

Santa Barbara Citizens Council On Crime

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PRESS RELEASE

Date: May 24, 2023
From: Santa Barbara Citizens Council on Crime
For: Immediate Release
Contact: Bob Hart (805) 680-7610

The 53rd ANNUAL H. THOMAS GUERRY AWARDS RECOGNIZE EXCELLENCE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT FOR SANTA BARBARA COUNTY.

The 53rd Annual H. Thomas Guerry Awards Ceremony will be held Wednesday, May 24, 2023, at 4:30 P.M. in the **Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisor's Hearing Room, 4th Floor, County Administration Building, 105 East Anapamu.**

The H. Thomas Guerry Award for VALOR:

Lompoc Police Department
Sergeant JORGE MAGANA
Detective ELIZABETH RENNER
Officer SERGIO PERALTA

For SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE:

Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Office
Sr. Deputy District Attorney ANN BRAMSEN
Chief Deputy District Attorney KELLY DUNCAN
Sr. Deputy District Attorney LYNMARC JENKINS
DA Investigator--Commander ED OLSEN
DA Investigator MICHAEL HUFFMAN

California Highway Patrol, Buellton
Officer KEVIN TAULBEE

California Highway Patrol, Santa Barbara
Officer RONALD HENSIC

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For SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE:

Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office
Deputy GEORGE HENDRICKS
Deputy LESLIE AVILA

Santa Barbara Police Department
Sergeant RYAN DeJOHN
Sergeant CHRISTOPHER PAYNE
Officer JOHN 'JAY' DUFFY
Officer JUSTIN HESKETH
Officer KELSEA KING
Officer MARC RENAUD
Officer DENNYS REYES
Officer THOMAS VAN EYCK
Officer MATTHEW TONELLO

We encourage members of the Press to attend the Awards Ceremony.

VALOR AWARD:

LOMPOC PD: SERGEANT JORGE MAGANA, DETECTIVE ELIZABETH
RENNER AND OFFICER SERGIO PERALTA

On Saturday, 6/11/22 at about 3:28 PM Sergeant Magana, Detective Renner, and Officer Peralta were called 210 N. D St. in the City of Lompoc to a disturbance between the suspect and his father. When they arrived on scene, they attempted contact with both the suspect and the victim. The suspect was known to all of the officers and was known to be confrontational in multiple previous contacts.

The officers attempted to gain entry to check on the father, who they suspected was in distress and possibly in danger. They tried to convince the suspect to allow them entry and kept in contact with him while looking into every crevice of the home to get a glimpse of the victim. Ultimately, they called into the residence to ask the victim if he was "OK" he replied he was not. The suspect slammed the door and the security screen. Shortly after, the victim was heard screaming in excruciating pain for help.

Sergeant Magana grabbed the locked security screen and forced the door open. Officers breached the front door and made entry into the home. Officers found the suspect had set the victim on fire. Officer Renner and Sergeant Magana tended to the victim and put the fire out, while Officer Peralta held the suspect at gun point until it was safe to handcuff him and take him into custody.

The officers' actions allowed for the victim to receive medical treatment. Unfortunately, due to the level of his injuries, the victim later passed.

Nobody expects to encounter this type of evil. The officers' bravery, decisiveness and actions are more than worthy of a commendation. These actions are the true meaning of the oath we swear to uphold.

SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE AWARDS:

SANTA BARBARA PD: SERGEANT RYAN DeJOHN, SERGEANT CHRISTOPHER PAYNE, OFFICER JOHN (JAY) DUFFY, OFFICER JUSTIN HESKETH, OFFICER KELSEA KING, OFFICER MARC RENAUD, OFFICER DENNYS REYES, OFFICER THOMAS VAN EYCK:

Now more than ever, law enforcement agencies are being asked to partner with communities in their policing practices to build meaningful relationships and produce optimal results. Cities across the nation, including Santa Barbara, have been looking for the right model of community policing practices for decades. In light of this, the Santa Barbara Police Department has placed a priority on the development of a collaborative and multi-disciplinary approach to dealing with issues surrounding a variety of important community priorities, including mental health and homelessness.

In an effort to support this mission, the Santa Barbara Police Department created the Community Action Team (CAT); a proactive, high-performing team of dedicated officers committed to both short- and long-term solutions to a variety of complex societal issues. CAT represents the “best of the best,” and is reflective of our efforts to address community concerns in a meaningful way.

Currently, The CAT Unit is a highly sought after specialty assignment. Selection for CAT is rigorous and competitive. CAT Officers are tasked with providing 7-day a week coverage, largely on bicycles and on foot. The CAT Unit’s productivity is incredibly high. In 2022, CAT Team Officers handled approximately 4800 calls for service. Of those 4800 calls for service, 2895 of them were self-initiated, a testament to the team’s work ethic.

