

2019 State of Texas Law Enforcement Achievement Awards



Public Service:

Sergeant Luis Roberto Menendez-Sierra, Houston Police Department

Sergeant Luis Menendez-Sierra serves as the Commander over the Houston Metro Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. In his position, he oversees 67 police agencies who are partnered with the task force, a team that is comprised of five police officers, two sergeants, and one civilian employee. He coordinated a three day online chat operation to arrest online predators, the individuals that were targeted were those soliciting and having sexual intercourse with children. This effort led to the arrest of 13 child predators, and one that was HIV positive and a registered sex offender on parole for online solicitation of a minor. Menendez-Sierra spends a great deal of his time discussing the importance of internet safety at schools and other community events, including town hall meetings.

Sergeant Marcus Povero, Sergeant Jacob Hopson, Officer Clayton Byington, Officer Kelly French, Officer Andreas Lebensieg, Officer Jason Manning, Officer Joe Peña, and Officer Landon Rollins, Fort Worth Police Department

Sergeant Marcus Povero and Sergeant Jacob Hopson were hand selected to implement the new Crisis Intervention Team (CIT). These two individuals were vital to the development of the program as well as putting together the team. With the assistance of the Houston Police Department, they were able to use their new knowledge to launch this new program. Along with other officers, the Fort Worth CIT was able to legally seize 250 firearms under the Health and Safety Code, potentially preventing many aggravated assaults or homicides, as well as two known threats to Fort Worth ISD. CIT interacts with mental health individuals that routinely deal with police. They were able to identify repeat 9-1-1 callers who fabricated calls that endangered the public through emergency police response. CIT has worked with these individuals to get them the treatment needed and reduce the call load.

Sergeant Robert Walsh and Sergeant Ja'Nae Powell, Arlington Police Department

Listening to citizen concerns during a community watch meeting in the Sharpshire Garden area of Arlington, Sergeant Robert Walsh developed a partnership with Lynn Hale Elementary School. This partnership was inspired due to delinquent activity among the elementary school students at a pedestrian bridge. Students frequently congregated in the area, and there were reports of students being bullied, fights, and students being exposed to drugs. Walsh decided that officers would need to engage students, so the school staff would walk students to the edge of campus where officers would be

waiting. Officers would then walk students across the bridge, discussing drugs, bullying, peer pressure, and being good students. He also organized students from Sam Houston High School and The Boys and Girls Club to create a mural that covered graffiti near the bridge. This program was thus named the Bridge Kids Program.

The Bridge Kids Program was reassigned to Sergeant Ja’Nae Powell, who expanded the program. Five days a week, she had organized police officers to walk the kids home and eventually the kids developed a relationship with the officers. Powell, with the help of the school, arranged a daddy-daughter dance; however, many of the girls did not have father figures at home. About 20 police officers attended the dance and escorted the girls; this received media attention and positive feedback. A mother-son dance was organized a few months later, and again officers participated in the dance. Officers continue to improve the community and the lives of the students, ultimately contributing to increased academic achievements.

Professional Achievement:

Sergeant Deon Cockrell, Texas Department of Public Safety

Sergeant Cockrell has devoted 24 years of service to public safety and has travelled to various states in the US providing training and assistance in recruiting events. In 2017, he helped develop a public safety announcement, entitled, “Come on Man.” This was issued over the radio to bring to light the danger of drinking and driving during football season. In 2018, Cockrell created a program called, “Unacceptable Losses,” which brought awareness of hand gun safety for both civilians and police officers. This program competed against 23 other state agency programs, and received first place honors in the category of public safety.

Officer Jesse Medina, Houston Police Department

Before becoming a police officer for the Houston Police Department, Officer Jess Medina served in the United States Marine Core. While on duty in Afghanistan, Medina stepped on pressure-plated explosive device and suffered life threatening injuries. However, after a lengthy recovery he fulfilled his goal by becoming a police officer and also was the first amputee to complete the Houston Police Department academy and become a commissioned officer. Medina has many noteworthy accomplishments, including an incident where he was dispatched to an aggravated robbery with a deadly weapon. Having the descriptions of the suspects, he led an organized search which consisted of communicating with many officers and units. After searching for a long period of time, Medina was able to bring in two of the three suspects into custody.

