

2026 OPJOA Training Conference Wrap-Up

July 28–31, 2026 • Best Western Hotel & Conference Center • Wooster, Ohio

What happens when you bring together great training, great food, friendly competition, a little '80s nostalgia, and some of the best people in the law enforcement profession? The 2026 OPJOA Training Conference!

From July 28–31, OPJOA members gathered at the Best Western Hotel & Conference Center in Wooster, Ohio, for four days of learning, networking, fellowship, and of course a little fun along the way.

A Great Place to Gather

Alyssa Thompson served as our Director of Sales for the 2026 OPJOA Training Conference, and the Best Western proved once again to be a fantastic home for our event. The hotel provided the space we needed for quality training, comfortable accommodations, and plenty of opportunities to catch up with old friends and make new connections.

And then there was the food!

All meals were catered by Buhlers, and attendees had plenty to say about the quality. The reviews were overwhelmingly positive, with many attendees raving about the food throughout the conference. Apparently, good training feeds the mind, but good food keeps everyone coming back for more!

A total of 85 OPJOA members attended this year's conference.

At registration, everyone received an official OPJOA conference T-shirt. For those who wanted to take home an extra, additional shirts were available for just \$10. Nothing says "I survived another OPJOA conference" quite like the official shirt!

Opening Ceremonies

The conference got off to a great start with a meaningful Opening Ceremony.

The Wooster Police Department Honor Guard performed the Presentation of Colors, followed by Harmony Collins of Wooster High School, who beautifully sang the National Anthem.

It was a wonderful way to officially kick off several days of training, fellowship, and fun.

The full agenda of presentations is attached.

Community Day — Giving Back

Rather than hosting a traditional Community Day this year, OPJOA chose to give back in a different way.

OPJOA made a \$500 donation to the Wooster Boys & Girls Club, helping support an organization dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of local youth.

We may not have had a traditional Community Day, but we were proud to continue the OPJOA tradition of supporting the communities that welcome us.

Cornhole Competition

Tuesday evening brought out the competitive spirit!

39 participants grabbed their bags and battled it out in the OPJOA Cornhole Tournament, organized by Jude Kaliszewski.

There was plenty of laughter, some impressive shots, and maybe just a little trash talk. Most importantly, everyone had a great time.

Congratulations to our winners:

 **First Place:** Gary Lawrence and Ken Bills

 **Second Place:** Bennet Brothers

The winners took home a silver coin designating their accomplishment.



Congratulations to the winners—and to everyone who participated!

Game Night: Back to the '80s!

Wednesday night sent us straight back to the decade of big hair, neon colors, cassette tapes, and unforgettable music!

80's Bingo took over the room, with Chris Lahman providing the bingo cards and cranking up the tunes. Multiple games were played, and lucky winners took home bags of Black Rifle Coffee.

Some attendees proved they were true '80s music experts.

Others...well, let's just say Shazam got a serious workout!

And the games didn't stop there. Two tables of Euchre seemed to be in action nearly every night at the conference, while poker added another layer of competition and fun during Game Night.

Clearly, OPJOA members know how to keep the good times rolling long after the training sessions end!

Thursday Night Banquet

Thursday evening brought everyone together for our annual banquet, a great opportunity to relax, enjoy a wonderful meal, and reflect on the conference.

Stan Popp gave the prayer before the meal. As always, Stan's words were thoughtful, inspiring, and true to form, not too long!

Our keynote speaker was Sylvia Colon, Co-Founder of Cleveland Missing.

Sylvia shared a powerful and deeply personal perspective on the impact of having a loved one go missing. Her cousin, Gina DeJesus, was held captive for many years, giving Sylvia firsthand knowledge of the struggles families of missing persons face, not only during the search, but long after.

Cleveland Missing's mission is to provide a brick-and-mortar location where families can receive support and resources, provide training to law enforcement on effectively engaging with families, and offer coaching and guidance to the public on how to support friends and family members of missing persons.

OPJOA was honored to support this important mission with a \$500 donation to Cleveland Missing.

We are grateful to Sylvia for sharing her story, her passion, and the important work Cleveland Missing continues to do for families and communities.

Dennis Dancak Memorial Friendship Award

One of the most special moments of the evening was the presentation of the Dennis Dancak Memorial Friendship Award.

Last year's award recipient, Julius Ponder, had the honor of presenting this year's award to Kathy Christ.

The award is a wonderful reminder of what makes OPJOA special, the friendships, camaraderie, and genuine connections that extend far beyond the conference classroom. Congratulations, Kathy, and thank you to Julius for carrying on the tradition of recognizing those who exemplify the spirit of friendship within OPJOA.

And Then...The Raffle!

No OPJOA banquet would be complete without a little excitement to finish the evening!

The banquet wrapped up with the raffle of more than 90 fantastic prizes. There was plenty of anticipation, cheering, and maybe a little “I hope they call my number!” as the prizes made their way to some very happy winners.

But the raffle is about much more than winning a great prize. The money raised through this raffle is what allows OPJOA to provide scholarships and make meaningful donations to organizations in the communities we visit.

So, every raffle ticket purchased helps OPJOA give back. Whether it helps a future law enforcement professional pursue their education or supports an organization doing important work in the community, the raffle makes a difference.

A huge **THANK YOU** to everyone who donated prizes, purchased raffle tickets, and helped make this year's raffle such a success. Your generosity helps OPJOA continue its tradition of supporting both our members and the communities we serve.

Scholarship Update

Unfortunately, we weren't able to award our scholarship this year.

Our scholarship recipient changed course before the conference and decided to pursue a career on the dark side of firefighting! Unfortunately, the new program is not at an accredited college and does not meet the requirements outlined in the OPJOA bylaws for scholarship eligibility.

While we were disappointed not to award a scholarship this year, we're looking forward to trying again, and we're hoping 2027 brings two scholarship recipients!

Until Next Year...

The 2026 OPJOA Training Conference was about much more than training. It was about learning from one another, building relationships, giving back, laughing together, competing a little, and making memories.

From the opening ceremonies to the final banquet, from cornhole bags flying to '80s music playing, from Euchre and poker games to meaningful conversations in the hallways, the conference was filled with the camaraderie that makes OPJOA special.

A huge **THANK YOU** goes out to everyone who helped make the 2026 conference a success, our presenters, sponsors, volunteers, hotel staff, food providers, organizers, and, most importantly, the OPJOA members who showed up ready to learn, participate, and have a great time.

Here's to another successful conference in the books and to making 2027 even bigger and better!

See you July 27-30, 2027, in Newark, Ohio!