2014 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.

Honorable Nathan Deal, Governor of the State of Georgia

GEORGIA PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING CENTER
December 17, 2014
Governor Nathan Deal

Greetings:

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,

Nathan Deal
2014 Governor’s Public Safety Awards Ceremony

December 17, 2014
1:30 p.m.

Welcome
Chris Wigginton
Director, Georgia Public Safety Training Center

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance
Dr. Rick Lanford
Senior Chaplain for Homeland Security

Introduction of the Governor
Chris Wigginton

Keynote Address
Honorable Nathan Deal
Governor of the State of Georgia

Award Honorees Presentation
Honorable Nathan Deal
Narration: Randy Travis, Fox 5 News

Dedication Prayer
Dr. Rick Lanford
**Act of Heroism**

**Ronnie Beard and Joshua R. Swain**
Georgia Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement

On the night of December 23, 2013, Corporal Joshua Swain and Ranger First Class Ronnie Beard responded to the Ocmulgee River in reference to four boaters who had become stranded by rising flood waters after their boat was swamped in the swift current. The boaters, stranded on a small area of dry land, were completely surrounded by flood waters that threatened to quickly inundate the small "island" upon which they had taken shelter. Not only were they trapped on a rapidly diminishing land mass, half of the boaters’ life preservers had been lost in the mishap.

Local rescue personnel were able to locate the stranded party prior to the Rangers’ arrival but were unable to reach the victims due to treacherous scene conditions and equipment issues. Cpl. Swain and RFC Beard launched their patrol boat and traveled to the area where the party was trapped. Although the hazards of a rescue attempt were obvious, the two officers unselfishly placed their personal safety at risk in order to reach the four subjects. Battling the powerful current and negotiating obstacles that threatened to capsize their own vessel, these officers successfully extracted all four boaters from the island before it was covered by turbulent waters. The boaters were escorted back to dry land where they were attended to by emergency medical services and released unharmed.

There is no doubt the actions of these Rangers, two days before Christmas Day, 2013, prevented the tragic loss of life, and it is therefore my pleasure to nominate them both for the Governor’s Public Safety Award.

**Act of Heroism**

**Robert M. Gault, James H. McQuaig IV and Darrin E. Watts**
Darien Police Department & McIntosh County Sheriff’s Office

In the early morning hours of June 13, 2014 officers responded to an automobile accident on Georgia Highway 251 in McIntosh County. Sgt. Darrin Watts and Deputy James McQuaig IV of the McIntosh County Sheriff’s Office along with Officer Robert Gault of the Darien Police Department arrived on the scene. Upon their arrival they found a man inside a burning 2008 Subaru Forester. There was fire present in the engine compartment and it was spreading, Eric Lynch was trapped. The officers approached the vehicle without fear for their own safety and immediately began efforts to free Lynch from the vehicle. The driver’s door was jammed shut and Sgt. Watts was able to reach through the window and cut the seatbelt. Lynch was unconscious and his legs were caught under the dash of the vehicle. Deputy McQuaig crawled into the back seat of the burning vehicle and across into the front seat where he was able to dislodge Lynch’s legs from the vehicle. Due to Lynch’s size it took the combined effort of all three officers to remove him from the burning vehicle and get him a safe distance away from the vehicle.
Act of Heroism

Andrew H. Kalin, Britt T. Massey and Daniel Rush
Forsyth County District Attorney’s Office & Forsyth County Sheriff’s Office

