



Courtesy photo

Hollis police Sgt. Barry Palmer is shown in an undated photo. Palmer died Tuesday at home.

Police sergeant's humor built bonds

Hollis | Death of Barry Palmer, 39, leaves family, friends, colleagues shocked.

By DAVID BROOKS

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Of all the skills that Barry Palmer possessed, one of the most cherished by friends, family and colleagues in the Hollis Police Department was this: In some mysterious way, he could be funny and serious at the same time.

"He was a funny guy - a hilarious guy - one of those guys that used humor in every situation . . . But he was also the kind of guy that could deliver lines in a way that didn't offend," said

Lt. James Sartell, who knew Palmer for his entire police career. "If you and I said the same thing to people that he did, they'd be mortal enemies with us. But he established bonds with people due to his humor. It was almost miraculous."

Sartell is one of the many people in shock this week from news that Palmer, 39, a police sergeant who had served in Hollis since 1997, died unexpectedly at home early Tuesday morning.

Palmer, who appeared to be in perfect health, collapsed in the bathroom of his Amherst home at about 5:45 a.m., according to family members. His wife, Nancy, performed CPR and called 911, but he could not be revived.

An autopsy said the cause of death

was a heart attack, perhaps triggered by a very low level of electrolytes, or salts, in the blood, said Palmer's sister, Kathleen. She said Palmer had recently lost a lot of weight on a diet, and family members thought that may have led to the unexpected death.

Kathleen Palmer said her brother had undergone a similar weight loss more than a decade ago, when he decided on a career in police work after working for years at Marvell Plate Glass in Merrimack.

"He wasn't really interested in school until he decided to become a cop. That's one of the things we respected about him - when he decided to become a cop, he just really focused. He lost a lot of weight . . . he

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built a gym in the cellar . . . and went to school, even with a full-time job," she said.

Palmer, a 1985 graduate of Nashua High School, earned a degree in criminal justice from Hesser College in 1994, graduating summa cum laude.

He joined the Candia Police Department in 1995, and after graduating from the New Hampshire Police Academy moved to the Hollis Police Department in 1997. He was promoted to detective in April 2001, and to sergeant earlier this month.

"He's a man that all those accolades that are said at times like this, are absolutely true. There's a hole in our lives that will never be filled," said Diane West, the police department's secretary.

Like many people who knew Palmer, she described him as one of the funniest people she knew, and yet also one who knew how to command respect.

Matthew Petz of Nashua, who has known Palmer since they attended Elm Street Middle School together and who was such a good friend that the family mentioned him in the obitu-

ary, said the death was a shock because Palmer was such a presence in his friends' lives.

"Anybody you tell, they're just dumbstruck. Nobody believed it," Petz said.

He described Palmer as being rock-solid dependable even amid his good-natured banter and his ability to make everybody laugh.

"If he said he was going to do something, it would get done, absolutely," said Petz. "If people met him, they liked him. That's the way it was."

Palmer's death is a blow to the 15-officer Hollis Police Department, which has just two sergeants. Petz says his friend planned to stay with Hollis a long time.

"He liked all of it - the interaction with people. He knew his community inside and out," said Petz.

Lt. Sartell said it will be hard to replace Palmer.

"He was the funny guy. There's other funny guys here, but he was the Zen master," said Sartell. He added that just last week he finally gave Palmer a card congratulating him on his promotion to sergeant: "You're a good man, friend, father and po-



Courtesy photo

Hollis police Sgt. Barry Palmer and his wife, Nancy, are shown in an undated photo. He died early Tuesday of a heart attack.

liceman. I'm proud to call you my friend," it said.

Palmer leaves a 21-month-old son, Davis, as well as numerous family members, including his parents, Barry J. and Nancy A. (Pederzani) Palmer of Nashua. Family members said he donated several organs after his

death.

Calling hours are today at Farwell Funeral Home, Nashua. He will be buried after a 9 a.m. Saturday service at Main Street United Methodist Church in Nashua.

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