



Pueblo County Sheriff's Office

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News Release

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Sheriff Taylor Recognizes Employees, Citizens at Annual Awards Banquet

Pueblo, CO: Pueblo County Sheriff Kirk M. Taylor honored several employees, two special units and several citizens for outstanding services and dedication to the Sheriff's Office at the 14th annual Awards Banquet Friday night at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

"I am honored to be able to recognize many of our exceptional employees, whose hard work, dedication and commitment embodies our "Service Over Self" motto," said Pueblo County Sheriff Kirk M. Taylor. "I am also pleased to be able to recognize a few of our outstanding citizens, who through their generosity, sincerity and attentiveness helped make a difference in our community."

A special tribute also was presented in memory of Detective Greg Drake, who died unexpectedly in April. Detective Drake was a nine-year veteran of the Sheriff's Office and a highly regarded investigator in Pueblo County.

The following awards were presented by Sheriff Taylor and his command staff:

DETENTION OFFICER OF THE YEAR: Deputy Heather Gonzales was recognized for her positivity and professionalism in carrying out her day-to-day duties as the Sheriff's Office's Fire/Safety/Sanitation Deputy at the Pueblo County Jail. Deputy Gonzales is responsible for ensuring everything in the aging detention facility is operating property. Among her responsibilities are to coordinate fire and health inspections, facilitating emergency drills, ensuring facility cleanliness, coordinating facility maintenance, fire equipment maintenance, new hire orientation, outside vendor coordination and background checks. She was recognized for always maintaining a positive attitude, her willingness to help fellow deputies, dedication to the Sheriff's Office. Deputy Gonzales was noted for her dependability, her amazing work ethic and her strong organizational skills.

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR: Deputy Jeffrey Alfonso was honored for being a great team player along with his loyalty, caring attitude and dependable work ethic in his duties as a patrol deputy. A veteran employee, Deputy Alfonso contributes more than just his times protecting the citizens of Pueblo County but also serves as a patrol training officer, DUI instructor, firearms instructor, intoxilyzer instructor and a drug recognition expert. Deputy Alfonso was noted for his proactive approach to policing and his generosity in assisting fellow

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deputies on calls and covering shifts when there are shortages, doing so with enthusiasm, dedication and an amazing attitude.

EMERGENCY SERVICES MEMBER OF THE YEAR: Communication Officer Karen Harrington was lauded for the compassion, attentiveness and dependability in the multi-tasking, critical-thinking job of an emergency dispatcher. In 2019, Harrington answered more than 7,000 9-1-1 calls and non-emergency calls and did so with dedication and professionalism. Harrington is a tremendous asset to the new communication officers in always offering to assist them with any task they may need. Her keen sense of being able to find important information to assist deputies in doing their job has made her an important asset to the patrol division. Harrington also regularly assists in rescuing, caring for and re-homing all types of animals, in addition to arranging transports for animal adoptions, supporting feral cat communities and helping for any animal in need.

SUPERVISOR OF THE YEAR: Sgt. James Keen was recognized as being a “lead-by-example” supervisor in the patrol division. He serves on the frontline with his deputies where he displays professionalism, discipline and compassion all with a great sense of humor and positive attitude. Sgt. Keen, a retired Army veteran, reports for his afternoon shift with a positive attitude and ready to work and passes that enthusiasm down to his deputies, many of whom are new to patrol. He strives to learn about each deputies’ strengths and encourages them to utilize those abilities. Sgt. Keen is always eager to share his knowledge and guidance with others and is described by fellow deputies as being open-minded, a great listener and always willing to help. Sgt. Keen also has dedicated hours off the job to help individuals he has encountered on calls from caring for farm animals, assisted with child placement, conducted maintenance work and even roped a large bull in order to get it off a busy highway.

NON-UNIFORMED MEMBER OF THE YEAR: Gayle Perez was recognized for demonstrating a “Service Over Self” attitude every day as the public information officer for the Sheriff’s Office and the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program. As the PIO, she is on call 24/7 and responds to incidents and writes news releases whenever requested. She also has been instrumental in creating a stronger presence on social media, highlighting the work and community outreach efforts of the Sheriff’s Office and the CSEP program. Perez also was noted for her positive attitude, dependability and willingness to help other employees when called upon to do so.

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: John Callahan was honored for his flexibility and dependability as a courier for the Sheriff’s Office. Callahan was noted for his dedication in covering his assigned shifts and his willingness to pick up additional shifts to help other couriers when they need the time off. Callahan is always friendly and has a smile on his face.

UNIT MERITORIOUS:

ACOVA’s (A Community Organization for Victim Assistance) 14 members were recognized for the countless hours they have volunteered to assist crime victims. Among the services ACOVA volunteers provide are ensuring victims are aware of their rights, helping them develop a safety plan, finding shelter or to just listening to the victims. Several of the volunteers have been involved with ACOVA for more than 30 years and offer a wealth of experience and help



mentor new members. The unit also has two bilingual members who provide comfort to Spanish-speaking victims.

UNIT MERITORIOUS:

INVESTIGATIONS: The investigations unit was cited for its dedication and thorough investigative work in responding to crimes during any time of the day or night. This year, the investigations unit worked on a variety of cases to include homicides, suicides, sexual assaults, child abuse, domestic violence and fatal traffic accidents. They also assisted in the investigation of eight officer-involved shootings. In April, the unit incurred the unexpected loss of a veteran investigator, who had several active cases. The detectives took on the additional cases and worked them alongside their own cases. Investigators have also stepped in to fill shortages on patrol as needed.

CITIZENS OF THE YEAR: Lou Mercer, Rebecca Wasil, Ron Wasil and Ross Barnhart were recognized for their donation of thousands of books to the Pueblo County Jail which enhanced the depleted book supply in the facility. **Rowdy Hall** was honored for his awareness in notifying friends their house was on fire early Christmas morning. Hall's notification allowed the couple and their dogs to get out of the burning home before the roof collapsed.

Sheriff Taylor also presented three commendation awards for outstanding service on behalf of the Sheriff's Office. **Detective JC Williams, the Detention Bureau and the Sheriff's Office Training Unit** were recognized for their dedicated service. Sheriff Taylor also presented three Award of Merit citations to **Betty McCoy and Deputy Brad Riccillo and Captain Dawn Ballas.**

(Photos Below)

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Sgt. Jim Keen

Deputy Jeff Alfonso

Deputy Heather Gonzales

Karen Harrington

John Callahan



Gayle Perez

