

County Chiefs & Sheriff Association recognizes service

By Lydia Statz, Union staff writer | Posted: Saturday, January 18, 2014 1:54 pm

WATERTOWN — Until we need them, most people don't think of the work law enforcement officers to keep our county safe.

But they do a lot, and the Jefferson County Chiefs & Sheriff Association on Thursday honored several individuals who have gone above and beyond the call of duty during the past year.

At the start of the association's annual dinner at Turner Hall in Watertown, retired Chief Timothy Thomas was recognized for his 40 years of service to the Waterloo Police Department.

"Tim did this job for 40 years with honor and integrity. He was just a great guy, and it was just an honor to work with him," said Watertown Police Chief Timothy Roets. "His plaque here says, 'Service before self,' and for 40 years' commitment, he did just that, and it was just amazing."

Thomas, who received a standing ovation, said that although the challenges of policing a small town weighed heavily on him throughout his career, he thoroughly enjoyed his tenure in Waterloo and his relationship with other Jefferson County leaders.

Meanwhile, accepting the first award of the evening was Deputy Michael Williams, a member of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, who was named 2013 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. Williams was nominated by Capt. Duane Scott due to his diligence and attention to detail in performing his duties.

In nominating Williams for the award, Scott wrote, "Deputy Williams consistently shows that he is engaged in duties as a deputy sheriff; he is prepared every day to give 100 percent, and is willing to assist the agency in any capacity asked of him."

Scott highlighted one particular incident from November in which Williams was able to arrest three suspects wanted in a Watertown robbery. He was informed of the robbery and the names of the suspects during a briefing at the beginning of his shift, and later spotted a car that "just didn't seem right." He observed the vehicle weaving inside its lane and the occupants doing a lot of moving inside the vehicle.

Williams checked the licensed plate and realized the vehicle was registered to one of the suspects and observed that there were three individuals in the car. He then requested permission to stop the vehicle.

All three suspects were identified, arrested and later charged with armed robbery.

“This is not the first time that Deputy Williams has used information that he has learned at shift briefings, while working in the jail, or knowing who is wanted in the county to provide information to his fellow officers, other agencies, or used it himself to complete his duties as a law enforcement officer,” said Scott.

“Deputy Williams’ actions and performance go way beyond the events of Nov. 9, 2013,” said Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office Chief Deputy Jeffrey Parker, who presented the award. “Mike has been a solid performer for our agency since the day he started, April 19, 1993. Twenty years of dedication, sacrifice and service to our community.”

Deputy Williams lost his brother Bruce, also a law enforcement officer, in 2003. A Green Lake County sheriff’s deputy, Bruce Williams was killed in the line of duty while responding to a domestic abuse call.

“Mike, as I present this award to you tonight, I know that Bruce and the rest of your family are extremely proud of you,” said Parker.

Williams’ father, Norman, spoke after the award was presented.

“We’re very proud of Mike and the work that he has done. It was kind of hard to stay in law enforcement after his brother had been killed, because they were very close,” he said. “I want to congratulate Michael on behalf of our family. Good luck and be safe.”

Also Thursday, Jefferson County Susan Happ presented the award for Citizen of the Year to Fort Atkinson resident Christy Blomgren.

Brookellen Teuber, an assistant district attorney, nominated Blomgren for the award following her commendable action in February 2013.

Teuber wrote that Blomgren was picking up her son and several of his friends from the Fort Atkinson Youth Center when two of her son’s friends approached her. The boys said there was a “creepy guy” in a car nearby, close to children exiting the building, who was viewing pornography.

Blomgren told the boys to steer clear of the car and that she would watch to ensure they passed safely. Then, she and her son drove toward the suspicious vehicle and paid close attention to the occupant. After confirming that the man was, indeed, viewing sexually explicit material and noting that there were several children in the area, she and her son stayed nearby and alerted the police.

“Blomgren could have left the area. Her child was safely in her car and his friends were safely on their way home. She had no reason to involve herself any further but for her fear for the welfare of the children in the area,” said Teuber. “Rather than leave, Blomgren remained on site until she

knew the man would cause them no harm and the kids had safely cleared the area ... We expect a parent to protect their child, but Ms. Blomgren went further and offered her protection to the children of our community. She also offered her continued assistance to the police as they investigated the report.”

The man later would be identified as a Fort Atkinson man with pending charges of first-degree sexual assault against multiple children. The man’s bond conditions prohibited contact with minors.

Blomgren was unable to attend the banquet.

Also Thursday, sheriff’s Deputy William Dandoy, one of the county’s former Drug Abuse Resistance Education officers, accepted the association’s President’s Award.

Dandoy was nominated by Capt. Scott, who said Dandoy was key in helping area schools develop new security plans after the Sandy Hook School shooting in Newtown, Conn., in December 2012.

