



Photo by David Ahnthe

# THE INNOVATOR

PETER ELLIOTT'S INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS  
ARE MAKING THE NATION'S STREETS SAFER

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eter Elliott's corner office on the 12th floor of the Carl B. Stokes Federal Court Building in downtown Cleveland overlooks the largest metropolitan area of the 40-county district that he is commissioned to protect. Elliott admits that he doesn't spend much time looking down at the Cuyahoga River, Tower City and Quicken Loans Arena that sit below. As U.S. Marshal for Ohio's Northern District, Elliott is too busy overseeing a staff of more than 330, who work daily to implement the innovative programs he has developed since being appointed to his position in 2003 by President George W. Bush.

Elliott is tailor-made for the job – only one of 94 U.S. Marshals in charge of the nation's federal judicial districts. Walking through the U.S. Marshal's Office, it's obvious that he has the respect of the men and women that serve below him – and they have his. He knows the Marshals Service well, hanging around the old Cleveland office since the late-1960's when his father was a Deputy U.S. Marshal. Today, he serves in a position that his father dreamed of holding before he retired, but fell just short of.

A 1980 graduate of St. Edward High School, Elliott's boyhood dream was to play professional baseball. Admittedly smaller than others in his class, he proudly talks about making the team all four years in high school, and being looked at by some major college programs during his senior year.

It was during his senior baseball season that everything changed. Facing Lake Catholic, with a pro scout and college recruiters in the stands, Elliott got what he described as "the hit of his career" off of the Cougars' ace pitcher. As his laser-shot sped toward the outfield wall, Elliott made his move toward first base. Running with excitement, his spikes went into the ground awkwardly and he felt a pop. With his knee torn and bloody, he crawled to the bag, determined to reach first base safely.

After being called safe, an ambulance was dispatched to take Elliott to the hospital. As he was being placed in the ambulance, head coach Ray Schmotzer told him "everything happens for a reason and a purpose." Elliott never played hardball again.

Though Coach Schmotzer's words weren't what the aspiring pro baseball player wanted to hear at the time, they

In 1987, Elliott made the decision to follow in his father's footsteps, joining the U.S. Marshals in Cleveland as Deputy Marshal, and taking the opportunity to work with his father on federal cases.

Elliott moved on from his first stint with the U.S. Marshals in 1992 to join the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, where he broke a local case with huge national and international implications.

It was an average September day in quiet Bedford, Ohio until the owner of The Bedford Self-Serve Mini Storage Facility decided to take action on a tenant who was six months overdue on rent payments. Upon opening the storage locker, the owner found a cache of weapons and explosives that included 13 firearms, bags of ammunition, blasting caps, and most dangerously, 100-pounds of corrosive dynamite so volatile that even the slightest agitation could cause detonation.

Not only was the locker itself a ticking time bomb, but its location, next to a gas station, across the street from a child daycare facility, and within a block of a school, made the situation even more dire.

Elliott was one of the first agents on the scene, helping oversee the safe evacuation of the surrounding area and removal of the deadly explosives. Though the day ended without incident, Elliott's job of investigating who



*Peter Elliott '80, takes his oath as U.S. Marshal for the Ohio Northern District alongside his father, Pete Elliott '54, who once sought the position.*

would ring true and become a personal philosophy as Elliott entered the family business – law enforcement.

Upon receiving a degree in public administration from Capital University in Columbus, Elliott returned to Cleveland to serve as an undercover narcotics agent for the Westshore Enforcement Bureau, which serves the communities of Bay Village, Fairview Park, Lakewood, North Olmsted, Rocky River, and Westlake.

owned the explosives, and what their intention was, had just begun.

He was challenged to find the lessee of the storage locker that was rented under a false name and only paid for in cash. Starting with just a rough composite sketch, and sheer determination to break the case, Elliott embarked on a four-year investigation that uncovered international terror schemes stemming from a century old hate between the Armenians and the Turks. Through his investigation, Elliott was able to trace the locker back to a powerful Armenian figure who had masterminded a number of terrorist attacks on Turkish targets during the 1970's and 80's, both in the United States and Europe.

