

# Harris lauded as father, dedicated cop

Updated: Wednesday, 22 Jul 2009, 12:52 AM MDT  
Published : Tuesday, 21 Jul 2009, 7:46 PM MDT

- Reporter: [Alex Tomlin](#)
- Web Producer: [Bill Diven](#)

RIO RANCHO, N.M. (KRQE) - A murdered lawman received a warm, loving and large tribute Tuesday morning. Sandoval County Sheriff's Sgt. Joe Harris was fatally wounded in a gunfight with a burglar last week.

There was a huge turnout for the memorial service for Harris who was well-known and well-respected in the Rio Rancho area.

Officials at the Santa Ana Star Center estimated the crowd at 3,000. There speaker after speaker talked about Harris's love for life, for his family and for law enforcement.

A procession of police officers and family members ushered Harris's casket into the center.

The 27-year veteran of law enforcement was one of the first officers sworn in for the Rio Rancho Police Department on a day former Police Chief Dencil Haycox still remembers.

"To pin that badge on Joe Harris, was like you was giving a kid a candy bar," Haycox said. "He was so happy."

Haycox described Harris as more than just a friend or colleague.

"We loved him, and he became like one of our own family members," Haycox said. "He was and is."

Harris' sons worked to hold back their emotion as they told the crowd how much their father meant to them.

"Every single night he would tuck us in, give us a kiss and say he loved us, no matter what," Daniel Harris said. "I thought I could not cry for this, but just remembering him."

Joseph Harris Jr. also spoke to the auditorium.

"I look around here and I am reminded of just how amazing of a dad I had," he said. "Everyone refers to him as a hero, and he is.

"He died doing a very heroic thing."

Many people in the crowd choked up when Harris's daughter Allyson spoke.

Wearing a Sandoval County deputy's cap, she told the crowd any daughter would have been lucky to have had her dad.

"He is definitely my hero and I bet a bunch of other people's hero, too." she said.

Harris is survived by five children and his wife of 15 years, Tonia Harris. (To hear the remarks of Harris's sons and daughter in their entirety, click [here](#) .)

Police said Harris's killer, Joseph Burgess, had been hiding out in the Jemez Mountains for about 10 years, burglarizing homes for food. He also died in the shootout.

He's been connected to the murder of a young couple in Canada in 1972 and was named as a possible suspected in the similar killings of a couple in California in 2004.