



*Sixth Annual
Attorney General's Award
for Distinguished Service in
Community Policing*







It is my honor to acknowledge the recipients of the Sixth Annual Attorney General's Award for Distinguished Service in Community Policing. This award recognizes police officers, deputies, and troopers from across the country for their exceptional work in criminal investigations, field operations, and innovative community policing strategies.

Law enforcement is a noble and indispensable profession. Every day, law enforcement officers brave difficulty and danger to keep their communities safe. And every day, officers forge and maintain the strong community ties that are essential for ensuring public safety. Although recent years have presented law enforcement with significant and unprecedented challenges, officers across the country continue to rise to meet our nation's most pressing threats to public safety. The officers we recognize this year are outstanding examples of that work.

The Justice Department is proud to stand with law enforcement agencies nationwide, united in our shared commitment to keep our country safe, to uphold the rule of law, and to protect civil rights. It is an honor to recognize the officers who go above and beyond their duties in pursuit of that mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Merrick Garland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General of the United States






ABOUT THE AWARDS

Criminal Investigations. This category honors exceptional performance in areas that include solving a particularly difficult case such as a cold-case homicide investigation, working in collaboration with the community on an investigation, conducting a comprehensive gang or drug investigation that results in the disruption and dismantling of a known gang responsible for significant violence in the community, using creative and collaborative investigation techniques to apprehend a prolific burglary or serial robbery suspect, or developing an effective program or strategy that increases a department's criminal case clearance rates.

Field Operations. This category honors exceptional performance in areas that include heroic, quick, innovative, or otherwise exceptional police work in partnership with other officers, agencies, or the community to make a significant arrest or solve a noteworthy case or community problem; solving a particularly challenging crime through community partnerships and the use of stellar preliminary investigation techniques; working with other officers, agencies, or the community to effectively enforce violations of state or federal criminal laws impacting the community, including violent offenses, drug trafficking, or firearm crimes; working to abate neighborhood blight and reduce crime; engaging youth to reduce crime and victimization and build trust; and successfully using de-escalation techniques to resolve a potentially violent situation such as a suicide, a person in a mental health crisis or struggling with substance abuse, a hostage situation, or a barricaded suspect.





Innovations in Community Policing. This category honors exceptional performance in areas that include engaging in significant problem-solving activities; creating productive community partnerships; or implementing new policing programs or initiatives that have led to reductions in violent crime or have had a significant impact on public safety problems, building and enhancing trust, or respect for police and community satisfaction. The ideal nominee for this award promotes public safety through a dedication to innovative community policing strategies and building relationships with and working proactively with the community to reduce violent crime such as human trafficking, gun crime, drug trafficking, and gang violence.






ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Attorney General's Award for Distinguished Service in Community Policing would not be possible without the active participation of representatives from the following organizations and agencies:

- Association of State Criminal Investigative Agencies (ASCIA)
- Fraternal Order of Police (FOP)
- Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association (HAPCOA)
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)
- Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA)
- Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA)
- National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE)
- National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)
- National Sheriffs' Association (NSA)
- Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)



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- U.S. Department of Justice
 - Office of the Attorney General (OAG)
 - Office of the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG)
 - Office of the Associate Attorney General (OASG)
 - Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)
 - Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys (EOUSA)
 - Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
 - Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)
 - Office of Justice Programs (OJP)
 - Office of Legislative Affairs (OLA)
 - U.S. Marshals Service (USMS)





PROGRAM

Welcome

*Hugh T. Clements, Jr., Director
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services*

Presentation of Colors

McKinley Technical High School Color Guard, Washington, D.C.

National Anthem

*Rhea Walker, Special Assistant
Office of the Attorney General*

Remarks from the Director of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

*Hugh T. Clements, Jr.
Introducing the Associate Attorney General*

Remarks from the Associate Attorney General

*The Honorable Vanita Gupta
Introducing the Attorney General*

Attorney General Address

*The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General*

Conferring of Medals

*The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General*

Closing

*Hugh T. Clements, Jr., Director
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services*



CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS

Sergeant David A. Benjamin

Norfolk Police Department (Virginia)

Large agency (serving populations of more than 250,000)



In March 2015, Anjelica “A.J.” Hadsell—home for spring break—went missing. Sergeant (formerly Detective) David A. Benjamin and his colleagues at the Norfolk Police Department immediately suspected foul play, but because A.J.’s fate was unknown, the investigation became complex and wide-ranging. Despite A.J.’s stepfather’s attempts to distract detectives by throwing suspicion on others, Benjamin and his team secured a variety of digital evidence linking him to A.J.’s disappearance—and found the young woman’s remains more than 50 miles away several weeks after she had vanished.

