Governor's Public Safety Awards Committee

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Georgia Public Safety Training Center

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Joel Vinson & Associates, Inc.

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Georgia Department of Public Safety

2006 Governor's Public Safety Awards

Dedicated to the men and women of the Georgia public safety community in recognition of their Acts of Heroism, Outstanding Deeds and Exemplary Performance that enhances their profession.

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Governor of the State of Georgia
October 2006
2006 Governor's Public Safety Awards Ceremony

Prelude
Air National Guard Band of the South

Welcome
J. Dale Mann
Director, Georgia Public Safety Training Center

National Anthem
Kelli Gilstrep

Invocation
Dr. Rick Lanford
Senior Chaplain for Homeland Security

Introduction of the Governor
J. Dale Mann
Director, Georgia Public Safety Training Center

Governor's Remarks
The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Governor of the State of Georgia

Awards Presentation
The Honorable Sonny Perdue

Narration - Randy Travis, Fox 5 News

Dedication Prayer
Dr. Rick Lanford

Name: Steve Cronic
Agency: Hall County Sheriff's Department
Award Recognition: Outstanding Contribution To Profession

In 2001, Steve Cronic took the office of Sheriff of Hall County with over 23 years of experience and dedicated and distinguished service in law enforcement and private security. Since taking office, Sheriff Cronic has raised the level of professionalism within the department by achieving State Certification in 2004, and in 2005, the department was awarded National Accreditation, making it the state’s largest nationally accredited full-service sheriff’s office.

Sheriff Cronic’s vision of providing greater service to the community has been achieved through several programs. He developed the first Victim Services Program for Hall County, which provides support for families and victims of violent crimes and traumatic events. The Sheriff’s Office provides classes through the Citizens’ Academy, allowing citizens to work directly with deputies and investigators in crime prevention.

Sheriff Cronic is a strong activist in the ADVANCE youth program, placing officers in Hall County’s schools, and providing drug awareness and preventive education. He instituted the Hall County Sheriff’s Office Teen Driver program, which has been recognized as one of the best in the state.

To address the growing problem of an overcrowded Detention Center, Sheriff Cronic converted the vacated Regional Youth Development Center into Hall County’s first Female Work Release Center, providing a rehabilitation program for female offenders.

Sheriff Cronic is dedicated to serving his community and his state, as evidenced through these, and many other, accomplishments.
2006 Governor’s
Public Safety Awards Honorees

Name: R. E. "Gene" Wilson
Agency: Sandy Springs Police Department
Award Recognition: Outstanding Contribution To Profession

Gene Wilson has been in law enforcement for over 35 years. At a point when most people are looking forward to retirement, he took on the insurmountable task of starting the first police department for the City of Sandy Springs. He took office as Chief on January 3, 2006, and had only six months to put together a department. Chief Wilson spent countless hours attending town hall meetings, public hearings, and neighborhood association meetings to determine what the citizens wanted and expected from their police department.

In order to provide the best service, Chief Wilson knew that he had to make the department competitive in pay and employee benefits. He fought hard and was successful in having a pay and compensation package for employees that surpassed any other in the area. The department went online July 1, as scheduled.

The department operates under the COMPSTAT model, where each person is held accountable for their area of responsibility. Relentless follow-up is demanded. The policies and procedures are modeled on standards set forth by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies and the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Chief Wilson went a step further by instituting a department-wide ethics program. His vision is to make the Sandy Springs Police Department the national role model for workplace integrity.

Chief Wilson’s exemplary law enforcement service over the past 35 years and his recent accomplishment of building and operating a model police department for the City of Sandy Springs demonstrate his devotion to the profession.

STATE OF GEORGIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
ATLANTA 30334-0900

Sonny Perdue
GOVERNOR

To Our Honored Guests:

We are here to recognize the courageous efforts of Georgia’s public safety community who are committed to achieve our most basic expectation of government: to keep our neighborhoods and communities safe.

Georgia’s public safety professionals protect us from fire, crime and chaos. They are leaders in our communities during times of crisis. They guard us against international and domestic terrorists. They defend our children from being victimized by sexual predators.

Where you find commitment, you will also find sacrifice. As you review the backgrounds and accounts of this year’s award recipients, I hope you will note the dedication and courage each have exhibited through acts of heroism and outstanding contributions to their professions.

It is a privilege for me to pay tribute to these public safety professionals. Each of them is individually reflective of Georgia’s most admirable virtues.

Sincerely,

Sonny Perdue
2006 Governor's Public Safety Awards Honorees

Names: James Simons and Derrick Gregory
Agency: University of Georgia Police Department
Award Recognition: Act of Heroism

While on patrol Saturday, December 3, 2005, Corporal Derrick Gregory and Officer James Simons of the University of Georgia Police Department noticed a fire at the Tau Epsilon fraternity house. The time was 4:18 a.m., and most of the residents were inside asleep. Risking their personal safety, Corporal Gregory and Officer Simons entered the smoke-filled building, and began knocking on doors alerting the residents of the fire. Because of their quick and selfless action, all occupants were evacuated without injury.