On June 6, 2014 Deputy First Class Daniel Rush was working his assigned post of front door screening at the Forsyth County Courthouse. While conducting a perimeter check, DFC Rush was approached from behind by a motor vehicle. The vehicle had left the roadway and was driving up the sidewalk and toward the steps of the Forsyth County Courthouse. Instinctively, DFC Rush approached the vehicle with his weapon drawn and prevented the vehicle from crashing into the courthouse. In the events that followed, DFC Rush was shot in the leg by the suspect. DFC Rush was able to seek cover and continued to contain the suspect until additional deputies arrived. Investigators Andy Kalin and Britt Massey were alerted to an active armed assault at the front steps of the courthouse. They were in the Forsyth County District Attorney’s Office, located on the second floor of the courthouse. Not knowing any specific details and without hesitation, Investigators Kalin and Massey took action. First, they informed co-workers of what was happening and directed them to stay in place. They then ran down the stairs, armed only with their service weapons and badges, with the intention of engaging the threat with deadly force. Their swift response to protect others by warning of the potential danger and advising people to stay put most assuredly would have saved lives if the gunman had breached the interior of the courthouse. Once outside, the men ran immediately to the front of the courthouse and found Forsyth County Deputy Rush lying on the ground immobilized. Deputy Rush was suffering from a gunshot wound to the leg that he had received from Dennis Marx’s assault rifle. While the assailant set off grenades and deputies exchanged gunfire with him, Investigator Kalin rendered aid, using his belt as a tourniquet. Investigator Massey provided cover for both men, with his service weapon. In the line of fire and exposed to the assailant, they immediately carried Deputy Rush to a safer location on the side of the building until the threat was eliminated, preventing further injury to the deputy.
Officer Blanchette was on patrol when flagged down by a citizen who had just witnessed a horrific crash. What remained of a Chrysler Sebring lay inverted, mangled, and crumpled, at the bottom of a 35 foot ravine. The vehicle had been traveling in excess of 100 mph when it left the roadway and demolished a 47 foot tall power pole that was supporting multiple active electrical and cable lines. The force of impact was so great it pulled the base of the pole from the ground, which was buried 8 feet deep, and carried it 166 feet to its final rest in the ravine with the vehicle.

Upon impact with the embankment, the front passenger was partially ejected, with a broken leg pinned beneath the vehicle which immediately burst into flames. At great personal risk, Officer Blanchette grabbed his fire extinguisher and entered the ravine with damaged power lines looming directly above.

Officer Blanchette found one victim only feet from the vehicle, which was rapidly succumbing to the building fire. The victim had suffered a disabling injury to his leg and was unable to get away. Officer Blanchette took hold and dragged him up the embankment, where he was able to get assistance from a Good Samaritan who had stopped to assist. Officer Blanchette returned to the burning vehicle in attempt to rescue the other trapped victim. Unfortunately, there was no longer a safe way to approach. The flames were extremely hot and had reached as high as the power lines overhead. At great personal risk, and through his immediate action, Officer Blanchette looked fear in the face and saved the life of the crash victim that night.
Act of Heroism

Thomas M. Burkett
Georgia Department of Public Safety

On November 15, 2013, at 1:48 p.m., TFC Thomas Burkett was on a traffic stop on GA 166 West in Atlanta, when his Automated License Plate Reader alerted him of a possible stolen vehicle near his location. After finishing the traffic stop, Burkett caught up to the vehicle, a grey 2011 Acura RDX, on Greenbriar Parkway and verified through GCIC that the vehicle was stolen. He made a request for other troopers to respond to assist him in stopping the vehicle with two male occupants. A few troopers were en-route, but no one was close to his location. At this time, the occupants of the Acura became aware that they were being followed by Burkett and entered into a residential area. Burkett activated his emergency lights, and the Acura sped onto a street with a cul-de-sac. The Acura proceeded down the street, and Burkett blocked the vehicle’s avenue of escape with his patrol car. The Acura then sped up and struck Burkett’s vehicle head-on, as well as another unoccupied parked vehicle.

Burkett exited his vehicle and got in a physical altercation with the driver. During the struggle, the suspect pulled a small caliber pistol from his waistband, and tried to shoot Burkett. Burkett pushed away from the suspect, drew his weapon, and was forced to use deadly force by shooting the suspect. The other occupant exited the vehicle and surrendered without incident. After securing the second suspect, Burkett reassured the suspect who had attempted to shoot him that he was going to be alright and to hold on for medical personnel. Both occupants of the Acura were found to be wanted out of Columbus, Georgia on felony warrants.

