

Ohio State Highway Patrol

Media Release

General Headquarters • Columbus, Ohio



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Patrol Announces Annual Awards

COLUMBUS – The Ohio State Highway Patrol announced the winners of their Annual Awards today. Top honors include:

- State Trooper of the Year – Tpr. Nicholas L. Lewis, Portsmouth Post
- Dispatcher of the Year – HPRD Sonia M. Banks, Portsmouth Post
- O.W. Merrell Meritorious Service Award (valor) – Sgt. Matthew Witmer and Tpr. Byron Foxx, Medina Post
- Blue Max Award (top auto larceny enforcer) – Tpr. Daniel H. Jesse, Ashtabula Post
- Robert M. Chiaramonte Humanitarian Award – Sgt. Jeremy B. Mendenhall, Jackson District, Commercial Enforcement Unit
- Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspector of the Year – Tpr. Paul E. Gerke, Hiram Post

Ohio State Highway Patrol Trooper of the Year – Tpr. Nicholas L. Lewis, Portsmouth Post, was selected from the 10 District Troopers of the Year. A graduate of the 144th Academy Class, he has been assigned to the Portsmouth Post since February 2007. He resides in McDermott with his wife, Elizabeth and their two children.

Ohio State Highway Patrol Dispatcher of the Year – Disp. Sonia M. Banks, Portsmouth Post, was selected as State Dispatcher of the Year. She has been a dispatcher at the Portsmouth Post since December 2003. She resides in Minford with her husband, Christopher and their two sons.

O.W. Merrell Meritorious Service Award – Sgt. Matthew Witmer and Tpr. Byron Foxx, both of the Medina Post received the highest award for valor for their efforts on December 11, 2008 when they helped to save a Parma woman's life by pulling her from a burning vehicle following a fiery two-vehicle crash on State Route 3 at Interstate 71 in Medina Township.

Sgt. Witmer is a graduate of the 113th Academy Class. He has served at the Medina Post since March 2002. He resides in Seville with his wife, Sandra, and their two children.

Tpr. Foxx is a graduate of the 130th Academy Class. He has served at the Medina Post since February 1999. He resides in Shaker Heights.

Blue Max Award (Patrol's top auto larceny enforcer) – Tpr. Daniel H. Jesse, Ashtabula Post, was honored with a Blue Max Award for recovering 16 stolen vehicles, valued at \$97,940 and resulting in the apprehension of 17 suspects. A graduate of the 142nd Academy Class, he has been assigned to the Ashtabula Post since May 2004. He resides in Ashtabula.

Robert M. Chiaramonte Humanitarian Award – Sgt. Jeremy B. Mendenhall, Jackson District Commercial Enforcement Unit, was honored with the Chiaramonte Award that was established to

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recognize troopers' dedication to humanitarian efforts both professionally and personally. Sgt. Mendenhall's dedication to educating young people to help prevent death and injury due to motor vehicle crashes is exactly the type of effort befitting of this award's namesake, Retired Colonel Robert Chiaramonte.

Since 2005, Sgt. Mendenhall has been a driving force behind an annual educational event known as IMPACT. What began as a modest pre-prom mock fatal crash event at Athens High School has grown into a dynamic presentation with nationally recognized speakers staged at Ohio University. IMPACT 2008 drew more than 6,000 students from 31 schools in southeastern Ohio.

Sgt. Mendenhall is a graduate of the 121st Academy Class and has served at posts in the Jackson District throughout his Patrol career. Earlier this week he was promoted to the rank of sergeant and is currently an assistant post commander at the Zanesville Post in the Cambridge District. Sgt. Mendenhall resides in Albany with his wife, Amy, and their two children.

Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspector of the Year – Motor Carrier Enforcement Inspector (MCEI) Tpr. Paul E. Gerke, Hiram Post, was awarded the Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspector of the Year. A graduate of the 123rd Academy Class, he has been assigned to the Hiram Post since June 2002. He resides in Niles with his wife, Valerie, and their two sons.

Criminal Patrol Award – Tpr. Neil D. Laughlin, Mt. Gilead Post, was awarded for having the most investigations of felony cases that led to felony arrests. In 2008, he had 58 felony cases and 103 felony arrests. He is a member of the 137th Academy Class and has served at the Mt. Gilead Post since February 2007. Tpr. Laughlin resides in Bellville with his wife, Samantha, and their two daughters.