As he knew many school staff, Dandoy met with principals to help update emergency plans and develop safety training for staff. He also met with other area police departments to help put together hands-on, active shooting training to present to schools, including in Johnson Creek, Palmyra, Jefferson, Cambridge and Waterloo public schools and private schools all over the county.

“Bill continued to research the various approaches to active shooter trainings that were coming out after Sandy Hook,” said Scott. “He requested to go to training and attended many trainings on his own time so that he would have the greatest amount of options available to provide to the schools as they worked to find the plan that would best suit their situations.

“I think that the reason Bill has been so successful with his programs is that he has not said, ‘This is the way I think a shooting should be handled,’” Scott further explained, “but has taken all of the various response models and said, ‘these are the options; you need to decide how you will utilize them.’”

“Ultimately, we hope to never have to use this training for its intended purposes, which is to save human life,” said Jefferson County Sheriff Paul Milbrath, who presented the award. “But the statistics do not lie; this tragedy has shown over the last several decades that it is not going to go away, but only get worse. Our response as law enforcement is to be prepared to face that tragedy and come away knowing that we were prepared to fight this battle.”

He credited his daughters, Julia and Lauren, as his inspiration for his work with the area’s school districts to ensure the safety of students.

“They both attend middle school in this county, and they’re my motivation to give my best effort to provide school staff with the best knowledge to deal effectively with the threats they may face,” he said.

Rounding out a long career with Jefferson County, Rhonda Rohloff on Thursday accepted the organization’s award for Support Person of the Year.

Rohloff, who retired Friday after a long career with the county, was nominated by District Attorney Sue Happ as a way to honor her integral service to the office.

“Rhonda first came to work for the county in 1977. She has spent the last 35 years selflessly serving our county and more than 20 years as the office manager for the Jefferson County District Attorney’s Office,” said Happ. “Over that time, Rhonda has worked with numerous different district attorneys and has managed to seamlessly transition from one administration to the next.”

Rohloff serves as the district attorney’s office manager, overseeing the department’s support staff.

“Rhonda is a true professional, whose absence will be greatly felt. Rhonda deals with strong personalities in our office with grace and professionalism,” Happ noted. “She treats victims, witnesses and attorneys with the utmost respect, even when they may be irritated or frustrated. She provides invaluable assistance to the district attorney, as well as other attorneys in this office.

“So much of what we do in law enforcement can be taken for granted,” Happ concluded.

“Rhonda’s lifetime of dedication to this county and this office should not be taken for granted.”

Accepting the organization’s annual Community Excellent Award, was a representative for UW Health Partners Watertown Regional Medical Center.

Watertown Police Chief Roets nominated the organization and presented the award.

“WRMC is a proven community partner with all law enforcement agencies countywide. WRMC provides excellent service, cooperation and assistance to law enforcement professionals in a wide variety of areas,” he said.

In his nomination, he cited the business’ sponsorship of several annual events, including the local Lights and Sirens at Riverside Park to promote injury prevention, the Run from the Cops 5K/10K run, the donation of a pharmaceutical drop box, and a bike rodeo to teach proper riding techniques to local youth.

Finally, Officer Dayne Zastrow, a 23-year veteran of the Watertown Police Department, accepted the award for the Crisis Intervention Techniques Officer of the Year.

Zastrow is one of the county’s 30 law enforcement officers who have completed crisis intervention training. The training is designed to give officers the skills to de-escalate tense situations routinely encountered when dealing with many mentally ill members of the community.

The award was created three years ago by the county Human Services Board to recognize officers who utilized their CIT skills in an exemplary way, and Zastrow was nominated as Jefferson County's CIT Officer of the Year by Chief Roets.

"Subsequent to receiving the training, I received several reports from department supervisors regarding Zastrow's notable ability to work with citizens in crisis," said Roets. "I also witnessed Zastrow engaged in an empathetic conversation with a chronically mentally ill young adult which was truly impressive."

Roets also cited at least four other interactions in the last four months, in which Zastrow managed to de-escalated potentially violent situations using his CIT training, all of which ended without incident, and made referrals to Human Services.

"Zastrow understands the fact that police officers have become the front-line workers in the mental health system," said Roets. "Zastrow has become an advocate for expanding the training for law enforcement so officers can divert a person to a mental health treatment facility rather than jail when appropriate."

Human Services Department director Kathi Cauley, who presented the award Thursday, said that although three nominations were received for the award, she was thrilled to see Zastrow on the list.

"I know how difficult it is to help people to change their behavior in a controlled and relatively relaxed setting," she said. "To have the skills to enter an acute crisis, where someone is a danger to themselves or others, to remain calm and focused, using well-honed skills, continually problemsolving, offering option, and maintaining the safety of all while asking for behaviors changes, is phenomenally difficult."

"It's very humbling for me. I'm rarely lost for words, but I was when I found out about this award," said Zastrow. "There isn't a single one of us sitting here tonight that goes into it thinking, 'I'm going to get an award.' It's all about making a difference."