poverty and blighted environments for families. “You have to appreciate what you have,” he said. “We have it good. All of us in the FAA have it good.”

Living conditions may be drastically different in areas just several miles away from his office. “Most people commit a crime because they have a need for their families, not because they’re bad people,” Nguyen said.

Policing enables him to fulfill his calling to perform community service. “It’s something in your blood,” he said. “You actually help someone. I like to help the community.”

Top Photo: Peter Nguyen on auxiliary police duty earlier this month at the Marine Corps Historic Half Marathon in Fredericksburg, Va.

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