Sergeant Benjamin worked tirelessly with local, state, and federal agencies, as well as non-law enforcement organizations, for the next three years to develop evidence that led to the indictment of the stepfather for murdering A.J. and illegally disposing of her remains. It took yet another four years of reschedulings, delays, and even a mistrial for the matter to be concluded, when the stepfather was found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to life (plus 15 years) in prison. Throughout the investigation, Benjamin remained steadfast in pursuing justice on A.J.’s behalf.

The investigation of this disappearance was one of the longest-running in the Norfolk Police Department’s history. It involved coordination and teamwork among agencies and organizations at many levels. Sergeant Benjamin, through two promotions and various changes of assignment, made considerable personal and professional sacrifices in those seven years to bring the case to its just conclusion.





Detective Christopher Crawford

Maine State Police Department

Large agency (serving populations of more than 250,000)



The sexual assault of a child is horrific and life-changing. Unfortunately, too often society addresses such crimes in ways that can retraumatize survivors. Even in jurisdictions with no statute of limitations on prosecution of child sexual abuse, adults who were victimized as children often remain silent rather than subject themselves to the scrutiny that comes with being identified.

In Maine, using state laws governing the recording of video calls (which took place much more frequently with the advent of the pandemic), Detective Christopher Crawford devised an investigative strategy that yielded indisputable evidence implicating a physician's assistant who had been assaulting boys and young men in Maine and four other states since the late 1960s. The suspect deployed numerous legal maneuvers to evade indictment, but Crawford diligently assembled so many interviews that the case against him was overwhelming. For three years, Crawford maintained communication with more than 20 confirmed survivors and their families, as well as others who preferred to remain anonymous, until the offender was convicted and sentenced in August 2021.

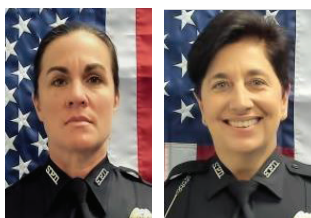
Detective Crawford continues to be instrumental in solving sexual assault cases in the state of Maine. His professional tenacity and personal compassion bring comfort to survivors and justice to those who have done them harm.



Detective Kimberly Laster and Detective Maria Llovio

Sarasota Police Department (Florida)

Medium agency (serving populations between 50,000 and 250,000)



In 2022, two unhoused women were sexually assaulted and strangled to death in less than three weeks within a half-mile of each other in Sarasota, Florida. Detectives Kimberly Laster and Maria Llovio, the lead investigators on the two cases, noted the similarities between the victims and the

circumstances in which they were found. Examination of the victims' cell phone data revealed their recent movements, and surveillance camera footage from the hours before each woman's demise showed that both had been seen in the company of the same man near the same store shortly before their deaths.

Detectives Laster and Llovio tracked one victim's phone to an encampment where, two days after the second murder, they found the man with the clothing he had been seen wearing in the security video with the first victim. The suspect voluntarily gave a DNA sample, and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement expedited the analysis, confirming within 24 hours that the suspect was connected with the first murder. Several months later that crime lab notified the detectives that DNA on the suspect's clothing was a match for the second victim as well.

Detectives Laster and Llovio's comprehensive investigation and their commitment to the pursuit of justice led to this dangerous suspect's arrest. The suspect died of a seizure three months after his arrest.





Detective Erik Whitlock

North Richland Hills Police Department (Texas)

Medium agency (serving populations between 50,000 and 250,000)



In 2013, Detective Eric Whitlock was assigned to the 10-year-old case of the nonfatal shooting of North Richland Hills Police Department (NRHPD) Officer Jeff Garner in the line of duty while attempting to conduct a traffic stop. Whitlock knew that the driver in the traffic stop had just robbed a bank in a nearby city; he identified six similar bank robberies in the previous five years and suspected that if he could solve any of these, he could identify the driver who had shot Officer Garner on his motorcycle in 2003.

The unsolved cases of all seven bank robberies included DNA evidence that yielded no actionable results; but by 2021, forensic analysis technology had advanced sufficiently to provide a promising lead. Detective Whitlock coordinated with federal and local agencies and carefully investigated and accumulated evidence leading to search warrants for the suspect's home and vehicle as well as a previously owned vehicle. Execution of those warrants showed that the previously owned vehicle was the same SUV he had been driving in the 2003 traffic stop and that his gun was the one that had been used to shoot Officer Garner. The suspect died by suicide rather than face arrest.