A deeply religious man, Elliott admits to feeling a stronger sense for why he was there the day the Bedford storage locker was discovered, and why he spent those years breaking a case that was decades old. There is no doubt he recalled the wisdom passed along to him by Coach Schmotzer after the case closed, with the Armenian mastermind being sentenced to the maximum extent of the law.

The case earned Elliott notoriety and showcased his tenacious will. The man who grew up in Lakewood, with few powerful political connections, had garnered enough respect to earn the position that had eluded his father – U.S. Marshal for the Ohio Northern District.

Elliott speaks proudly of the day he took his oath in March 2003, recalling how he had prayed so hard as a child that his father would earn the position, and knowing that day, as he took the oath, how proud his father was that his son had lived his unreachable dream. To the surprise of the hundreds in attendance the day he took the oath, he called his father Pete, a 1954 St. Edward graduate, to the stage to accept the oath with him. The framed memory of that great moment for father and son has a prominent spot on the windowsill of Elliott's office.

As the youngest-ever Marshal to hold the position in the Northern District of Ohio, Elliott immediately got to work developing programs to make his district safer, behind a personal philosophy that "we need to get to the root of

the problem rather than the surface."

During an afternoon workout in the gym adjacent to his twelfth floor office, Elliott had a bright idea. Inspired by the June 2000 murder of Cleveland Police Patrolman Wayne Leon, who was shot while trying to apprehend a wanted fugitive, Elliott developed a plan to help take fugitives off the street and create less of an opportunity for another violent encounter between an officer and criminal. His idea grew into the Fugitive Safe Surrender Program.

Partnering with local religious organizations, Fugitive Safe Surrender offers individuals with felony and misdemeanor warrants the ability to turn themselves in to law enforcement and have their cases adjudicated in a safe and non-violent environment. According to the U.S. Marshals Web site, the goal of Fugitive Safe Surrender is to reduce the risk to law enforcement officers who pursue fugitives, to the neighborhoods in which they hide, and to the fugitives themselves.

During Fugitive Safe Surrender's inaugural weekend in Cleveland in 2005, more than 850 fugitives surrendered, including 300 felons. Elliott's plan worked, and by offering the fugitives a non-threatening place to surrender, he made the streets safer for the public and law enforcement officials.

"I am certain the program has saved lives," says Elliott, who frequently travels to American cities to implement his program. To date, seven cities nationwide have adopted Fugitive Safe Surrender, including Akron, Memphis, Nashville, Indianapolis, Phoenix and Washington, D.C. Future plans are in place to expand the program to Atlanta, Dallas, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Richmond, Syracuse and other cities.

The program's nationwide success has garnered much attention, including a recent feature in the New York Times documenting the program's success in Nashville. In April 2006, Ohio Senator Mike Dewine introduced a congressional bill to provide proper federal funding to expand the program further.