More impressive in many ways than the CAT Unit’s quantitative statistics are CAT’s qualitative statistics, largely measured by successes stemming from their involvement in relationship building with a variety of professional and community partners. CAT Officers attend weekly “Regional Action Plan” (RAP) meetings, where they are able to collaborate with other organizations, listen to community concerns and answer questions. They attend sanctioned “Neighborhood Walks” and are part of the City of Santa Barbara’s “Neighborhood Improvement Task Force.” They conduct community presentations, assist with community training and are subject matter experts in crisis intervention and de-escalation. They are masterful in their approach to “thinking outside the box,” recognizing that their

problem-solving methods must be robust and inclusive of both community and professional partner perspectives. Their partnerships are the pillar of their success. Some of the agencies they partner with are Santa Barbara Act, City Net, Good Samaritan, County Behavioral Wellness, PATH, Rescue Mission and a variety of other County and City Departments.

Barbara Andersen, the Former Director of Partnerships for Santa Barbara Act and current Senior Assistant to the Santa Barbara City Administrator was recently asked to describe her experience with working with the CAT Unit. In response, Barbara Andersen said the following:

“It truly is a privilege to work closely with the Community Action Team (CAT) to address the diverse needs of our residents in the City of Santa Barbara. We are so fortunate to have experienced, professional, and compassionate officers that are responsive and engaged in all aspects of our community. From communicating with concerned individuals to collaborating with government and nonprofit agencies, the CAT goes above and beyond every time. Their skilled approach and knowledgeable team has also been able to support the ever-changing and complex needs of our most vulnerable community members. All in all, we are able to ensure the safety and vibrancy of our neighborhoods in the City because of their incredible work.”

The Community Action Team is an exemplary team; professional, dedicated, procedurally just and forward thinking. Their hard work and dedication to service is commendable, and for all the reasons described I would like to nominate the following Community Action Team Officers for the H. Thomas Guerry Award for Superior Performance.

SANTA BARBARA PD: OFFICER MATTHEW TONELLO

On 05/28/2022 at 2315 hours Officer Tonello responded to the Olive Mill Rd overcrossing of US 101 for a report of a suicidal male threatening to jump off the overpass. Officer Tonello arrived and began primary negotiation with the former NFL football player who stood 6’4” and approximately 330 pounds. Upon arrival, Officer Tonello immediately began to de-escalate the situation and establish rapport with the subject. Officer Tonello learned about the argument with the subject’s wife that night which triggered this episode. The male discussed his history of depression and mental health issues related to years of head injuries from his playing career.

The decision was made to place the subject on an involuntary 5150 W&I Hold. He made it very clear that he would not voluntarily go to the hospital. Officer Tonello was determined to gain the male’s cooperation. Over the next two hours Officer Tonello patiently negotiated with the subject and eventually convinced him to be driven to Cottage Hospital. Officer Tonello personally

delivered the subject to the hospital and ensured he was receiving the help that was needed. This peaceful resolution to a volatile situation was thanks to the tireless commitment of Officer Tonello.

SANTA BARBARA SHERIFF'S OFFICE: DEPUTY GEORGE HENDRICKS

Sheriff's Deputy George Hedricks began working for the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office in July of 2007. He is currently the City of Goleta Community Resource Deputy (CRD) for Dos Pueblos High School and Goleta Valley Junior High.

Deputy Hedricks works in partnership with school administrators, students, and parents daily. His on-campus presence affords him the ability to investigate complicated issues, as well work with school staff and parents on lesser involved matters. The teamwork displayed by all involved parties allows for alternative solutions to correct negative behavior, as opposed to criminal citations and court appearances.

Deputy Hedricks has fostered special relationships over the 11 years he has been assigned to the schools. In addition to his CRD position, he is also Dos Pueblo's head baseball coach during his off-duty hours.

Deputy Hedricks is the main security resource for school administrators and students alike. When an issue arises, he is immediately sought out for direction and guidance. He has displayed the patience and even-temperament to mediate fights and/or arguments on campus.

Deputy Hedricks has proven himself to be a moral and ethical role model for the students. This is evident in his countless investigations and interactions while on and off campus, always remaining professional and empathetic in his interactions with students and staff.

Some of his other duties as the CRD include meeting with parents and school administration, classroom presentations, making referrals to appropriate agencies, effectively communicating the needs or requirements of certain educational codes or policies, especially amongst a diverse student population. One of his main duties is to make sure both staff and students feel safe and respected, while assisting in providing a comfortable learning environment.

