

Local man reaches goal to work for U. S. Secret Service

Matthew Barton planned a path to
work for top law enforcement agency

By Bobby Conner
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EBONY – For most of his life, Matthew Barton had an interest in law enforcement. After taking an introductory class on criminal justice in high school, he decided on a path that has led him to the top, the United States Secret Service. It took careful planning, hard work and sticking to his goals to get to where he finally wanted to be.

Barton was born in Florida and eventually moved to the Ebony area when he was in the eighth grade with his parents Bill and Trish, who still live there, and his sisters Lauren and Lindsay and brother Chris.

He graduated from Park View High School in 2006 and attended James Madison University. Barton originally planned to pursue a degree in Music Education, but changed his major to Justice Studies, Crime and Criminology shortly before starting classes his freshman year. Because of the courses he took in high school through the dual enrollment program at Southside Virginia Community College, he was able to graduate from James Madison University in 2008, two years early, with a Bachelor of Science Degree.

“It was kind of my plan all along. Taking the dual enrollment classes put me on a fast track to finish college early and begin my law enforcement career,” said Barton.

During his freshman year of college, Barton completed several internships and participated in ride-alongs with several police departments, including the Henrico County Division of Police and the Brunswick County Sheriff’s Office.

“Sheriff Roberts was very helpful as I began thinking about my career path. He gave me some of the best advice as I was trying to decide on the direction to take. I really appreciate him taking the time to mentor me,” said Barton.

Since Barton was only 20 years old when he received his college degree, he was too young to be hired by most law enforcement agencies, local and federal. However, he applied for and was hired as a Deputy Sheriff Jailer by the Gwinnett County Sheriff’s Department in metro Atlanta.

In Gwinnett County, there is both a county police department and county sheriff’s department. Barton ended up working for both.

“After about 8 months of working for the sheriff’s department, I transferred to the county police as an officer. I chose Gwinnett County Police as opposed to other agencies because they have their own police academy and train their officers far beyond what is mandated by the state. I wanted to get as much training and experience as I could,” said Barton.

Barton graduated from the Gwinnett County Police Academy in April of 2010 and worked as an officer for 6 years.

Barton feels that starting out as a jailer with the sheriff’s office gave him a better understanding and more skills when dealing with people out on the street as a patrolman. The detention center was direct supervision, meaning it was only him locked behind a set of double doors and tasked with monitoring a housing unit of between 70 to 140 inmates.

“Starting out so young as a jailer gave me invaluable interpersonal communications skills to successfully work with all types of people. It also gave me a good understanding of criminal behavior and things to look for out on the street,” said Barton.

While with the Gwinnett County Police Department, Barton received several advanced and investigations certifications and worked on many special assignments to get as much experience and exposure as possible.

“For me, it was more than a paycheck. It was a career choice to do as much as I could and prepare myself with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to get a federal job. I worked hard to get there and took every opportunity that was given to me,” said Barton.

While working at the Gwinnett County Police Department, Barton applied for a position with the U. S. Secret Service and was hired in March of 2016.

“The hiring process took almost an entire year and was very competitive, but I wasn’t going to give up,” said Barton.

The United States Secret Service, which is headquartered in Washington, DC, was created in 1865 to combat and stop illegal counterfeiting of money. In 1901, with the assassination of President William McKinley, the agency was asked to add protection to their mission. Today the agency has offices across the country and world, continues the work of protecting our nation’s leaders and visiting dignitaries as well as investigations of violations of laws relating to financial crimes such as credit card and access device fraud as well as computer-based attacks on the nation’s banking and telecommunications.

In 2003, the United States Secret Service, which today has over 7000 employees worldwide, was transferred from the United States Treasury Department to the Department of Homeland Security.

Barton’s job with the Secret Service began with orientation at the James J. Rowley Training Center in Beltsville, Maryland and then he was sent to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia, where different government agencies train. He received his Federal Law Enforcement Certification in May 2016.

After receiving the federal certification, Barton went back to the Secret Service training center in Maryland for another three months of training. He graduated in September 2016 just before the presidential election.

“Our training was intense but is important in order to do the job we do,” said Barton. “When we finished training, I went right into work during the 2016 presidential campaign.”

There are two divisions of the Secret Service, the Uniformed Division and the special agent division. Barton is currently with the Uniformed Division, which is based out of Washington, but he gets pulled for special protection assignments. The mission of the Uniformed Division is to protect venues and facilities secured for U. S. Secret Service protectees. They also provide physical security for the White House Complex, Vice President’s Residence, Treasury Department building and foreign diplomatic missions in Washington.

Because of his police experience in Georgia and performance during training, he was assigned to the Foreign Missions Branch which provides police services to diplomatic missions in Washington and works closely with the U. S. State Department.

“It’s really interesting work with people from all parts of the world. Even though I’m assigned to the Foreign Missions Branch and work mostly in DC, I travel often for protection assignments throughout the country and sometimes overseas. I volunteer to travel as much as possible to see operations on a broader scale,” said Barton.

When traveling, there is a lot of work that goes into making sure the person or persons who are being protected are safe during a visit. No matter how long a visit may be, it still takes the same amount of planning before and during the visit.

“It doesn’t matter if we are in a location an hour, a day or a week. The same amount of time and preparation goes into doing the job we have to do. That doesn’t change,” said Barton.

“This is really a fast paced job. We were traveling all over the country during the campaign,” said Barton.

“There were plenty of times during the campaign I would get back home and then be called right back out and be gone for days. I just keep a suitcase packed all the time.”

The motto of the Secret Service is “Worthy of Trust and Confidence”, and Barton lives and works by those words each day. He understands the seriousness of what he and his fellow agents and officers do and knows how important the work is to keep those they protect safe.

“I really enjoy where I am in my career and life now,” said Barton. “I am proud of the work we do. At the end of a visit, when the motorcade leaves or the helicopter or plane takes off, we have the satisfaction of knowing that we did our absolute best and everything went as planned. It’s an honor to be given the opportunity to be a part of such an important, unique mission and work for the Secret Service.”

Barton gives much credit to his family and friends for their help and inspiration.

“I wouldn’t have gotten to where I am today without the love and support of my parents, my brother and two sisters,” said Barton. “I owe them a debt of gratitude for always being there for me and believing in me. I also want to extend my thanks and appreciation to all my friends and the Ebony Community for their constant encouragement over the years.”

For more information about the United States Secret Service or career opportunities visit www.secretservice.gov.