Throughout the whole ordeal TFC Burkett was able to maintain his composure, saving his own life and securing the safety of the residents in the neighborhood.
Governor’s PUBLIC SAFETY HONOREES

Act of Heroism

Trent Swicord
State Board of Pardons & Parole

Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles Task Force Officer Trent Swicord and other members of the United States Marshals Southeast Regional Fugitive Task Force met with several other agencies including the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and Tift County Sheriff’s Department regarding the apprehension of Shorofsky Horton. Horton was wanted by the Tift County Sheriff’s Department for Armed Robbery and Aggravated Assault. Arrest team members met and information was developed that Horton was around the Tift Regional Hospital with his girlfriend Matanya Miller, in a white Honda Civic. Officers began canvassing the area and eventually located the vehicle at Lee Ave. and Lee St., which was the Med Choice parking lot.

Arrest team members planned to block the vehicle from the front and the rear before it could exit the parking lot. Shortly after locating the vehicle, Horton and Miller were observed getting into the Honda Civic. Officers moved into place as planned and attempted to make contact with Horton, who was the passenger. Officers immediately realized that the door was locked. While all officers were giving loud verbal commands for Horton to exit the vehicle, Miller accelerated towards Task Force Officers Trent Swicord and Rick Hogan. Both Officers were struck by the vehicle. Officer Trent Swicord was thrown up on the hood of the car at which time he fired three rounds into the windshield of the vehicle forcing Miller to stop the car. Officer Hogan was thrown up over the vehicle causing injuries to his arm, back and head. Officer Swicord’s foot was run over and his leg was also injured. Once the vehicle stopped, other arrest team members were able to take Horton into custody. Emergency medical personnel responded to the scene immediately. Officers Hogan and Swicord were treated for their injuries and released. Both officers have returned to full duty with no limitations. Miller was treated for gunshot wounds she sustained during the incident. A search warrant was obtained for the vehicle and approximately $10,000.00 and a firearm were found inside Miller’s purse.

If it weren’t for Trent’s quick response, several people could have been fatally injured. Due to Trent’s actions, every officer involved was able to go home to their families and two dangerous felons were taken off the streets of Georgia.
Act of Heroism

Sherrill LaTasha Warren
Georgia Department of Corrections-Probation

In her position as Sentencing Specialist, Officer Warren worked on the court team, and acted as liaison for the Judges in her circuit. In her capacity, she was rarely called upon to assist during arrest. However, on the afternoon of July 22, 2013 after returning from lunch, she walked into the Probation Office and heard the sounds of struggle from the arrest room. Without hesitation or the benefit of her duty gear she moved to the room to assist.

Seconds before Officer Warren entered, an arrest team had been attempting to arrest a subject who began to fight with them. When she approached the room, a shot was fired by the probationer, striking Officer Warren in the abdomen. The probationer fired a second shot, striking himself in the neck. Fellow Officers came to Warren’s aid until medical assistance arrived. Officer Warren’s bravery and willingness to go beyond the call of duty to assist her fellow officers is to be commended.
2014 Governor’s Public Safety Honorees

Outstanding Contribution to Profession

John B. Edwards

Department of Juvenile Justice & Peace Officers Association of Georgia

John B. Edwards began his law enforcement career in 1977 as a uniformed Deputy Sheriff at the Evans County Sheriff’s Office. Mr. Edwards later joined the Georgia Bureau of Investigation in 1978, where he worked as an undercover narcotics agent and smuggling investigator. In 1992, John was promoted to Assistant Special Agent in Charge and designed, staffed, and supervised the Tri-Circuit Multi-Jurisdictional Drug Task Force. John retired as a Special Agent in Charge with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Statesboro Field Office after 30 years of service. During his career Mr. Edwards supervised approximately 500 homicide investigations and served with the FBI and Secret Service as Co-Chair of Crisis Management during the Sea Island G-8 Summit. John retired from the GBI in October of 2008. Edwards was then appointed as Chief Deputy Sheriff of Evans County, Georgia in 2009. During his time at the Evans County Sheriff’s Office, Edwards was instrumental in designing and implementing an Intelligence Led Policing Operation for the Sheriff’s Office through the Bureau of Justice Assistance’s “Smart Policing Initiative”. Edwards currently serves on the Executive Board of the Peace Officers Association of Georgia as Secretary/Treasurer. John also serves as a Board Member of the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice where he represents the 12th Congressional District, where he has been integral to achieving juvenile justice reform in Georgia. Mr. Edwards was re-appointed to his second term in 2013. John has lectured around the United States for the National Law Enforcement Institute, the Regional Counter Drug Academy, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Sheriff’s Association, Department of Homeland Security, and various Federal, State, and local agencies. John has been widely published on the topics of major case management, homicide investigations, intelligence led policing, and law enforcement professionalism. Some of his publications have included lawofficer.com and the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin.