Constable Ted Heap, Harris County Constable’s Office Precinct 5

Constable Ted Heap has served 35 years in his position and has been leader in developing the path in helping animals suffering from abuse in the Houston area. Heap formed a city-wide Anti-Animal Cruelty

Partner Council that brought in other agencies and partners to work together to find solutions to better remedy how crimes against animals are being reported. In response to his efforts, the Harris County Animal Cruelty Taskforce was created and officially launched. The council developed a hotline and website so that those crimes could be reported more easily. In addition to helping animals, Heap, with the help of a 13 year-old lacrosse player, came up with the 2018 Burning Flower Foundation Stuffed Animal Drive. This drive was to provide stuffed animals to children who are victims of violent crimes.

Valor:

Officer Eric Garcia, Officer Leonard Lake, Officer Robert Phillips, Officer Jacob Williams, Arlington Police Department

On December 11, 2016, while on patrol, Officer Eric Garcia initiated a traffic stop on a stolen vehicle. The driver of the car evaded the officers, lost control of the vehicle, and struck a traffic signal pole. All the officers moved swiftly to get all five of the passengers out of the car, as the engine had caught fire. Officer Garcia removed two passengers from the back seat, and Corporal Williams pulled the back left passenger out. Officer Phillips struck the driver side window with his baton and had to cut the driver's seat belt; once cut, Officer Lake pulled the driver out through the back of the vehicle. Without the assistance of these officers, the occupants would not have survived due to being immobile.

Officer Ben Baskin, Officer William Brewer, Officer Heath Cook, Officer David Henze and Officer Brent Mayorga, Arlington Police Department

On October 31, 2017, these officers conducted a high-risk search warrant operation against a heavily armed suspect, who had a long criminal history that included assaulting and evading police. Officers were stationed at the back and front of the house. The command "breach" was given, Officer Mayorga breached the front door and struck it twice. A distraction device was thrown into the residence, and Officer Brewer and Officer Baskin entered and gunfire erupted. Officer Brewer fell back and Officer Baskin pulled him away safely, Officers Henze, Cook, and Mayorga began engaging the suspect. Verbal commands were given; there was no response from the suspect on the ground.

Patrol Officer Aaron Gonzales, Mission Police Department

On August 19, 2018, Officer Aaron Gonzales was dispatched to a structure fire and was advised of the possibility that children were still in the home. Upon arrival, he saw the structure completely engulfed in flames and thick smoke emitting from the home. Gonzales was advised by the children whom had exited the house that their grandfather was still inside. Without hesitation, Gonzales ran towards the house and upon entry was able to locate an elderly man. He could only pull the man a short distance because of the extreme heat right above his head. Gonzales had to run outside to regain composure, ran back in the house, and dragged the man out. The elderly man was transported by ambulance to McAllen Medical Center and then Brooke Army Medical Burn Center, where he sadly succumbed to his injuries two days later.

Trooper Trent Harben, Texas Department of Public Safety

On February 2, 2018, while on patrol, Trooper Trent Harben responded to assist a fellow trooper in pursuing a suspect who had evaded arrest during a traffic stop. Trooper David Alcantar also responded, and DPS Aircraft Pilot Terry McQuagge and Tactical Flight Officer Kolton Kendall located the vehicle and were able to send troopers Harben and Alcantar updates on the suspect's location. The suspect came to a stop on the interstate and Harben parked his patrol car in front of the suspect's car to protect an eastbound motorist. Harben exited his vehicle with his issued M4 rifle, and Alcantar his exited the vehicle with his issued handgun. Alcantar approached the vehicle and gave orders to the suspect to show his hands. The suspect turned and opened fire, and hit Alcantar in his upper right arm. Harben moved away from his cover after hearing gun shots. He fired his rifle, hitting the suspect, and the suspect went down. Harben quickly handcuffed the suspect and then assisted Alcantar with a tourniquet for his arm, so he could be transported to the hospital.