Detective Whitlock's determination and his use of traditional as well as innovative investigative techniques brought resolution to the victims of seven bank robberies going back 25 years, as well as to Officer Garner, who continues to serve at the NRHPD—now as an Assistant Chief.





Detective Ezekiel Sisneros

Monte Vista Police Department (Colorado)

Small agency (serving populations of fewer than 50,000)



For eight months beginning in September 2020, Detective Ezekiel Sisneros worked with agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to pursue federal criminal charges against a well-established local drug dealer connected to a case in which a transaction had gone bad and led to an exchange of gunfire. The warrants arising from Sisneros's investigation led to the seizure of more than a pound of methamphetamine and other drugs, four firearms, and four arrests. The U.S. Attorney's Office successfully prosecuted the dealer and secured a 16-year prison sentence.

Detective Sisneros regularly works with and assists federal agencies with a multitude of cases in Monte Vista and the San Luis Valley, investigating drug activity that routinely leads to search and arrest warrants. His dedication to eradicating these harmful substances and the guns used by those who traffic in them is making a measurable difference in the safety of his community.







FIELD OPERATIONS

Officer Pedram Farhang

Oakland Police Department (California)

Large agency (serving populations of more than 250,000)



Officer Pedram Farhang recognized the limitations patrol officers face in becoming familiar with and retaining information about suspects and vehicles wanted for violent crimes, because of their workload and the volume of emails they receive daily. That led him to begin distributing a weekly department-wide document containing photos of suspect vehicles and brief

descriptions of the past month's crimes, condensing 50 emails into one quick-reading digest and allowing his colleagues to use their time more efficiently. In early 2022, his efforts paid off: Farhang recognized that two murders in different nearby cities were similar and that vehicles linked to both were involved in auto burglaries throughout Oakland. His innovative approach to collecting and disseminating critical law enforcement information made his colleagues aware of these connections and led to the apprehension of two suspects and the recovery of the primary suspect vehicle.

In the past year, through similar creative efforts in the Crime Gun Intelligence Center, Officer Farhang has assisted in generating leads and identifying suspects or suspect vehicles in more than 50 violent crimes across the San Francisco Bay Area. In a single overtime shift, he located a vehicle stolen in a carjacking at gunpoint, apprehended a gang member linked to several recent crimes, and located a vehicle used in a series of armed robberies—resulting in three arrests and the recovery of three “ghost” handguns. Farhang has also prepared a training curriculum for new officers in areas related to proactive and constitutional policing. His comprehensive knowledge of details regarding suspects and vehicles wanted in connection with violent crimes and his efforts to make that knowledge available to his colleagues have substantially improved public safety in his community.





Deputy Tanya Garcia and Deputy Esteban Hernandez

Harris County Sheriff's Office (Texas)

Large agency (serving populations of more than 250,000)



Deputy Tanya Garcia—a patrol field training deputy—and her trainee were dispatched to a situation where a police officer and military veteran was armed, intoxicated, and suicidal. He became agitated when Garcia tried to speak to him. She called for additional resources and

assigned them individual roles, having a colleague take over communication with the subject so she could continue briefing deputies as they arrived.

One of those subsequent arrivals was Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT) Deputy Esteban Hernandez, who immediately began to assist in the de-escalation. Deputies had successfully taken one gun from the belligerent subject, but Hernandez learned he had another and was eventually able to confiscate that weapon as well. Once the subject was disarmed, Hernandez transported him to the Veterans Affairs hospital.

This attempted “suicide by cop” was a challenging case for Deputies Garcia and Hernandez. The fact that the subject was a veteran and an experienced police officer added to the difficulty. They remained aware of their responsibility for the safety of the subject, his distraught family members, and other deputies on the scene—including trainees—and took great care to handle the call with empathy and compassion.



Patrolman First Class Demetrius Amos and Patrolman First Class Mackenzie Handel

Pocatello Police Department (Idaho)

Medium agency (serving populations between 50,000 and 250,000)



In May 2022, Officers Demetrius Amos and Mackenzie Handel and their trainees (new hires on just their third day with the Pocatello Police Department) responded to a domestic disturbance in which a man was threatening a woman and a child with a gun. When the officers and trainees arrived, the subject turned his rifle on them.

