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Lieutenant's Off-Duty Actions

Win Him FSA's Correctional Officer of the Year

The Florida Sheriffs Association presents two major awards each year – the Deputy Sheriff of the Year and Correctional Officer of the Year. With more than 30,000 employees working for Sheriffs in this state, we have quite a pool of candidates to draw from.

In recent years, we've noted a trend in nominees. It seems that more and more, the heroic deeds our Sheriffs' Office employees are doing is spilling over into their personal time; the heroic acts spotlighted often take place in their off-duty hours.

This year's Correction Officer of the Year award winner is a prime example. In fact, he not only allowed his work to spill over into his off time – he willingly stepped out of his comfort zone, transitioning from detention-related services to road patrol.

And he made that switch successfully.

Here's his story.

On Saturday, August 6, 2005, at approximately 10:17 in the evening, Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Corrections Lt. Scott R. Breton was off duty and returning home after visiting his father.

As he traveled on the six-lane North Congress Avenue at the posted 45-mile -per-hour speed limit, he noticed headlights in his rearview mirror, speeding towards him.

Thinking that the driver would hit the brakes after seeing his marked Sheriff's Office green and white, he was surprised when the silver Mitsubishi Diamante continued by him at approximately 70 miles per hour.

Recognizing the danger this driver's actions posed to other vehicles and citizens in the area, Lt. Breton decided to get the vehicle's tag number and radio it in for on-duty law enforcement units to

handle.

As he was closing in on the vehicle, he saw it veer off to the right, cross the bike lane, run up on the curb and quickly jerk back onto the road. As the vehicle swerved, Lt. Breton saw a large dark-colored object fly into the air and land approximately 30 feet away from the road.

Not knowing what the object was, Lt Breton continued his pursuit. The speeding vehicle slowed and turned into a grocery store parking lot, where the officer thought the driver would stop. Instead, the Mitsubishi kept going.

While trying to keep up with the vehicle, Lt. Breton's mind replayed the image of the object the driver had hit – could it have been a garbage can? Or an animal, maybe?

But he had seen people nearby and heard a woman scream.

Lt. Breton says at that point, he was convinced the driver he was pursuing had hit a person. And, considering the speed at impact, loss of life was almost certain.

Pursuing – with caution

The driver continued to make a series of fast turns. Lt. Breton activated his lights and called dispatch with the plate number. The vehicle continued driving erratically, but Lt. Breton was hopeful that the driver might be trying to return to the scene.

Instead, the driver turned in the opposite direction. He traveled a little farther, then turned onto a residential street. He stopped in the middle of the road.

As Lt. Breton notified dispatch before exiting his vehicle, he saw another person running by his passenger side door– toward the suspect – who had just stepped out of his car.

The man was shouting angrily and waving his arms at the suspect.

Lt. Breton quickly calmed the citizen, who had been following the suspect for some time – even before the Lieutenant had engaged in the chase. He directed the citizen to return to the crash scene and help emergency vehicles locate the victim. The man complied.

Lt. Breton proceeded to detain the 22-year-old white male. He checked the suspect for weapons, handcuffed him and secured him in the back seat of his vehicle until city police could arrive.

Later, Lt. Breton described the suspect's initial attitude as one of innocence. He held out his hands to the side and asked, "What did I do?" After the angry citizen told him that he'd hit a pedestrian, the suspect became defensive, blaming the victim, saying, "He shouldn't have been in the middle of the road."

The suspect gave other conflicting accounts to investigators, saying at one point he had hit a pedestrian who had stepped into his path and at another point, he had hit a man on a bicycle, who rode directly in front of him.

Lt. Breton learned the true story when he was finally able to return to the scene: Three individuals were crossing the road – including the victim and his girlfriend, who were holding hands. Two reached the other side safely, but the victim had just stepped onto the sidewalk, with one foot still in the bike lane, when the suspect's vehicle left the road and struck him.

