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## Laser eye surgery donated to Indian River deputy shot during traffic stop



The dashcam video on Deputy Christopher Lester's cruiser shows Andrew Coffee punch the deputy in the head during their confrontation Friday. (MARTIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE)

Published on: 1/27/2016

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — [Amid the scuffle and the gunfight with a felon](#) on the morning of Dec. 18, a sheriff's deputy lost his eyeglasses.

But the Rotary Club of Vero Beach Sunrise and New Vision Eye Center in Vero Beach are stepping in to make sure that never happens again to Indian River Deputy Chris Lester.

The club offered a \$1,500 donation to pay for the facility fee for laser eye surgery for Lester, who was shot and wounded Dec. 18. Staff at New Vision returned the donation and said it will cover those expenses. New Vision's Dr. David O'Brien volunteered to perform the surgery without charge, said Carrie Ludicke, director of public relations at the Eye Center. His expenses would normally be \$2,500 for the surgery, she said. Total cost for the procedure normally runs \$4,000.

The club presented Lester with its award for First Responder of the Year at its Wednesday meeting. Lester briefly spoke at the meeting to thank the club and the eye center, Sheriff Deryl Loar, but could not comment to Treasure Coast Newspapers because he's involved in the shooting investigation.

"He said he was extremely humbled," Loar said.

Lester is expected to return to work next week after several weeks of medical leave, Loar said.

It had been nearly 30 years since an Indian River deputy had been shot and wounded in the line of duty. But it's also rare for a deputy to lose his glasses in an altercation at work, Loar said.

"It's usually not a big issue," Loar said. "Most of the younger deputies don't have glasses."

Law enforcement agencies require officers to have 20/20 vision, Loar said, but officers can achieve that with glasses or contact lenses. In his years of experience with the Sheriff's Office and the Florida Highway Patrol, Loar said he hasn't heard much about officers choosing to have laser surgery to help them on the job.

Sebastian Police Chief Michelle Morris also said there's been few to no issues with her officers losing glasses in the line of duty. Because of health privacy laws, law enforcement administration doesn't involve themselves with officers' decisions about improving their eyesight, she said.

Lester had made a traffic stop on Andrew Coffee Jr., who was on a scooter with no tags on 45th Street between Old Dixie Highway and U.S. 1. A dashboard camera video showed Lester directing Coffee to place his hands on the hood of his patrol car. After Coffee walked to the front of the patrol car, he swung his fist and struck Lester in the face, the video shows. As Lester fell, his glasses flew off.

Coffee pulled a gun from his waistband and began firing at the deputy, who fired back, sheriff's officials said. Lester was shot once in the leg, while Coffee was struck twice in the abdomen.

"It adds to the heroic nature of his actions" that Lester was able to fire back after he lost his glasses, Loar said.

Coffee spent five days at Lawnwood Regional Medical Center & Heart Institute in Fort Pierce, the Sheriff's Office said. He remains at the Indian River County Jail without bail. Coffee was

charged with attempted murder, battery on a law enforcement officer and possession of a firearm by a felon.