Officer Amos fired twice, and the subject fled to an alley, took cover, and lay in wait to ambush them when they followed. When they did, he fired multiple rounds—gravely injuring Amos and then injuring Officer Handel, who had placed himself in the line of fire to protect his trainees. Handel was able to direct additional responding officers to the subject, who surrendered, and to guide a new hire in providing emergency medical care for Amos and himself. The subject was transported to a local hospital by ambulance; Amos and Handel were evacuated in patrol vehicles.

Officer Handel's selflessness and quick thinking resulted in his own injury but likely saved the lives of officers around him, including Officer Amos. Amos's encouraging messages to his department through his period of recovery unquestionably improved morale among colleagues who had been affected by the incident. When they initially arrived at the hospital, both Amos and Handel had walked into the emergency room with support from their colleagues; when they were released, they both insisted on walking out.





Officer Sheena Shelton

Forest Park Police Department (Georgia)

Small agency (serving populations of fewer than 50,000)



In July 2022, Officer Sheena Shelton took control of a response to a call for service in which a woman was threatening her husband with a rifle. The subject was irate and suicidal, arguing with officers and not allowing anyone to approach her home. Shelton maintained phone contact for several hours and persuaded her to cooperate, surrender her weapon, and submit to police custody, but she was frightened by the heavy police presence and retreated, rearmed, and retrenched. Shelton continued to assure the subject that officers would not harm her and again convinced her to turn over her weapon, come outdoors, and surrender peacefully. She was finally taken into custody without incident.

The lives of the armed subject, her husband, other responding officers, and other community members the subject might have harmed in her agitated state were saved by Officer Shelton's cool head and calm demeanor in a tense, high pressure crisis situation.





Officer Marc Navarro

Los Alamitos Police Department (California)

Small agency (serving populations of fewer than 50,000)



Officer Marc Navarro embraces the concepts of community-oriented policing in every aspect of his work—before, during, and after events calling for police presence. He has successfully persuaded the city to increase funding for protective gear to allow the police to provide an enhanced response to critical incidents. At a traffic stop, he gave an elderly driver a written warning expressing concern about

her future safety rather than a formal citation; she later wrote a letter to a local magazine, which followed up with an article about Navarro and his community policing techniques. During another traffic incident, in which a driver's medical emergency caused a collision, Navarro climbed into the car and reclined the driver's seat to perform CPR rather than lay him on the hot asphalt as would have been normal procedure. His door-to-door efforts to locate doorbell camera or surveillance footage of an attempted carjacking impressed the victim enough to send the department a message of gratitude. Navarro's thorough attention to the well-being of his colleagues and his town's residents both show his commitment to community-oriented policing and public safety.







INNOVATIONS IN COMMUNITY POLICING

Officer Grace Albritton

St. Petersburg Police Department (Florida)

Large agency (serving populations of more than 250,000)



Officer Grace Albritton knows that self-esteem and having basic resources are critical to a student's success. So when she returned to her own high school as a school resource officer (SRO), she created a resource for students who lacked school supplies, hygiene items, and adequate clothing and shoes. "Grace's Closet," operating in partnership with other community organizations and school alumni, occupies a full classroom and runs like a shop with flexible hours. Students can get items they need without stigma—especially crucial for young people who are unhoused, of whom Pinellas County has approximately 4,000, and who are much more likely than their housing-secure peers to withdraw from school and to fall into a cycle of violence, crime, and drug use.

Officer Albritton also mentors and advises a half-dozen student clubs and organizations in her role as an SRO. She was named the Pinellas County School Board's School Resource Officer of the Year in 2021–22 and clearly demonstrates her commitment to a positive relationship between law enforcement and the community.





Officer Jimmy Pittmann II

Oakland Police Department (California)

Large agency (serving populations of more than 250,000)



Officer Jimmy Pittman operates the OK Program of Oakland, a collaborative mentoring and leadership development program for Black male teenagers that focuses on developing critical thinking skills and promoting academic excellence. He is known for the high standards he sets for himself as a police officer and a Black male leader in the community, and he works collaboratively with the program participants to reach their full potential as future leaders and role models. The middle and high school program rewards academic performance and good citizenship, facilitates a weekly study hall, and even provides food to families as needed. Pittman and his colleagues also offer workshops and practical skill-building services to the young participants on diverse topics including financial literacy, decision-making, self-awareness, anger management, violence prevention, social conduct, interacting with the police, and community service.