Due to Deputy Hedricks presence on campus, students have learned to trust him and see him as a friend, mentor, and guardian. They feel comfortable in approaching him for questions and/or concerns.

SANTA BARBARA SHERIFF'S OFFICE: DEPUTY LESLIE AVILA

In 2012, Sheriff's Deputy Leslie Avila retired from the Santa Barbara Sheriff Office, and remained an Extra Help employee until 2018, when she began her service retirement.

Deputy Avila was hired in August 1986, where she began her exceptional service to Santa Barbara County. Throughout her time at the Sheriff's Office, Deputy Avila worked in Patrol Operations and Court Services.

In December 1989, Deputy Avila was assigned to the DARE Program until June 1992. Deputy Avila returned to the DARE Program in September 2011, until she retired from the Sheriff's Office in March 2012.

In April 2012, Deputy Avila continued to work in the DARE Program until April 2023. During her time in the DARE Program, Deputy Avila worked with over 11,000 students in the Santa Ynez Valley, Santa Maria/Orcutt and Lompoc regions of our county. In addition to DARE, Leslie also taught over 900 students other lessons by request, creating specialized workshops to address Bullying, Internet Safety, and Safety Awareness.

While attending several recent DARE Graduations, I (Sheriff Brown) heard from students, teachers, and parents that Deputy Avila had impacted their lives.

In her more than 36 years with the Sheriff's Office, specifically with the DARE Program, Deputy Avila has demonstrated exceptional achievement in her assigned duties with loyalty to the County of Santa Barbara and her DARE students and her dedication to her student's success and well-being.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE:
SR. DEPUTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY ANN BRAMSEN, CHIEF DEPUTY
DISTRICT ATTORNEY KELLY DUNCAN, SR. DEPUTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
LYNMARC JENKINS, DA INVESTIGATOR-COMMANDER ED OLSEN, DA
INVESTIGATOR MICHAEL HUFMAN

Throughout 2015 and early 2016 the City of Santa Maria experienced a terror never seen in the City's history - murders of young men on the streets with few witnesses, the only descriptions as young men in hoodies shooting, and no other leads, leaving these tragic killings unsolved.

The transnational MS-13 gang clique Santa Maria Little Salvy, with direct ties to El Salvador, was trying to take over the City of Santa Maria. The Santa Maria Little Salvy gang members appeared to be normal young men, working in agricultural fields in Santa Maria - except they hid their true identities - they were cold blooded killers who hunted and executed rival and perceived rival gang members. They woke early to go to work and at night they carried out their terror on the streets of Santa Maria.

Throughout 2015 and early 2016, the MS-13 clique carried out the murder of ten separate victims and attempted to murder fourteen additional victims. SMPD detectives utilized a Wiretap operation during a period of 40 days. While listening on the wiretap,

detectives actively interceded and with the assistance of multiple law enforcement partners, they were able to prevent six additional murders in Guadalupe and Oxnard in real time.

Detectives used technology in the form of hundreds of phone records, the downloads of more than 150 cell phones, social media accounts and YouTube videos to identify the criminals and their involvement in these murders. Ballistics comparisons were performed on 148 bullets and cartridge cases found at the scenes or during autopsies. Then SMPD Detective Sergeant Michael Huffman, was the lead investigator on what became known as "Operation Matador."

Detectives and prosecutors learned these thousands of puzzle pieces formed an intricate web of criminal conspiracy where the leadership of the Santa Maria Little Salvy clique was in El Salvador. This sophisticated criminal network had ties to Ohio, North Carolina, Virginia - all answering to leadership in prison in El Salvador.

In 2016 Sr. DDA Ann Bramsen presented this case to a criminal Grand Jury that handed down a 50-count indictment against 12 defendants, including charges of homicide, conspiracy to commit homicide and criminal gang conspiracy. The Grand Jury also separately indicted eight additional clique members for the conspiracy to murder six victims. Given the sheer magnitude and volume of what we quickly realized was the largest prosecution of MS-13 gang members in the nation in terms of number of defendants and number of charges, Chief DDA Kelly Duncan joined the prosecution team with Ms. Bramsen in 2017.

As the case approached a trial date in early 2020, the Superior Court severed the trial into two groups of five defendants due to the lack of a large enough courtroom to try ten defendants. The first group of defendants would proceed to trial while the second group of five defendants waived time so that Trial 2 would begin after the conclusion of Trial 1.