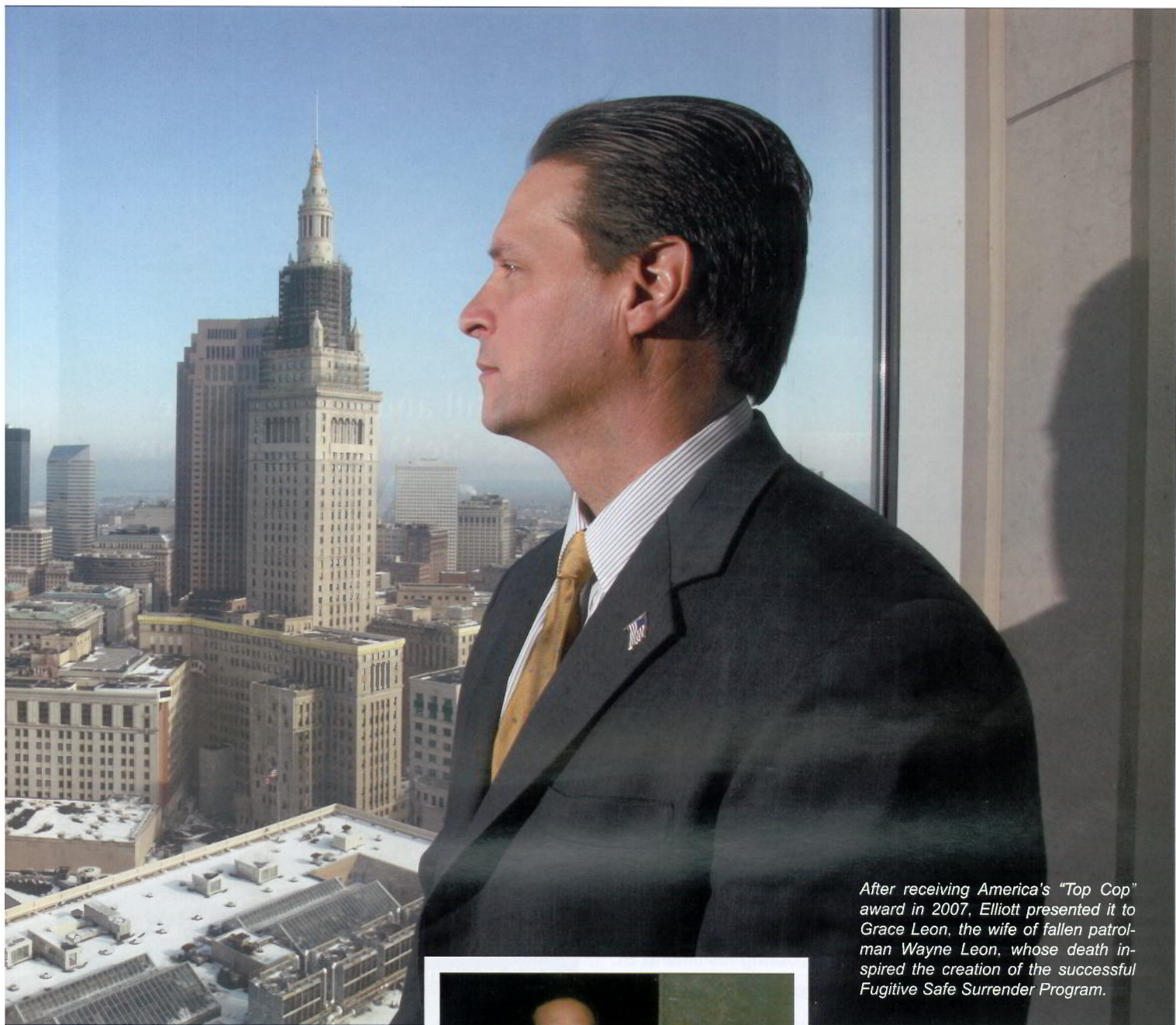
Though Fugitive Safe Surrender is the best known of the unique and highly-effective programs that Elliott has developed since taking office in 2003, it is only the tip of the iceberg. Elliott



is responsible for forming the Northern Ohio Violent Fugitive Task Force, which is a collaborative effort between federal, state and local law enforcement responsible for the arrests of more than 10,000 violent fugitives.

Elliott also developed partnerships with Clear Channel Radio and WKYC-TV in Cleveland, which takes a proactive approach to apprehending offenders by featuring a Fugitive of the Week and providing the public with an anonymous tip line to report information on known fugitives.

Elliott's Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program is



*After receiving America's "Top Cop" award in 2007, Elliott presented it to Grace Leon, the wife of fallen patrolman Wayne Leon, whose death inspired the creation of the successful Fugitive Safe Surrender Program.*

Photo by David Ahnholz

another initiative receiving national acclaim. Focused on getting to the root of the youth gangs problem, the program brings Deputy U.S. Marshals into the school system to teach students about the danger of gangs, and also offers them positive experiences so they can feel part of a larger group and avoid gang involvement. G.R.E.A.T. partners with local sports teams, religious organizations, universities and non-profit organizations to provide activities for the students and opportunities for the students to give back to their communities.

Far removed from his childhood



dream of playing professional baseball, Elliott takes pride in knowing that he was meant to be a U.S. Marshal, as it has given him the opportunity to serve

communities nationwide with his innovative programs. And the community has certainly noticed, decorating Elliott with such prestigious awards as a "Top Cop" of America by the National Association of Police Organizations.

Elliott continues to collect awards, accolades and kudos for his work, including working with movie producers in the initial stages of a feature film on the terrorist case he broke as an ATF agent.

And through everything, he remembers the words of Eagle baseball coach Ray Schmotzer, that "everything happens for a reason and a purpose."