Officer Pittman is a trusted figure in the Oakland community, where he often mediates conflicts before they escalate to issues requiring serious police involvement. His exemplary commitment to strengthening relationships between law enforcement and the young men in the OK Program make Pittman a true asset to the community.





Officer Yessenia Diaz

Miramar Police Department (Florida)

Medium agency (serving populations of between 50,000 and 250,000)



Officer Yessenia Diaz's creative solutions to long-standing problems facing senior citizens have had an important impact on the community. She frequently meets with community groups of diverse backgrounds and finds new ways to work together with residents and develop engaging crime prevention programs. Her Safety Bingo presentation engages older adults in the Miramar Police Department's S.A.L.T. (Seniors And Law Enforcement Together) group to learn important safety lessons in an interactive way, using bingo cards with public safety tips—things like, "The IRS will never just show up at your house!" and "UPS drivers always wear black shoes!" She also organized a fashion safety show with a red carpet runway featuring police, city officials, uniformed delivery services, and others to teach older adults how to distinguish legitimate uniforms from fraudulent ones and how to verify the identity of someone who knocks on their door.

Officer Diaz's dedication to helping older adults in her area stay aware of and avoid predatory scams is a genuine asset to the community.





Officer Henni Hamby

Tallahassee Police Department (Florida)

Medium agency (serving populations of between 50,000 and 250,000)



Officer Henni Hamby has found creative ways to connect with the community she serves, even when the COVID-19 pandemic brought many community activities to a standstill. She held virtual meetings with neighborhoods and community organizations when they couldn't meet in person, and she proactively developed other new ways to

interact with the community. The Community Relations Unit partnered with a local business to bring a mobile trailer to neighborhoods to deliver snow cones to community members and their children, enabling Hamby and her unit to make safe contacts with youth and adults and foster positive connections with the community.

Officer Hamby is devoted to public safety for people of all ages. She operates programs including a personal safety and empowerment program for elementary school children, as well as a car seat check program for parents. Hamby is also an advocate of senior programs, because she recognizes that older adults are more vulnerable than most when it comes to theft, abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, and other crimes. Hamby is the department's Citizen Police Academy (CPA) coordinator and has developed an outstanding partnership with the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) organization. She works tirelessly to serve her community.



Officer Michael Peale

Broken Arrow Police Department (Oklahoma)

Medium agency (serving populations of between 50,000 and 250,000)



Many Spanish speakers in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, do not speak English and are distrustful of the police. Officer Michael Peale, the Public Affairs Officer, does not speak Spanish himself but knew his department needed to reach out to everyone in the community it serves. To address this service gap, in 2019 he developed a curriculum for a Spanish language

Citizens' Police Academy. Many of the program's first students were religious leaders, local business owners, and civic leaders, further amplifying the department's reach to the Spanish-speaking community.

Since the start of the Citizens' Police Academy in Spanish, reporting of minor crimes has increased and the incidence of violent crimes has decreased in Broken Arrow's Spanish-speaking communities. Officer Peale has heard from residents crediting the relationships the department has built with the Spanish-speaking community and from fellow officers agreeing that they've seen more Spanish speakers coming forward as witnesses. Peale's program is now influencing surrounding areas as police departments in other states have asked for information on the program's design and coordination. Peale not only makes sure everyone in his local community has access to police department services but also shares his experience and resources with other states who help to start similar programs.





Patrol Officer Heather M. McClelland

Groton Police Department (Connecticut)

Small agency (serving populations of fewer than 50,000)



Officer Heather McClelland is a believer in creative police work. She initiated a police therapy dog program, where a police officer partners with a therapy dog to assist members of the public. She and her therapy dog, Chase, provide support to community members and fellow officers as well as jurisdictions outside of Connecticut that have asked for

her help. Since its inception in August 2019, the program has paid major dividends to the community, law enforcement, and other first responders, as well as other jurisdictions.

Officer McClelland organizes and runs in the Groton portion of the Special Olympics Torch Run. She has also organized and helped with other community events such as the Safe Futures Toy Drive, a United Way Food Distribution Drive, the Special Olympics "Penguin Plunge," a drug take-back day, and meet-and-greet events at area businesses, along with Chase. McClelland also organized the Cops and Comfort Dogs Symposium in Groton, which brought law enforcement and their numerous comfort dogs together from other states to learn more about the program and discover ways to take it to their own communities.







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