

Volunteer group serves local first responders

By **KATHLEEN STURGEON**

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FORSYTH COUNTY, Ga. — In September 2015, Forsyth County Deputy Sheriff Daniel Sibenaller's daughter, Elizabeth, was born with a critical congenital heart defect.

Elizabeth spent more than a month of her early life in an inpatient facility where she had three surgeries by the time she was 3-months-old. Two were open-heart procedures.

The family had outstanding medical bills and Daniel and his wife, Meredith, had to take extended time off work. They also had to care for their son, Joseph, splitting time between to children 60 miles apart.

The local volunteer group, the Benevolent Association Dedicated to Giving to Employees of Forsyth County Service Organizations, stepped in to relieve some of the financial stress, allowing the family more time to care for Elizabeth.

"B.A.D.G.E. allowed me to focus on my family when they needed me most, so when I could return to work I could be more focused on my job and helping the community and not worrying about the bills," Sibenaller said. "We have learned through this journey that raising kids takes a village and we consider B.A.D.G.E. part of our village. We have been able to focus on her care, juggling many appointments and help her overcome her developmental delays."



ASHLEY COOK PHOTOGRAPHY/SPECIAL

Elizabeth Sibenaller and her father **Daniel** benefitted from B.A.D.G.E., or the Benevolent Association Dedicated to Giving to Employees of Forsyth County Service Organizations, after Elizabeth required multiple heart surgeries.

Elizabeth is now a happy, growing 3-year-old who runs around singing.

However her medical journey is not over. In 2017, she was diagnosed with left ventricle heart failure which means she will need another heart surgery in the next few years.

"It means a lot to us to know B.A.D.G.E. is out there to help if life throws us a curve ball we are not pre-

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pared for,” Sibenaller said. “The love that B.A.D.G.E. has shown us has touched our heart in ways we could have never imagined. To know there is an organization such as B.A.D.G.E. which is dedicated to helping first responders and their families in their darkest hour is truly amazing. First responders are the first to help in critical situations, but the last to ask for help when we really could use it. We are grateful for B.A.D.G.E.”

Elizabeth is just one of many who have benefitted from B.A.D.G.E. since it began in 2015.

Bill Howell, president of the board of directors, said it is not permitted for a citizen to contribute something personally for an officer.

“You couldn’t give money to the Sheriff’s Office or that particular officer,” he said. “You can give the donation to us, and we will decide what to do with it. B.A.D.G.E. is the vehicle to disperse the funds. People have given us \$5,000 and \$10,000 donations to spend how we see fit. We’ve also had requests for specific people.”

B.A.D.G.E. was originally created to support the Sheriff’s Office. But it grew to include all employees of service organizations, including the Cumming Police Department, 911 Center and Fire Department.

The board of directors is made up of volunteers with no law enforcement background. They strive to be nonpolitical and unbiased, so they are able to choose recipients with the greatest needs. To date, the organization has collected roughly \$250,000 to benefit first responders.

“I’ve always appreciated and respected what officers do,” Howell said. “As I got older, it made my blood boil to see how hard of a job they do and how much disrespect they have to put up with. I think they’re underpaid, underappreciated and the job they do is difficult. They deserve more, and the citizens of Forsyth always want to do more for them. The people of Forsyth County love their first responders. Now they have a vessel to do more.”

To find out more about B.A.D.G.E., visit badgeoffcso.org.

To donate to B.A.D.G.E.

Visit: badgeoffcso.org

Email: badgeoffcso@gmail.com

Mail: Checks to B.A.D.G.E. of FCSO to 525 Tribble Gap Road, Suite 1827, Cumming