The 23-year old black male was literally ripped out of his girlfriend's hands.

Although investigators thought the act first appeared intentional, eyewitnesses reported that the driver had been drifting into the right lane and striking the curb for a number of miles before the tragedy occurred.

Surprise: He's a repeat offender

Charges against the suspect included: DUI manslaughter and leaving the scene of an accident involving injuries or death, as well as vehicular homicide.

Despite the suspect's insistence that he had only consumed one shot of Jagermeister, it was later determined that he had a blood alcohol level of .22, nearly three times the legal limit.

A day after the incident, the suspect's parents called 9-1-1 reporting that their son was threatening suicide. He was detained under Florida's Baker Act for evaluation. Police later learned of the suspect's intention to flee the country to avoid prosecution and detained him. He is now awaiting trial.

Records show that since 2003, the suspect has been arrested four times and charged with a variety of crimes, including DUI, aggravated assault and battery and failure to appear. He was on probation for the assault and battery at the time of the hit-and-run.

Not his average day

A 22-year veteran of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Department of Corrections, the dual-certified Lt. Scott Breton credits the crossover training he's received over the years for preparing him to handle this incident. He managed to remain calm and make critical decisions under stress that is very different from his day-to-day work, supervising 90 employees in Intake & Release at the Main Detention Center.

In making the nomination, Sheriff's Office Captain Mark Chamberlain wrote that Lt. Breton's actions were just another example of his contributions to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

Lt. Breton has received many accolades for his contributions to the agency over the years, including overseeing successful re-accreditation of the Main Detention facility; and more recently, helping develop the automated interface between the Jail Management system and AFIS. He was also instrumental in getting all arresting agencies in Palm Beach County converted to using the FDLE charge tables.

For Lt. Scott Breton's quick thinking, which means a repeat offender with a total disregard for human life will be held accountable for his actions, the Florida Sheriffs have named him their 2005 Correctional Officer of the Year. At FSA's Winter conference, he received a handsome plaque and check for \$1,000.

Contact APB editor Julie S. Bettinger at: jbettinger@flsheriffs.org. Lt. Scott Breton can be contacted via e-mail: BretonS@pbso.org.

(SIDEBAR)

Brevard County Deputy Earns Honorable Mention

Like his fellow nominee, Brevard County Sheriff's Office Corrections Deputy Glenn Stout is being recognized for superb off-duty service.

On the evening of October 19, 2005, uniformed Corrections Deputy Stout was returning home

from work at the Jail Annex Complex. He noticed a white female standing at an intersection with a revolver in her hand. The woman saw him and tried to hide the firearm as he passed her. Though unarmed, Deputy Stout turned his vehicle around and heard the firearm discharge twice.

Deputy Stout made radio contact to the jail, which relayed information to the Sheriff's Communication Center to have deputies respond. Deputy Stout ordered the female to get on the ground, but she did not respond. She instead, pointed the muzzle of the firearm to her chin and then the back of her head.

She ignored further orders and sat on the ground, trying to discharge the weapon again. The woman then got up to walk away, and Deputy Stout followed at a safe distance. She turned around and began walking toward his vehicle with her hands in the air, pleading, "please shoot me; help me; please kill me."

Not responding to his further orders, Deputy Stout noted the woman no longer had the weapon in her hands. He convinced her to get on the ground and was able to place her in handcuffs until deputies arrived.

It was later determined that the suspect had been reported missing earlier in the morning. A nearby homeowner had earlier witnessed the woman fire the gun in the air.

FSA's Corrections Officer of the Year awards committee chose to recognize Corrections Deputy Glenn Stout for his performance in this incident. Though only two years with the Brevard County Sheriff's Office, he conducted himself like a veteran officer. He relied on his excellent communications and negotiations skill to disarm this unpredictable person and prevent harm to the suspect, himself and the community.

Congratulations, Deputy Stout.

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