John has served as an instructor, teaching his personally designed course, “The Burden of Command”, at the Georgia Law Enforcement Command College at Columbus State University. Mr. Edwards has also taught additional courses including “Effective Leadership”, “High Profile Case Management”, and “Felony Task Force Management”. Mr. Edwards conducts seminars throughout the country on his “Burden of Command” philosophy and recently released his book “The Burden of Command”. John is a member of the First Methodist Church of Claxton and is active with the Evans County Family Connections youth and outreach programs. Mr. Edwards is nominated not only for his honorable career service, but his repeated efforts to improve the professionalism and provide leadership and management training to Georgia’s public safety employees. It is estimated that John Edwards has taught thousands of public safety officers and officials throughout the country.

In conclusion, Mr. Edwards is a credit to the GBI, Department of Juvenile Justice, POAG, and to the Georgia law enforcement community. John exemplifies the words “law enforcement professional”.
Outstanding Contribution to Profession

Eddie Grier
Georgia Department of Public Safety

Charles Edward (Eddie) Grier retired from the Georgia State Patrol on August 1, 2014, after a career of more than 36 years. At the time of his retirement he served as the Commanding Officer of the Georgia State Patrol.

He is nominated for his contributions which include working to make for a smooth transition for members of the Department of Motor Vehicle Safety to become part of the Georgia Department of Public Safety; his leadership skills; and his work in developing a traffic plan which reduced the time for motorists to leave speedway events in Hampton.

Outstanding Contribution to Profession

Glenn P. Hutchinson
Thomas County Sheriff’s Office

After returning home from service in Vietnam, Lt. Hutchinson entered employment with the Albany Police Department as a patrolman. During his tenure in Albany, Lt. Hutchinson served as a patrol officer, motor officer, crime scene officer and latent print examiner, eventually obtaining the rank of lieutenant. He retired from the Albany Police in 1991 after 21 years of service. He immediately re-entered law enforcement and began serving with the Thomas County Sheriff’s Office under Sheriff R. Carlton Powell. Lt. Hutchinson began with the sheriff’s office as a fingerprint examiner. He was instrumental in developing the crime scene unit at the Thomas County Sheriff’s Office and has served in that capacity for the past 22 years. Lt. Hutchinson has compared tens of thousands of latent prints in his career and worked numerous high profile cases. Lt. Hutchinson has identified and been responsible for the capture of numerous dangerous felons throughout the State of Georgia. During his time both with the Albany Police Department and the Thomas County Sheriff’s Office, Lt. Hutchinson has accepted work from agencies all across South Georgia. He is referred to throughout the southern part of the state as one of the "go-to men" in the latent fingerprint field. Lt. Hutchinson maintains a high level of proficiency and has trained many of the latent print examiners operating at all levels in the state today. After 43 years of service, he has made the decision to retire and spend time with his family.
Outstanding Contribution to Profession

J. David Miller
District Attorney

David began his career as a prosecuting attorney in the Moultrie office on September 1, 1985. While there, he authored the first child abuse protocol agreement for all Colquitt agencies involved in the investigation, treatment and prosecution of child abuse cases. It is important to note that this was accomplished two years before the State mandate that all counties have such an agreement.

In 1987 David moved to the main office in Valdosta where he prosecuted most all murder and child abuse cases. In 1996 David ran unopposed for District Attorney. He has successfully run unopposed for four more terms. During his first six months in office David was instrumental in the creation of a child advocacy center in Valdosta. Under his leadership, it was the first such center in Georgia to gain national accreditation. He also helped to assist in the establishment of these centers in Thomasville and Moultrie.

