

ELECTION 2026 LAKE COUNTY SHERIFF

Williams throws hat in the ring

By Alexandra Kukulka
Post-Tribune

Indiana State Police Maj. Jerry Williams, a Gary native, announced Saturday he will run for Lake County sheriff in the 2026 election.

"The timing is right for the next chapter of my career, and that's to take all these achievements and successes that I've gained over the years with the state police and bring those accomplishments and experiences closer to home back here in Lake County," Williams said in an interview with the Post-Tribune.

Williams began his law enforce-

ment career as a corrections officer for the Lake County sheriff's office before going to work for the Indiana State Police, where he's worked for the last 31 years, he said.

Alongside ISP Superintendent Douglas Carter, Williams spearheaded an intensive 15-month effort starting in early 2022 to assist the city of Gary with reorganizing and implementing industry-wide best practices to improve public safety and make the department a better place to work. He served as Gary's interim police chief for the first half of 2023.

Over the years with Indiana State Police, Williams said he was a road trooper in Lake County and

then a member of a gang task force, where he worked investigations in East Chicago, Gary, Hammond, Munster and Highland.

Then, Williams said he became a sergeant and worked in Indianapolis in the state police's fiscal division. In that role, Williams said he worked on grant writing and bid specification writing.

Williams also worked in the Indiana State Police internal investigations division, before being assigned as lieutenant of the Indiana State Police Lowell District, which encompasses seven counties, he said.

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Indiana State Police Maj. Jerry Williams speaks during a news conference on Sept. 12, 2022. On Saturday, the Gary native said he will be running for Lake County sheriff in 2026. In January, St. John Police Chief Steve Flores announced his candidacy. **KYLE TELECHAN/POST-TRIBUNE**



Reggy, mascot of the Mascot Hall of Fame in Whiting, can be seen on the outside the building on Thursday. **KYLE TELECHAN/POST-TRIBUNE PHOTOS**

BP wants to turn Mascot Hall of Fame into office building campus

By Alexandra Kukulka
Post-Tribune

The BP Whiting Refinery submitted paperwork to acquire the Mascot Hall of Fame with plans to build campus-style office buildings for its employees on the site.

The BP Whiting Refinery held its first community night Thursday at the Mascot Hall of Fame, which is located across the street from the refinery.

The event started with a panel discussion, where residents could submit questions on note cards, that was attended by about 100 employees and residents. After the panel, attendees could visit stations to learn about different elements of the refinery, from safety to lab work.



BP employee John Orlich speaks with a visitor during the BP Whiting Refinery community night event on Thursday.

"We realize we have a big refinery in a lot of people's backyards," said Donnie Brown, former Vice President of Refining at BP Whiting. "We want to make sure we're more open."

Brown was promoted Friday to BP's Senior Vice President of Safety & Operational Risk Assurance. Chris DellaFranco, who has been with ExxonMobil for more than 20 years, will begin as the VP of the Whiting Refinery on July 1, according to a BP news release.

During the event, Brown said the company submitted a bid for the land with the city of Whiting. Brown said the company would like to build a campus with office buildings and green space for employees to utilize.

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Former Gary man's appeal denied

Convicted of pregnant Cal College student's death in 2015

By Meredith Colias-Pete
Post-Tribune

The Indiana Court of Appeals denied Derron Fuller's appeal Thursday — nearly a decade after Rochelle Stubblefield disappeared while meeting him at a Gary elementary school playground by his house.

Stubblefield, 20, a Calumet College student and track athlete, was 35 weeks pregnant with his child when she disappeared on Nov. 10, 2015. Her body has never been found.

She planned to name her son Amir.

Fuller, now 29, formerly of Fort Knox, Kentucky, while in the Army, but originally from Gary, was sentenced to 94 years in May 2023 on two counts of murder and one count of obstruction of justice.

In a 3-0 decision, Appeals Judge Cale Bradford rejected Fuller's attempts to pick apart the evidence used against him at trial.

In the appeal, Fuller argued his rights had been violated by several bits of evidence admitted, the court erred by rejecting his motion to dismiss, and he questioned the sufficiency of the evidence — i.e. the trial went on despite being a circumstantial case.

He also argued he was denied due process at trial — most significantly that detectives lost the cousin's seized cell phone during the course of the case, and the cousin's police interview got corrupted, preventing his lawyer from challenging the witness's credibility — and that investigators were never able to pull information from the device.

Bradford wrote there was enough evidence pointing to Fuller's guilt.

Stubblefield texted her mother around 5 p.m. that day that she planned to meet up with Fuller, according to court documents.