Electronic Technician Team of the Year – Bucyrus District Team, presented yearly to the top electronic technician team. The Bucyrus District team includes:

- Electronic Technician 3 Dana Reasoner – A 16-year veteran, he resides in Mansfield with his wife, Susan, and their teenage daughter.
- Electronic Technician 2 Richard Newsome – A 16-year veteran, he resides in Granville with his wife, Tammy, and their two sons.
- Electronic Technician 1 Peter Flavin – A four-year veteran, he resides in Heath with his wife, Amy, and their two children.

Ohio Trooper Recognition Award – Tpr. Richard Wells, Massillon District, was selected from 11 regional recipients. The Trooper Recognition Award recognizes excellence among troopers who are assigned to specialty positions. Tpr. Wells is a member of the 115th Academy Class and has served at the Massillon District Office of Investigations since December 1997. Tpr. Wells resides in Strasburg with his wife, Kelly, and their two teenage sons.

OSHP Employee Recognition Award (District) – A 23-year veteran, Roger Workman, Maintenance Repair Worker 2, in the Wilmington District, received the award presented annually to recognize excellence in field employees who are not troopers or dispatchers. Workman resides in Xenia with his wife, Vicki.

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OSHP Employee Recognition Award (General Headquarters) – A 20-year veteran, Arthur Kitzmiller, Systems Analyst 1, LEADS System Operations, received the award presented annually to recognize excellence in employees who are not troopers or dispatchers. Kitzmiller resides in Gahanna with his wife Kimberly, and their teenage son. The couple also has two other grown children.

Note to Editors: Below are District honors for: District Trooper of the Year, District Dispatcher of the Year, District Trooper Recognition, and District Employee Recognition. For photographs of award winners, e-mail wwwOHP@dps.state.oh.us with requests.

Findlay District – Tpr. Joseph R. Sisco, Van Wert Post; Disp. Mary A. Lute, Findlay Post; Tpr. Robert G. Sellers, Findlay District Headquarters; and Mike A. Hankins (Maintenance Repair Worker 2), Findlay District Headquarters.

Bucyrus District – Tpr. Shaun J. Robinson, Sandusky Post; Disp. Christopher D. Baker, Mansfield Dispatch Center; Tpr. Rosalee Swart, Bucyrus District Headquarters; and Franklin P. Laney (Network Administrator 2), Bucyrus District Headquarters.

Massillon District – Tpr. Darrell M. Dowler, Ashland Post; Disp. Christine L. Freund, Medina Dispatch Center; Tpr. Richard P. Wells, Massillon District Headquarters; and Richard D. Bell (Driver License Examiner 1), Barberton Driver Exam Station.

Warren District – Tpr. Douglas J. Bolen, Warren Post; Disp. Michelle D. Higgins, Warren Post; Tpr. Michael J. Landers, Warren District Headquarters; and Kimberly J. Speedy (Secretary), Canfield Post.

Piqua District – Tpr. Chris A. Coverstone, Piqua Post; Disp. Kari L. Root, Dayton Post; Tpr. James A. Boysel, Piqua District Headquarters; and Amy J. Murphy (Driver License Examiner 1), Bellefontaine/Marysville Driver Exam Station.

Columbus District – Tpr. Jermaine D. Thaxton, Granville Post; Disp. Melissa D. Baldwin, West Jefferson Post; Tpr. Jason S. Allison, Columbus District Headquarters; and Stacy L. Mullen (Secretary), West Jefferson Post.

Cambridge District – Tpr. Charles V. Robinson, III., Marietta Post; Disp. Richard F. Skelly, St. Clairsville Post; Tpr. Laura C. Taylor, Cambridge District Headquarters; and Paula J. Allensworth (Secretary), New Philadelphia Post.

Wilmington District – Tpr. Jeremy S. Wickman, Hamilton Post; Disp. Joseph W. Darnell, Batavia Dispatch Center; Tpr. William D. Wilson, Wilmington District Headquarters; and Roger C. Workman (Maintenance Repair Worker 2), Xenia Post.

Jackson District – Tpr. Nicholas L. Lewis, Portsmouth Post; Disp. Sonia M. Banks, Portsmouth Post; Tpr. Lee E. Burnem, Jr., Jackson District Headquarters; and Eva L. Ball (Secretary), Jackson District Headquarters.