Sergeant Renee Glasser, Plano Police Department

On June 12, 2017, while filling up her squad car, Sergeant Renee Glasser saw a car drive towards her and the female driver jumped from the car and ran towards Glasser for help. The male passenger began firing with a handgun towards the victim and Glasser, who engaged the gunman, striking him. Once the situation had been neutralized, Glasser radioed for assistance and emergency medical assistance for the downed suspect. Through her quick action, she was able to save the life of the victim and others in the parking lot.

Police Officer Alonzo V. Reid, Houston Police Department

On December 24, 2018, while responding to a priority call to back up another unit on a vehicle pursuit, Officer Alonzo Reid and Officer J.P. Daily were struck by an intoxicated driver who failed to yield the right of way. The police vehicle hit a utility pole and a parked car, then rolled twice and erupted in flames. Reid suffered several lacerations and a second-degree burn on his leg. He was able to climb out of the burning police vehicle, and, with the assistance of a civilian Reid was able to pull Daily from the car before the car became fully engulfed in flames. Officer Daily sustained serious burns to 50 percent of his body.

Corporal Joshua Moer, Trooper Aaron Clopton; Texas Department of Public Safety

On April 26, 2018, a pursuit of a kidnapping suspect and victim originating in Oklahoma had reached Wichita County, Texas. The suspect's car began to slow after officers spiked the vehicle's tires; the victim at this time exited the car in an attempt to escape. The suspect chased and tackled the victim to the ground and began stabbing her with a knife. Corporal Moer, the lead unit, exited his patrol car and discharged his duty pistol to stop the suspect. The shots hit the suspect but only briefly delayed the attack. He continued to stab the victim. At this time, Trooper Aaron Clopton arrived with his patrol rifle in hand, and with Moer, they advanced towards the suspect. Moer gave verbal commands to the suspect to stop; however, he refused, continuing to assault the victim. Both officers discharged their

weapons and the suspect fell and died. The victim survived the attack thanks to Corporal Moer and Officer Clopton.

Police Officer Sarah Wakefield, Houston Police Department

On January 15, 2018, while on patrol, Officer Sarah Wakefield witnessed a severe car accident. She observed a man on fire hanging from an open door of a burning vehicle. Wakefield took a jacket from a bystander to protect herself from the flames and heat, and she approached the man. She pulled him from away from the vehicle to safety. The driver was taken to the hospital for critical burns, and later succumbed to his injuries.

Officer Taylor Rust, Plano Police Department

On September 10, 2017, the Plano Police Department had received a call about a male suspect attempting to get into a residence and was possibly armed. Officer Taylor Rust responded to the call and arrived at the scene and entered through the back alley. Rust heard gun shots and announced "shots fired," over the radio. More gun shots followed the first ones. Rust decided not to wait for back up, in fear that more people would die if he waited. Rust entered the backyard and saw a woman crouched with her hands covering her head and others who had been shot. He entered the house and saw more people inside but could not determine their condition. The suspect then walked from the hallway to the living room and faced Rust with an assault rifle in ready position. Rust then shot and killed the suspect.

Captain Wesley Hensley, Texas Attorney General's Office

On December 11, 2018, Captain Wes Hensley and other law enforcement officers received information about the whereabouts of a wanted man the suspect. Trevino had outstanding felony warrants for aggravated assault of a family member and violation of a protective order. Upon arrival of the suspect's residence, vague information was given from the two occupants in the residence on the suspects whereabouts. Hensley and the other officers made the decision to search the residence, making their presence known. Hensley found the bathroom and saw the shower curtain half-drawn and again announced his presence. He opened the shower curtain and was ambushed by the suspect's gunfire, one shot hit Hensley's right cheek, one hit each arm, rendering his arms disabled, and the last to his thigh region, causing him to fall face down on the floor. Realizing that he could not give up, he got himself off the floor and tried to get the suspect to talk outside. He refused and told Hensley to get on his knees; Hensley did not and turned to make an escape toward the open entryway. The suspect fired more rounds at Hensley, with one striking him causing him to fall, and several more towards the groin area. Hensley bear-crawled to safety; the suspect, barricaded himself inside and took his own life during a long standoff with law enforcement. Captain Hensley has undergone several reconstructive surgeries and is on a long road to recovery continuing with rehabilitation.