

By DEVAN FILCHAK

A Norwell senior is taking it upon himself to have a pavilion built at the Wells County law enforcement shooting range as his final Eagle Scout project.

Preston Steele, 17, has always had an appreciation for law enforcement as it essentially runs in his family; two of his genetic connections to law enforcement are that his father is Officer Greg Steele of the Bluffton Police Department and his uncle is Chief Deputy Randy Steele of the Wells County Sheriff's Department.

Preston Steele has had the idea of building a pavilion or some type of shelter for the shooting range for a couple of years, but the idea only became more relevant with the COVID-19 pandemic. The training building is only 10 feet by 10 feet, which doesn't allow for social distancing.

Instead, training has been happening under 10-foot-by-10-foot tents outside of the building, said Officer Greg Steele, who is also one of the range instructors. The pavilion will also shelter the officers from inclement weather.

Naturally, he was excited when he heard his son's idea.

"If he gets this completed, it will help us a lot, keeping out of that weather and yet following the CDC guidelines for distance training," Officer Steele said.

Preston Steele is now raising money to have a 20-foot-by-30-foot open-air pavilion built next to the existing training building at the shooting range. The cost for materials will be around \$5,000 to \$6,000, he said, but a professional crew to build the pavilion is a must since COVID-19 guidelines prevent him from forming a group who could build it themselves. That raises the estimated cost to between \$15,000 and \$20,000.



The 20-foot-by-30-foot pavilion would be built at the local law enforcement training range is shown.

But Steele says it is more than worth it to support local law enforcement.

"Since 2020 and all of this anti-police stuff, it's really helping out because it's helping get Bluffton as a community together to do something for the police who are always there for them," he said.

Steele started raising money about two weeks ago when his project was approved by the scout board. Nearly every day after school, he has walked around Bluffton in his Eagle Scout uniform from business to business, asking for support.

On Saturday, he set up a tent at the Parlor City Market. He passed out fliers to passersby and told people about the T-shirts he is also selling to raise funds.

Steele is selling Wells County Law Enforcement Support T-shirts through Steeleco Printing. The front of the shirt features the Indiana and United States flags and reads, "I support Wells County law enforcement." The back of the shirt features the badges from the county's law enforcement agencies and reads, "God bless the USA."



The front T-shirt design is shown. The back of the T-shirt features the logos of local law enforcement agencies.

The shirts are \$20 and can be bought at steelecoprinting.com

People can also donate directly without buying a T-shirt if they'd prefer at [gofundme.com/f/law-enforcement-facility](https://www.gofundme.com/f/law-enforcement-facility)

People can also send checks made payable to Preston D. Steele, which can be mailed to Preston Steele, 3522 E. U.S. 224, Ossian, IN 46777.

Steele said he doesn't have an expectation for when he will be done raising funds and when construction will begin. That just depends on when he manages to raise the full funds.

The police deserve the support and the pavilion because they got into the field to help people, Steele said.

"Police, they're always there to help you, but a lot of times, some things happen and people, they don't really see it the right way. So they think all police are bad, but they're not," he said. "They'll always be there for you. That's why they become police officers."

Steele has been a scout for most of a decade, and he's thoroughly enjoyed it. He has more than 50 badges on his sash.

“I like that they get younger guys and they teach them responsibility and how to actually do things so they can use it later on in their life,” he said.

And while he’s learned a lot from the Boy Scouts program over the years, this project will focus on Steele learning how to be a leader.

“(The project is) made to teach us responsibility and like the leadership position. We’re the ones who are supposed to come up with all of this and raise money and then oversee whatever is going on,” he said.

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