Fuller's new girlfriend saw him dump some of Stubblefield's

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Hobart police officers cited for their lifesaving efforts

Hobart Police Chief Garrett Ciszewski, left, presents a lifesaving commendation to Patrolman Ryan Zukli on Wednesday. Patrolman Zachary Bulthuis Center also received a lifesaving honor. Both officers were credited with quick action in saving infants in distress. **CAROLE CARLSON/POST-TRIBUNE**



By Carole Carlson

Hobart has honored two police officers credited with lifesaving efforts involving two infants in separate incidents.

Patrolmen Zachary Bulthuis and Ryan Zuklin received commendation citations from Police Chief Garrett Ciszewski at Wednesday's Board of Works and Safety meeting.

"On behalf of the city, we applaud you," Mayor Josh Huddleston told the officers. Zuklin said he answered a

dispatch call on Jan. 17 telling him a 70-year-old woman was in distress, but when he arrived at the home, he found a 7-week-old baby struggling to breathe and turning blue.

"I started doing CPR," said Zuklin who explained he learned child and baby cardio-pulmonary resuscitation at the police academy. He said it's a slightly different procedure from the adult method.

A short time later, Hobart Fire Department medics arrived and maintained the CPR effort all

the way to the St. Mary Medical Center.

"It was everybody on deck," Zuklin said of the emergency workers' quick response. "They got a pulse back and the baby was taken in a helicopter to a Chicago children's hospital."

Zuklin has been a member of the police department for four years.

"I went home that night and hugged my 6-year-old," he said. The incident marked Zuklin's

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Campus

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“We’re always looking for opportunities to get our facilities in a modern place,” Brown said.

Whiting’s Redevelopment Commission issued a request for proposals to purchase 41 parcels, which includes the Mascot Hall of Fame, said Whiting Mayor Steve Spebar. The deadline for the proposals was June 4, he said, and BP filed a proposal for the Mascot Hall of Fame property.

The city owns the museum structure and land, Spebar said, and the museum hasn’t generated money for the city in the last few years. Officials from other towns have reached out to city officials to bring the museum to their towns, he said.

“There’s a significant bond issue that’s tied to the building that the purchaser would have to compensate the city for,” Spebar said. “If the mascot museum was sold, it turns the mascot museum from a non-taxpaying budgetary item to a tax-paying property. That’s an immediate financial gain.”

Spebar said he’s hopeful that at the Redevelopment Commission’s July 2 meeting a recommendation will be presented regarding BP’s request for proposal.

In addition to the bid for the Mascot Hall of Fame, Brown said BP will expand into lower carbon energy through blue hydrogen production.

“We are looking at those types of investments for the future,” Brown said.

The refinery was established in 1889 by Standard Oil, Brown said, and is the sixth largest in the country and largest in the Midwest. The refinery processes about 440,000 barrels of crude oil daily, he said.

Rudy Gallegos, Director of Health, Safety, and Environment at BP Whiting, said the refinery gets crude oil from Canada and Texas. In basic terms, Gallegos said the refinery works to heat up



A display featuring a number of mascots can be seen outside the Mascot Hall of Fame in Whiting during the BP Whiting Refinery community night event on Thursday. **KYLE TELECHAN/POST-TRIBUNE PHOTOS**



Whiting resident Carolyn Marsh, administrator of the BP Whiting Watch Facebook page, speaks with BP employees during the event Thursday.

the crude oil, break it up into products, remove sulfur and add “good elements” that go into gasoline. In February, the refinery experi-

enced a power outage that caused a disturbance in the community, Brown said.

No one was injured in the incident, he said, but the refinery was evacuated and roads were shut down for an extended period of time.

To safely shut down the refinery, there was an unplanned flaring of gasses — emitting odors similar to burned rubber — into the air.

Considerable public outcry erupted in the wake of the power outage, which caused attendees of an February public hearing on BP’s air quality permit to demand more stringent guidelines. IDEM reiterated that it was limited by what it can do under the re-permitting process, thus being unable to take previous permit violations into account.

Brown thanked the community for its patience as the refinery

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— Whiting Mayor Steve Spebar

returned to regular operations. “You allowed us to recover,” Brown said.

Carolyn Marsh, who has been the administrator of the BP Whiting Watch Facebook page for 10 years, said the group has been calling for a citizen advisory committee, so she was pleased to hear that such a committee will be formed in the fall.

Marsh said she wasn’t pleased with the proposal BP filed for the Mascot Hall of Fame because it won’t generate revenue for the city.

“I’m very upset by it,” Marsh said.

Jim Florek, who worked at the refinery for 28 years before retiring 15 years ago, said the Mascot Hall of Fame was a good idea for the city, but it isn’t profitable and BP needs office space for its employees.

Florek said he enjoyed the event and learning more about the refinery and its plans for the future.

