



**BLUECOATS INC.**

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# BLUECOATS, INC.

Cuyahoga County

Our origin,  
history and  
mission





*A charitable organization devoted exclusively to the well-being of families of Cuyahoga County safety officers who have lost their lives, or have become permanently and totally disabled and incapacitated, in the line of duty.*

an idea born  
beneath  
a mountain



### **When Did It Start?**

It was in 1956, in the shadow of East Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro, that the idea for Bluecoats was born. Three of Cleveland's dedicated civic leaders (Gordon Stouffer, Vernon Stouffer and Fred Crawford) were there on an animal collection safari for the Cleveland Zoo. Gordon initiated the then-novel idea that Cleveland needed an organization which could rally support for the families of police officers and firefighters who lose their lives in the line of duty. Vernon and Fred agreed.



*Gordon Stouffer*



*Vernon Stouffer*



*Frederick C. Crawford*

Upon their return to Cleveland, they engaged professional help to shape the new organization, and Fred called upon a hundred of his friends to initially fund the effort. Bluecoats was then formed under the laws of the State of Ohio as a non-profit corporation dedicated to stepping in and providing the financial support and counseling that the deceased safety force officer would have made available to the family had the officer survived. This support takes many forms, but is always tailored to the individual needs of the family members involved.

Since our inception in 1956, Bluecoats has fulfilled the vision of its founders by providing support and care to the families of those who have given their lives to protect each of us, our families and our community.



## What Does It Do?

Bluecoats provides assistance to the families of deceased safety officers who are covered by its charter. These benefits, listed as follows, are intended to supplement existing benefits programs. Some of these are *automatic* and some are *discretionary*. All are administered in accordance with the policies continually reviewed and revised by Bluecoats' Board of Directors:

Included in *automatic benefits* are:

- An immediate cash payment at the time of death
- Assistance with customary funeral expenses
- Payments of mortgage (principal and interest) or rent until federal death benefits are paid or for up to two years, whichever comes first
- Christmas holiday payments of \$250 to the children of the deceased officer until age 21
- Payment of college tuition and incidental expenses for the spouse and children
- Sponsorship of a variety of group events, including an annual summer outing, a May memorial luncheon, and group support sessions for surviving spouse



*The Greater Cleveland Peace Officers Memorial at Huntington Park in Downtown Cleveland.*

*Discretionary benefits* are need-based and founded by what Bluecoats believes the deceased officer would have provided if the officer was living. These requests are considered on a case-by-case basis:

- Counseling (legal, financial, job placement or other)
- Various expense payments or reimbursements
- Private or parochial tuition assistance for grade school, high school, and technical school
- Support for advanced degree expenses

In providing its benefits, Bluecoats strives to be *consistent* in its mission but *flexible* in its approach, trying always to determine what needs to be done, and then to step in at the right time and do it.

## Whom Does It Benefit?

To be eligible for Bluecoats benefits, the deceased safety officer must have been: (a) a person providing police, fire, emergency medical or other emergency services; (b) who was employed by a political subdivision or non-profit organization in Cuyahoga County; and (c) who died, or became permanently and totally disabled and incapacitated, while acting in the line of duty.



*Cleveland Firefighters Memorial on the Lakefront.*

The family members of such a deceased safety officer eligible for Bluecoats benefits include: (a) the officer's surviving spouse; (b) dependent children; and occasionally (c) other family members who were dependent upon and being supported by the officer at the time of the officer's death.

Recognizing that needs change over time as individuals and families mature, and that each family is different, Bluecoats tries to determine eligibility and beneficiaries on a case-by-case basis, subject always however to the guidelines inherent in its mission.

### **How Does It Operate?**

The work of Bluecoats is made possible by the annual contributions of its members. This group of Greater Cleveland industrial, business, financial, professional and civic leaders, and their spouses, is the backbone of the organization. Bluecoats membership, which is limited by its charter, typically has a waiting list for admittance. Over the years, Bluecoats dues have proved sufficient to finance its activities. Unlike many other charitable organizations, Bluecoats has not had to resort to any additional type of fund raising activity. However, a major campaign, the *Standing in Their Shoes Education Fund* was initiated in 2013 to raise funds for education expenses.

Bluecoats members meet twice a year and are updated on the organization's finances, membership and activities.

Each year a new set of Trustees are elected by the members to the Board of Directors and serve as Board members for a 3-year term. Also, each year the slate of Officers are proposed by the Board of Directors and approved by the membership at its annual fall meeting.

The Directors work through established committees in order to manage the organization in a professional, efficient and fiducially responsible manner.

The day-to-day business of Bluecoats is administered by an Executive Director.

*Since its inception in 1956, Bluecoats has assisted over 100 families of safety officers who died in the line of duty.*

In designing and applying its programs and financial support, Bluecoats works very closely with its Police and Fire Advisory Committee. This Committee includes the Chiefs of the Cleveland Division of Police and the Cleveland Division of Fire and their designees, as well as representatives from the suburban police and fire departments.

By policy, Bluecoats shuns publicity and tries to go quietly about its work. Its members pray that the tragedies which require it to take action will not occur, but if and when they do, Bluecoats stands immediately ready to step in and do whatever is needed. It provides a bridge to a secure future for the deceased safety officer's surviving family, and then provides ongoing support to individual family members as needed.

### **Where Does It Work?**

Bluecoats works throughout Cuyahoga County, Ohio. It encourages neighboring counties to establish their own Bluecoats-type organizations, and to this end it will provide any advice and counsel that may be useful.

## Why Does It Endure?

Bluecoats has endured over the years because its members recognize the supreme sacrifice made by members of our safety forces who give their lives in the line of duty.

These brave men and women have given up their lives to protect our lives and property and to make our community a more secure place in which to live. Their surviving spouses, children and other family members must bear for a lifetime the enormous burdens of this heroism. While Bluecoats can never replace a deceased safety officer, it does try to provide the continuing financial support, care and counseling that the officer would have provided to the officer's surviving spouse and children, and to thereby ease the burdens of these survivors.

Cuyahoga County safety forces are advised of Bluecoats and the work it does. We hope this knowledge helps to strengthen their resolve in discharging the dangerous duties inherent in their work, knowing that their loved ones will be cared for if death in the line of duty does occur. By thus helping to build the morale of our men and women in blue, the work of Bluecoats benefits our entire community.

The support of Bluecoats becomes highly personal to each beneficiary it serves. It may take the form of financial support for a college education, a special wheelchair for a disabled child, counseling for a spouse who has financial or legal difficulties, drug treatment for an addicted family member, a new furnace and storm windows for an elderly widow, vision or orthodontic services for those who need them, or a car loan to provide transportation to work.

Whatever is needed.

*Over the years since its founding, Bluecoats has gained national recognition and become a model for many similar organizations serving other cities. It is a highly focused private charity which is based on acknowledgment of the enormous debt a community owes to the members of its safety forces, particularly those who lose their lives in the line of duty. Judging by the fact that it is "a charity with a waiting list" for membership, Bluecoats seems to be a valued community asset...one that is likely to endure long into the future.*

