

# Honoring her son: The Ralston Foundation



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Behind nearly every named scholarship lies a personal story, few of which illustrate the principle more clearly than the Jeffrey Ralston Foundation Scholarship, established in the late 1990s to support students interested in law enforcement.

**Betsy Ross Ralston Brooks '49** graduated from Montclair College High School in 1945 and enrolled that fall in Trenton State College. She majored in health and physical education and for two years dated a young man named Roy Berenotto, who would graduate in

1950. While the two drifted apart in her senior year, they remained close friends until her death in 2000 at the age of 72.

Berenotto, who lives today in Lake Worth, FL, recalls her as a lively, gregarious, and energetic student who loved all sports, from dancing to sailing, and was known as a take-charge, spontaneous, and helpful person.

Ross went on to teach at Passaic Valley Regional High School for several years before marrying Robert Ralston, who headed an insurance and real estate brokerage in Ocean Grove. She taught

kindergarten briefly and then helped her husband in his business while raising their son, Jeffrey. When her husband died, she ran the business herself for several years before selling it, moving to Spring Lake, and marrying Philip Brooks, a CPA and investor.

For most of the year, Mrs. Brooks, always an avid sailor and golfer, lived in New Jersey, where she was a founding director of the Shark River Yacht Club and for many years headed up ladies' golf at the Spring Lake Country Club. In the winter, she lived with her husband in Surf Side, FL, where she continued her active life and even helped manage the Doral Ryder Open professional golf tournament.

Her later years, however, were marked by tragedy. After Philip Brooks died in 1966, she became a victim of breast cancer. Her only son, Jeffrey, who had been a highly popular patrolman on the Neptune City Police Department for 13 years, died at the age of 34 in 1997. It was a wrenching loss for Brooks, who had renewed contact with Berenotto during her illness.

After Jeffrey's death, she asked her attorney to help her establish a foundation in his memory to help students study for law enforcement careers. It was her goal to have the College select academically strong but needy students. Until her death she interviewed each one over lunch at her home to ensure they understood the background of the scholarship.

At first, before the foundation had been established, Mrs. Brooks created a scholarship fund with a gift of \$25,000, telling her old friend, Roy Berenotto, that she would try to limit recipients of the scholarships to residents of Monmouth County who intended to be police officers. But as it turned out,

students majoring in law and justice came from all over the state and had diverse interests in that broad field.

The first recipient was **Lori Granato '98** of Waterford Works in South Jersey, who 11 years later still vividly recalls meeting Mrs. Brooks over lunch. Granato says she never did really understand why she was selected, for she was headed for law school and was prepared to borrow money for college.

But Mrs. Brooks was willing to accept that shift and, by supporting Granato's undergraduate years, enabled her to afford law school.

"I did meet her after I was told about the scholarship," Granato said, "and found her to be an absolutely wonderful lady. When she told me about her son, that really impressed me, and I worked very hard all the way through school because of what she did for me and because it all was done in his memory."

Granato did go on to law school and then went to work for a Philadelphia firm (now Pattern Analysis, Inc.) that investigates medical provider fraud, largely by physicians accused of defrauding insurance companies. She also is pursuing a master's in business administration at Rowan University. She and her husband, Shawn Smith, live in Sicklerville with their nine-month-old boy, Tyler.

By 1999, Mrs. Brooks was again diagnosed with cancer, a condition that this time took her life at the end of 2000. She had arranged for her entire estate to be transferred to the Jeffrey Ralston Foundation and named George Harris and two longtime friends, Roy Berenotto and Barbara Fox, as trustees.

The effect of these events was to produce a substantial expansion of the Ralston scholarships so that this year, \$4,000 is being contributed to each of 10 students majoring in criminology and

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justice studies at TCNJ. Berenotto says the trustees' goal is to have four students in each graduating class receiving such aid in future years. At this point, four have graduated in addition to Granato.

The second recipient was **Daniel Maughmer** of Neptune, who graduated in 2002. Although he tried for months to land a police officer's job in the Monmouth area, eventually he worked four years at Home Depot and married last June. He has since put a longtime hobby to work at an inside sales position for an aquarium store, having decided he is a lot better at "making people happy as a salesperson." Without the Ralston scholarship, however, he says he probably never could have finished college.

**Brian Lockwood '04** of Barnegat is pursuing a PhD in criminal justice at Temple University and hopes to be teaching at the university level in three to five years. Since he had another job at TCNJ as a residence hall community adviser, the scholarship he received allowed him to leave college debt free, "a huge advantage when I was looking forward to several years of graduate school," Lockwood said.

It was a similar story for **Lukasz Kret '04**. His scholarship and community adviser benefits also made it possible for him to graduate free of debt and then earn a master's in forensic science at the Sacramento, CA, campus of the University of New Haven, CT. He worked for a while at the coroner's office in Sacramento, and this winter was busy sending out job

applications for federal and state agencies in the forensic science field.

A third member of the Class of 2004, **Robert Carson** of Cherry Hill, has been thinking of graduate school, but now works as a public records researcher for a private firm, County House Research, doing security records checks for private clients in the Philadelphia area.

Berenotto, an active alumnus, was on campus recently and met a parent of a current Ralston scholarship recipient. A single mother, she told Berenotto how much the scholarship had meant to her and her son.

"I think it's working out well," he said. "We're trying to do it exactly as Betsy wanted, and the scholarships are really making a difference."

Betsy Ross Ralston Brooks



honoring her son