

The Delaware State Police Celebrates 100 Years of Service to the Citizens of the First State

The calendar year 2023 marks the 100th anniversary of the Delaware State Police. While our agency has existed for over 100 years, it was not until 1923 that it became a full-service police agency. This agency has evolved since the onset of its humble beginnings and has strengthened over the course of those 100-plus years.



The State Highway Police in the 1920s.

With the creation of the State Highway Commission in 1917, a movement began to create a statewide policing force that would focus on the State's growing roadway infrastructure, and in 1919, the State Highway Police, the precursor to the State Police, was formed. The four 'Officers' originally assigned to the State Highway Police patrolled the highways of the State year-round on motorcycles and were known as the "Four Horsemen."

By 1923, the growing consensus was that the scope of the State Highway Police needed to be expanded. On April 28, 1923, legislation was passed by the General Assembly that led to the creation of a State Police force under the authority of the State Highway Commission.

In its earliest years, the State Police force focused on "speeding cars of 35 miles per hour and roving bands of troublemakers and bootleggers." This expanded focus on areas of concern, beyond mere enforcement of highway laws, serves as the foundation of the full-service agency the Delaware State Police is today.

After the creation of the State Police force, many "firsts" soon followed. By 1925, four dogs were donated to serve as security for the stations. Those dogs ultimately laid the foundation for what would become the agency's first canine units.



A 1920's era Officer with his K-9 partner.

While the agency's top priority remained traffic safety, the responsibilities of the DSP increased as the Great Depression caused an influx in criminal activity. The agency soon became focused on thefts as well as the sale and import of alcoholic beverages.



Troopers posing for the camera (1930s-era).



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By the late 1930s, police stations had been established in all three counties. With that came the purchase of the first set of patrol vehicles in 1935 and the purchase of police radio-transmitting equipment in 1936. By 1938, the DSP had established a civilian workforce to manage some of the day-to-day administrative duties of the department. This proved to be an extremely valuable move for the State Police, as it allowed more time for the Officers to patrol the roads of Delaware and keep the citizenry safe.



Some of the 'first' DSP Civilians (circa the 1940s).

In the 1940s, in conjunction with the Delaware Association of Chiefs of Police, the DSP established a summer youth camp in

Sussex County. As a mechanism for 1940s-era mentorship, this camp, later named Camp Barnes, has continuously served thousands of girls and boys throughout the state for over seven decades. To this day, Camp Barnes continues to help develop initiative and leadership skills within our Delaware youth, while simultaneously fostering trust in law enforcement professionals.

By the 1960s, the State Police expanded its role by acquiring its first fixed-wing aircraft. In the years to follow, the newly formed Aviation Section expanded to include several helicopters. At that time, helicopters were suggested to be used for traffic control and emergencies. Today, the unit has many functions, which include providing rapid transport of critically sick or injured persons to medical facilities and supporting law enforcement ground personnel in the apprehension of criminal suspects.



DSP Trooper Medics at work (circa the 1990s).



A few older aircraft flying over Wilmington.

During this same period, DSP took significant steps toward breaking several barriers by effectively recruiting and hiring quality minority applicants. These steps led to the hiring of the first African American Trooper in 1969 and the first female Trooper in 1976. Today, the composition of the Delaware State Police, both civilian and sworn, contains women and men from virtually all ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. While the DSP has significantly evolved, we continue to strive toward hiring a diverse and increasingly capable workforce!





In more recent years, the evolution of the State Police has continued and has positioned the DSP to truly serve as a full-service law enforcement agency. This evolution has led to the incorporation of 'state of the art' technology, new units focused on cybercrime, criminal analytics, and much more. Presently capable of securing the safety of the State by land, air, and sea, thanks to the creation of a full-time, Maritime Unit several years ago, the Civilians and Troopers within the DSP take great pride in setting the standard for modern-day law enforcement.



DSP Troopers and Explorers preparing to patrol the State Fair Grounds (Circa the 2018s)

While we are excited to celebrate our first 100 years of service to the First State, we are even more excited to see what the future has in store for our agency. In all ways, Delaware State Troopers are proud to provide professional, competent, and compassionate law enforcement services to the citizens and visitors of Delaware 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. As we begin our next century of service, the Delaware State Police continues to enhance its approaches to intelligence-led policing, community engagement, and an overall commitment to dedicated services.



Throughout 2023, there will be three public events that will be held to commemorate our historic milestone. A 100th Anniversary Tribute will be held at Legislative Hall in Dover on Friday, April 28, 2023. On Saturday, June 17, 2023, a 100th Anniversary Car Show & Community Showcase will be held at the Headquarters complex in Dover. The final public event will be the 100th Anniversary 5K in Dewey Beach, which will take place on Saturday, September 23, 2023. Please visit [2023 – Delaware State Police 100th Anniversary 5k](#) for additional details.

One of the many ways the State Police will be marking this historic anniversary is through the deployment of 'retro' patrol vehicles throughout 2023. Several modern-day police vehicles with historical markings will be patrolling the entirety of the State while paying respect to the many proud women and men who previously wore the uniform of a Delaware Trooper and established the foundation that current Troopers continue to build upon.



2023 Tahoes, this one marked like the 1949 Ford pictured on the left, and others like it will be on patrol in 2023.

If you want to become part of the Delaware State Police's next century of service, please visit our recruiting website to [Become a Trooper](#) or [Become a DSP Civilian](#). If you cannot join our sworn or civilian ranks, please consider supporting our agency's legacy with donations to either [Camp Barnes](#) or the

Delaware State Police Museum. You can also visit the Camp Barnes website at <https://campbarnes.net/> and donate directly to them. Contributions to both entities can also be made via U.S. Mail sent to Delaware State Police, P.O. Box 430, Dover, DE 19903-0430.

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Presented by Public Information Officer, Sergeant India Sturgis

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