Trial 1 began in March 2020 and one week into pre-trial motions the COVID-19 pandemic hit putting the trial on hold for more than a year. During this delay the second group of five defendants (Trial 2) decided not to waive any further time, meaning that the two trials would most certainly take place simultaneously in courtrooms in Santa Maria and Santa Barbara. Sr. DDA Bramsen was now assigned to Trial 1, along with colleague DDA Peter Telesca. And Chief DDA Kelly Duncan was assigned to Trial 2. When a second prosecutor was needed to join Trial 2, Sr. DDA Lynmarc Jenkins stepped up to the monumental task. In 2020, Sergeant Mike Huffman retired from SMPD and joined the DA's office as an investigator and his first assignment was to be one of two investigating officers at trial - the other being gang expert, SMPD Sgt. Scott Casey. DAI Huffman was instrumental to the success of the prosecution of these trials.

His knowledge and experience with the investigation from its inception was a tremendous asset to the prosecutors throughout trial.

Trial 1 started in the summer of 2021. Trial 2 commenced in October 2021. Hundreds of law enforcement and civilian witnesses testified in the two trials in Santa Maria and Santa Barbara. DAI Commander Ed Olsen recognized the logistical feat that coordinating all of these witnesses would involve. Commander Olsen developed a plan to ensure the safety of numerous surviving victims and witnesses and that would alleviate their concerns in testifying not once, but twice against these serial killers. Commander Olsen's contribution to both trials was instrumental in our success. In April 2002 a Santa Maria jury delivered guilty verdicts against each defendant in Trial 1, resulting in multiple life without parole sentences. In June 2022 a Santa Barbara jury delivered guilty verdicts against each of the remaining defendants in Trial 2, also resulting in multiple life without parole sentences.

CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL-BUELLTON: OFFICER KEVIN TAULBEE
April 7, 2022, Officer Taulbee responded to a suspicious circumstances call. Upon his arrival, he investigated a series of crimes, including California Penal Code 664/187, Attempted Murder, California Penal Code 273.5 Domestic Violence, California Penal Code 245(d), Assault with a deadly weapon, and California Vehicle Code 10851 (a), Stolen Vehicle. During this complex investigation, Officer Taulbee conducted a thorough and detailed investigation and report, which led to the successful prosecution of the suspect.

November 6, 2022, Officer Taulbee stopped to assist Mrs. Maureen Hurley, who ran out of gas on US-101. Mrs. Hurley wrote a letter to the Buellton Area Commander complimenting Officer Taulbee for his "nice, helpful, engaging and patient demeanor."

March 26, 2023, Officer Taulbee received a letter of commendation from Jessica Jansen. Officer Taulbee responded to Mrs. Jansen's residence for a report of a suspicious abandoned vehicle on her property. Mrs. Jansen noted that while speaking with Officer Taulbee, she was impressed by his professionalism and courtesy, which she says were "above exemplary."

As the area School Bus Officer, Officer Taulbee provided high-level training and education for school bus drivers.

CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL-SANTA BARBARA: OFFICER RONALD HENSIC

Over the years, Officer Hensic has gained the respect and admiration of colleagues, friends, and family. He is dedicated to the CHP and its mission.

Officer Hensic has always sought ways to have a positive impact. Ron is an established leader and performs in a trusted supervisory role as an Officer-In-Charge on the graveyard shift. Ron also trains new officers in impaired driving and other criminal investigations. When he's not training or supervising the shift, he proactively and skillfully patrols to remove impaired drivers. He annually receives MADD's "23152" award for his efforts to remove impaired drivers.

Officer Hensic consistently exceeds the Department's high standards for service in the Santa Barbara community. Officer Hensic has completed ten years with the Department. Upon graduation from the CHP Academy, he was assigned to the Ventura Area where he served with honor and distinction. Officer Hensic has been working in the Santa Barbara Area since 2014. Officer Hensic is one of our most valuable field training officers (PTO) and has trained many of the Area's new officers. His professional demeanor, excellent judgment, and willingness to help others has endeared him to his peers and supervisors.

He is routinely assigned as the graveyard shift supervisor as the Officer-in-Charge because of his sound knowledge, skills, and abilities coupled with his experiences and sound judgment during high stress incidents. Command leadership recognizes him as a trusted member of our supervisory team.

Finally, Officer Hensic has been instrumental in removing impaired drivers from our county's roadways while working the graveyard shift. Every year, he earns a Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) award for removing impaired drivers. He has personally removed hundreds of impaired drivers since his arrival in Santa Barbara. His unwavering commitment to the CHP's mission and selfless service to the public is a true testament of his character. It goes without saying his dedication and service to the Santa Barbara community has saved countless lives throughout the county.