“It was great. They need to do these things more often,” Florek said.

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Post-Tribune archives contributed.

Officers

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second commendation for lifesaving, Ciszewski said.

On May 24, Bulthuis answered a call regarding a child drowning in a bathtub.

He found a mother holding an unresponsive nine-month-old boy who slipped out of his bath seat as his mom tended to another child.

“He had a heartbeat, so I didn’t do CPR,” said Bulthuis, who joined the department six years ago.

“I listened to his mouth and started back pats. Pretty soon, he spewed out all the water and started crying.”

The child was rushed to a nearby hospital where officials said he made a full recovery.

“I’m just happy we can show the Board of Public Works the great things our officers do,” said Ciszewski. “They go above and beyond.”

He also stressed the importance of learning CPR.

The Hobart firefighters’ union teaches a course on CPR, first aid and Stop the Bleed. For information, contact 219-942-5184.

Carole Carlson is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.

Williams

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As lieutenant of the Lowell district, Williams said, he oversaw urban areas like Gary and East Chicago as well as rural areas like Pulaski and Starke counties.

Williams said he is currently a member of the Indiana State Police executive staff as assistant chief of staff of logistics, which means he supervises the state police’s supply, maintenance, engineering and transportation in addition to overseeing all property and facilities the police agency owns.

“At the end of the day, I’m a crime fighter. I pride myself on being that. I’m passionate about doing just that,” Williams said. “Being able to bring that level of understanding to an office like the Lake County Sheriff’s Department will be paramount. It’ll give me a leg up, I believe, because it will shorten my learning curve.”

Williams said he’s talked to some Lake County officials about his run for sheriff, though he declined to share who he talked to. But, Williams said those he talked to seemed excited that he is running for sheriff.

The race for sheriff won’t be decided until the 2026 election,



Indiana State Police Maj. Jerry Williams speaks during a ceremony at Gary City Hall on Dec. 5. Williams, who worked at the Lake County Sheriff’s Department decades ago before joining the state police, is running for sheriff in 2026. **MICHAEL GARD/POST-TRIBUNE**

but Williams said he sees his announcement as a six-month head start to the typical schedule of announcing in late 2024 or early 2025 for that election.

“We’re excited about it. My team is 100% committed to doing the best we can for Lake County. Our goal now is to get out here and get an early start with sharing our message, our vision and our values with the community,”

Williams said.

Williams said his values for the Lake County sheriff’s office are public safety, integrity and transparency.

Williams is the second person to announce his candidacy for Lake County sheriff. In January, St. John Police Chief Steve Flores announced he will run for the position as well.

“People ask why I want to run,

and it’s very simple. Public service and protecting our community has always been part of my life, it has led us to stand here today where a new dream has taken over for me, and that is to maintain and create a safer Lake County,” Flores said in his announcement.

Lake County Democratic Party Chairman Jim Wieser said “more than a couple” of people have told him they would like to run for Lake County sheriff. He declined to give an exact number and the names of the people who expressed interest in the position.

“I understand the nature of the position and it’s an important position in county government,” Wieser said. He added that as more candidates announce for the sheriff’s race that he hopes they are mindful of the Democratic Party’s focus to reelect U.S. Rep. Frank Mrvan this November.

Current Lake County Sheriff Oscar Martinez Jr. is not eligible to run for reelection as he is in the middle of his second term. Under state law, county sheriffs can only serve up to two four-year terms within a 12-year period.

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Meredith Colias-Pete and Post-Tribune archives contributed.

Appeal

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things, including a laptop and identification card out a car window while they were driving. The cousin testified at trial that he and Fuller once joked about if Fuller would kill Stubblefield, because she was pregnant. In retrospect, he

was sickened by it. Fuller also hid in his new girlfriend’s basement before he was arrested days later.

There was circumstantial evidence that Stubblefield was dead and her child had never been born, Bradford said. For example, her driver’s license hadn’t been renewed, her Social Security number wasn’t used, there have been no hits for her DNA in a

national missing person’s database, and she had never left the country, Bradford wrote in the 21-page opinion.

Many of the errors Fuller cited in the end were “harmless” for his legal defense at trial, he wrote.

After Stubblefield met Fuller that night outside Williams Elementary School, they started arguing and Fuller later told the

cousin that he tried to stab her in the temple, choked her to death, and he dragged her body to the surrounding woods.

Investigators later found her broken eyeglasses, which they said was a sign of a struggle, her inhaler, and her shoes by the school.

Police cadaver dogs searching wooded areas around Williams

Elementary School in Gary, 1320 E 19th Ave., picked up the presence of human remains during a couple searches, but never found the body.

Stubblefield’s car was moved across the street.

Fuller’s motion for a new trial was denied in November.

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