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Deputy improves after Aug. shootout Officer wounded in fatal gunfight

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His scars are almost healed and he still has some nerve damage in his right leg. He meets with doctors a couple of times a week and undergoes physical therapy nearly every day.

Patrick Neal, 33, is not sure when he will be able to put on his Cherokee County Sheriff's Office uniform and return to work, something he definitely wants to do again.

"My desire is strong. I still want to be a police officer," he said Thursday. "I became a cop because I wanted to help people. I wanted to catch the bad guys and protect and serve."

Neal, a deputy with the sheriff's office, was shot while serving a felony probation warrant for Frank Sheridan at 303 Windship Court on Aug. 10. Neal suffered wounds to his face and leg and was taken to Grady Memorial Hospital. Sheridan, 48, was killed in the gunfight.

Neal said the recovery process will be slowed down by the nerve damage, but doctors are expecting a full recovery. In the meantime, Neal has an extensive support system to make the recovery easier.

"I have good support from the sheriff's office. There are guys calling in and checking up all the time. Our church family is continually calling and bringing by food. My wife has taken care of me everyday," he said. "People from the Woodstock, Canton and Holly Springs police departments call. There have been so many positives coming from people that it has made the healing so much better."

Neal's wife, Ruth, said the support shown from family, friends, churches and schools has been a blessing.

"It makes the job worth something," she said. "I never thought the sheriff himself would come to the hospital. There have been monetary gifts from people we don't even know. We are so thankful for all the prayers, the contributions and the generosity."

The couple, who live in Pickens County, have one son and attend Mount Zion Baptist Church.

Neal said he was scared, but faith in his training and in God helped him during the gunfight.

"I depended on my training, my ability, my equipment and the will to survive," said Neal, who will celebrate his fifth anniversary with sheriff's office in November. "I believe I was where God wanted me to be. Without Him, I think there is a strong chance I would not have won."

After the shooting, Neal remembers seeing people from the neighborhood run over to him to offer assistance.

"The first people there were not officers, just plain old citizens," he said. "They did everything they could from holding my hand to taking off my belt and tying it around my leg. That takes courage. Those are my heroes."

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