Name: Michael Ergle
Agency: Crisp County Fire Rescue
Award Recognition: Act of Heroism

Captain Michael Ergle, with the Crisp County Fire Rescue Department, was the first to arrive at a structure fire on October 15, 2005. As he exited the engine, he was confronted by a very distraught female who informed him that her husband was inside the burning house. Captain Ergle quickly entered the house and rescued the man. After handing him over to the EMS crew for resuscitation, the female approached Captain Ergle again stating that her baby was still inside. He entered the house a second time to find a small dog in a back bedroom. Because of Captain Ergle's quick and heroic actions, the male occupant and the family dog were saved.

Name: Kevin G. Moore
Agency: Kingsland Fire Rescue
Award Recognition: Act of Heroism

On the morning of November 23, 2005, Kingsland Fire Rescue received a call regarding a passenger vehicle in a pond behind a truck stop near Interstate 95. Firefighter/EMT Kevin Moore and his partner were first to arrive at the scene. They found the driver in distress and climbing from the vehicle, which was about 100 feet from shore and sinking rapidly. The driver began swimming toward the shore, but appeared to lose consciousness and went underwater. Moore quickly jumped into the ice cold water and brought the victim back to shore. The victim was not breathing, and Moore began resuscitative efforts until an ambulance arrived. Due to Moore's quick and selfless actions, the driver of the vehicle survived.

Name: Michael S. Yeager
Agency: Coweta County Sheriff's Department
Award Recognition: Outstanding Contribution To Profession

Sheriff Michael Yeager has earned the loyalty and devotion of the citizens of Coweta County and his fellow employees at the Coweta County Sheriff's Office. His community involvement goes far beyond the duties required of a sheriff. He is the past president of the local Kiwanis Club, led the Hero's Program for the Coweta County Chapter of the Red Cross, is past president of the Georgia Sheriff's Association, and is a Board Member of the Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council.

Sheriff Yeager coaches several youth league ball teams and sponsors others. He is active in the Boy Scouts of America. Sheriff Yeager, along with Steve Bedrosian, founded the Bedrock Golf Classic which raises funds for S.A.F.E. Programs in Coweta County Schools. He sponsors the Law Enforcement Torch Run every year that benefits Special Olympics in Coweta County, and in 2005 he organized the first Bike Run for the Sheriff's Youth Homes. Sheriff Yeager promotes several programs for citizens including ladies self-defense, firearms classes, the Citizen's Sheriff's Academy, and Neighborhood Watch programs.

Sheriff Yeager is an extremely popular sheriff and community leader who cares about family and the citizens of Coweta County. He received the prestigious Sheriff of the Year Award for 2006. For his service to the community and the state, Sheriff Yeager's outstanding contribution to the profession serves as an inspiration to all.
Names: Ronald G. Fagan, Trevor A. Levy, Stephen C. Bennett, Kerry D. Lambert
Agency: Cobb County Fire Department
Award Recognition: Act of Heroism

On January 15, 2006, a report of a fire at a Holiday Inn in Marietta was received. Several Marietta and Cobb County units responded and were instrumental in many rescues. However, the actions of Cobb County Fire Department's Truck Company 19 warrant special recognition. The crew was assigned search and rescue of the third floor of the hotel. Before the crew reached the third floor, conditions within the stairwell forced them to don their breathing apparatus. The need for timely rescue and the resources immediately at hand necessitated that the search be conducted without the protection of a hose line.

As the door to the third floor was opened, visibility was reduced to zero, and the crew was forced to crawl on the floor using a search rope to maintain contact with each other. As they crawled down the hallway, they heard screams for help. They found a victim who was unable to exit and ushered him back to the stairwell to safety. As they made their way toward the second victim, the entire floor reached its flash point. Having no means of fighting the blaze, the crew was forced from the floor. Once they returned to the stairwell, they discovered another hotel guest who had tried to escape but collapsed. Engineer Levy and Firefighter Bennett untangled the victim from the rope on the floor and carried him down to safety. Unfortunately, the second victim they had heard in the hallway perished when the floor flashed over.

The crew of Truck 19 placed themselves in tremendous peril and operated without regard for their own lives in order to save others. According to the crew, Captain Fagan exhibited unparalleled leadership that guided them safely through this extraordinary ordeal. He cautioned them before entering the building that they were about to place themselves in a situation unlike any they'd ever experienced. Knowing the risks, the crew proceeded with bravery and two lives were saved as the result.

Names: Clinton Rivers, Daniel R. Simmons, John D. Stripling III, Vance Streeter, Blake R. Buchan, Gregory M. Stewart
Agency: Lumpkin Police Department, Stewart County Sheriff's Office, Stewart County EMS
Award Recognition: Act of Heroism

Around 2:00 a.m. on August 18, 2005, Chief John Stripling of the Lumpkin Police Department and Deputy Clinton Rivers of the Stewart County Sheriff's Office heard shots fired at the courthouse and went to investigate. They encountered a man with two hostages who began firing, hitting both officers in the face. Off-duty Officer Dan Simmons arrived on the scene and began assessing injuries and providing aid, putting his own life in danger as shots were still being fired.