David served in every elected office in the District Attorney’s Association and was elected its president in 2001. David has served a number of years on the Prosecuting Attorney’s Council of Georgia. He served two terms as its chairman. For the last ten years he has served as PAC’s Budget Chairman. This position requires him to help establish a budget for the District Attorneys in Georgia and he presents the same to the Governor as well as to the House and Senate Public Safety Appropriations Committees. David has served as an instructor at PAC’s Basic Litigation Course which is an intense forty hour boot camp for new prosecutors. He has been a presenter to several state-wide conferences speaking on the issues closest to his heart – child abuse and victim’s rights. He was appointed by the Governor to serve as the District Attorney member on the State Child Fatality Review Panel. He also serves as a member of the Children’s Justice Task Force. He has previously served as PAC’s representative to the Governor’s Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and on the Board of Pardons and Parole Citizen Advisory Panel. In 2004 he received PAC’s District Attorney of the Year Award and in 2011 he received a special “Going the Extra Mile” Award in recognition of his contributions to PAC.
**Outstanding Contribution to Profession**

**Gordy Wright**
Georgia Department of Public Safety

Over the course of his career, Gordy Wright has been an exemplary leader in the law enforcement community. With over 32 years of service to the Georgia Department of Public Safety and five years with WCOH-AM radio in Newnan, Wright utilized his foundation in journalism to educate and inform the motoring public and create lasting relationships between the department, the media and other state and local agencies.

Wright began his career with the Department of Public Safety as a radio operator at the GSP Lawrenceville post in 1982. Two years later, he transferred to Headquarters Communications in Atlanta. He was promoted to Public Relations and Information Specialist and transferred to the Public Information Office in 1988. During his tenure in Public Information, he has served as Public Relations Director, Public Affairs Assistant Director, and as the Director of the Public Information Office, a position he has held since 2008.

Wright played an integral part during the 1996 Summer Olympics as a photo journalist chronicling the department’s participation in the Torch Relay from Savannah to Atlanta, and other historical moments. His knowledge of the agency and commitment to the agency’s history added the role of board member with the GSP Historical Society, a position he has held since 1995. Wright served as the Society’s Secretary and has been instrumental in preserving the agency’s history and traditions. He has coordinated numerous traffic safety campaigns for the department including Operation Strap-n-Snap, Click It or Ticket, Operation Zero Tolerance, Hands Across the Border, and G-TACT.

During the G8 Summit on Sea Island in 2004, Wright made sure that his staff provided public affairs support and served as the eyes and ears for GSP. Wright’s leadership ensured that concerns were addressed professionally. Wright’s years of experience in journalism, including his earlier days in radio, created a harmonious relationship between the department and media outlets throughout the state of Georgia. These relationships have been beneficial when relaying information regarding traffic crashes or when publicizing the various traffic campaigns to the motoring public.

In addition to media relations, Wright has served as a representative for the department when working with other agencies within Georgia and outside the state. He has supported GEMA when dealing with natural disasters and other emergencies, provided assistance to the GBI, partnered with the Division of Public Health, and collaborated with GOHS, MADD, and law enforcement agencies within the surrounding states.
Governor’s Public Safety Awards Committee
Comprised of representatives from the following groups:

Mr. Ben Hinson, Chairman
Citizen Member

Jim Hanson
Citizen Member

Captain Keith Canup, Vice Chairman
Georgia Department of Public Safety

Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

Georgia Emergency Management Agency

Department of Natural Resources,
Law Enforcement Division

Georgia Firefighters Standards & Training Council

Department of Public Health,
State Offices of EMS and Trauma

Georgia Peace Officer Standards & Training Council

Fraternal Order of Police

Georgia Prison Wardens’ Association

Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police

Georgia Public Safety Training Center

Georgia Association of Emergency Medical Services

Georgia Sheriffs’ Association

Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs

Georgia State Firefighters Association

Georgia Bureau of Investigation

Georgia State Patrol Historical Society

Georgia Department of Corrections

Peace Officers’ Association of Georgia

Georgia Department of Transportation

Police Benevolent Association of Georgia

Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs

Prosecuting Attorneys’ Council of Georgia

Georgia Department of Transportation

State Board of Pardons & Paroles