Paramedic Vance Streeter arrived shortly thereafter and was shot while rushing to the aid of the two men. Greg Stewart, director of Stewart County Emergency Medical Services, arrived and ran to the aid of Chief Stripling, while shots were being fired. After assessing the injuries, Stewart then went to Paramedic Streeter and pulled him out of the street to safety. EMS Assistant Director Blake Buchan arrived on the scene and began aiding the downed officers without regard for his own safety.

After Stripling, Rivers, and Streeter were shot, the suspect ran from the courthouse. More than 50 officers from 10 agencies arrived in Lumpkin to assist. Just before 5:00 a.m., the suspect was surrounded by officers. He moved away from the hostages and opened fire on the officers. The suspect, a convicted felon on parole, was shot and died at the scene.

All the officers and emergency personnel involved in this incident acted with professionalism, under exceptional duress, and helped to protect innocent citizens.
2006 Governor's Public Safety Awards Honorees

Names: Patrick M. Duff, Randy E. Joiner, James G. Tanner, Mike Bradshaw, Tony C. Thompson, David A. Lacey, W. Tracy Tabb, Garry L. Greene, Matthew K. Holloway, Thomas M. Bonner, Henry Lynch, Michael Kevin Harris
Agency: Georgia State Patrol
Award Recognition: Act of Heroism

In the early morning hours of August 18, 2005, troopers, along with several members of other law enforcement agencies, responded to a shooting in Lumpkin, Georgia where the Lumpkin Police Chief, a Stewart County deputy, and a member of the Stewart County EMS had been shot.

At approximately 5:00 a.m., the shooter was spotted with two hostages and carrying a semi-automatic weapon. Troopers Joiner, Tanner, Bradshaw, Thompson, Lacey, Tabb, Greene, Holloway, Bonner, Lynch, and Harris set up a perimeter to prevent the subject from leaving the area. The gunman refused to drop his weapon and began firing in all directions. During this engagement, a Plains police officer and Sumter County deputy were hit by gunfire. When the shooter began advancing on officers, a trooper and other officers returned fire, fatally wounding the gunman.

Although the troopers’ lives were in jeopardy, they acted with professionalism and courage while exhibiting a sincere concern for the hostages and their fellow officers.

Name: Patrick Usher
Agency: Cobb County Police Department
Award Recognition: Act of Heroism

On October 8, 2005, Cobb County Police Officer Patrick Usher responded to a domestic dispute between a husband and wife. Upon arrival at the residence, he was met at the front door by a young child and his mother. Officer Usher was then confronted by the husband who was standing at the top of the stairs, pointing a handgun at his wife and son as they were screaming in terror. The man refused to drop his weapon, and Officer Usher shot at him. The suspect returned fire and fell from sight. Officer Usher reached through the broken glass of the door and pulled the child to safety. Without knowing the suspect’s condition, Officer Usher provided cover for the woman as she exited the house to a place of safety. When backup officers arrived, they found that the suspect had been fatally wounded. Officer Usher’s quick decision-making under extreme conditions prevented a tragic situation from becoming even more so.

Name: Carlos Bruce Moody
Agency: Georgia Department of Corrections
Award Recognition: Act of Heroism

Officer Carlos Bruce Moody, a correctional officer with the Montgomery State Prison in Mt. Vernon, was at his home on Veterans’ Day morning, November 11, 2005, when he heard a commotion outside. Moody went outside to investigate and found a neighbor’s house on fire. He knew that three children lived in the house and feared that they were trapped inside. He entered the smoke-filled house, but had to retreat for fresh air. Moody re-entered the house, crawling on the floor searching for occupants. He was forced out due to dense smoke and extreme heat. Not willing to give up, he entered the house for a third time. The fire was so intense at this point that his jacket caught fire and he exited the building. Officer Moody then went to the electrical supply and turned off power to the house. Someone spotted a woman at a window trying to escape. She was disoriented and unable to unlock the window. Officer Moody broke the window with a flashlight and pulled the woman from the smoke-filled house. He was relieved to learn that the children had been taken to school and were not in the house. Officer Moody’s quick thinking and willingness to put himself in danger saved the life of a single mother of three small children.

Name: Matthew Buehler
Agency: Marietta Police Department
Award Recognition: Act of Heroism

On November 1, 2005, Officer Matthew Buehler, with the Marietta Police Department, was the first to arrive at the scene of an accident with injuries on Interstate 75. The accident involved a rollover vehicle with two passengers trapped inside. The vehicle had large flames coming from the engine compartment and the wheel well. Other officers arrived to assist and attempted to contain the fire while Officer Buehler crawled inside the vehicle. He cut the seat belts, and the occupants were safely removed without injury. As Officer Buehler exited the vehicle, it burst into flames. While putting his own life at risk, Officer Buehler’s heroic actions saved the lives of two individuals.