

# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

## 2022 Awards Narratives

**Meritorious Citizenship Award:** This award is presented to individuals other than State Patrol employees who have assisted the Minnesota State Patrol in providing a significant service to the public.

### Ryan Huso and Kyle Rohlfs

April 17 – Ryan Huso and Kyle Rohlfs were driving when they saw a vehicle upside down in a water-filled ditch. The driver had lost control on the slush-covered road. Huso and Rohlfs went into the chest-deep water and partially opened one of the submerged vehicle's doors. They found the driver and pulled her to safety.

### Jason Wiskow

May 7 – Off-duty paramedic Jason Wiskow was driving when he saw an injured motorcyclist on the shoulder of the road with his leg amputated above the ankle. Wiskow administered emergency medical care to the victim until paramedics arrived.

### Derrell Mitchell and Lashila Roberts

May 21 – Derrell Mitchell and Lashila Roberts witnessed a vehicle go off the roadway, roll over multiple times and start on fire with two people inside. Mitchell and Roberts pulled the unconscious passenger from the vehicle. The driver got out on her own before the vehicle became engulfed in flames.

### Robert Martinka

June 6 – Robert Martinka jumped into action when the driver of the bus he was riding on experienced a medical emergency. The bus was transporting 37 passengers, 26 of whom were special-needs adults. When Martinka, a volunteer that day, noticed the driver become disoriented, he grabbed the steering wheel and helped the driver bring the bus to a stop on the shoulder.

### Kyle Johnson

Sept. 22 – Kyle Johnson was driving when he noticed a vehicle that rolled and started on fire. Once stopped, he found the driver unconscious and still belted in the driver's seat. Johnson pulled her to safety before fire consumed the vehicle.

**Life Saving Award:** This award is presented to members of the State Patrol who distinguish themselves by performing acts that prevent the death of another.

### Sgt. Kelly Phillips (Investigative Services Section)

Oct. 17 – Sgt. Kelly Phillips was off-duty at her home when her neighbor knocked on her door holding a limp, lifeless infant. Sgt. Phillips quickly determined the child was in cardiac arrest. She began chest compressions and administered back blows. The infant regained a pulse and began breathing.



# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

## MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

### **Trooper Nick Otterson (Brainerd District)**

Jan. 17 – Trooper Nick Otterson was responding to a 911 call from a man saying he was driving and thought he was having a heart attack. During the call, the man became unresponsive. Trooper Otterson located the vehicle and found the driver slumped over. Working from an upright/seated position, Trooper Otterson administered lifesaving efforts until medics arrived on scene.

### **Trooper Bronson Wehr (Duluth District)**

**This presentation is combined with a Minnesota State Patrol Commendation for Sgt. Chris Durfee and Officer James Stracek of the Fond du Lac Police Department.**

April 27 – Trooper Bronson Wehr was first on scene to a medical call for a man who had overdosed and was unresponsive. While a woman at the residence performed chest compressions, Trooper Wehr administered a dose of Narcan and applied his AED. Sgt. Chris Durfee and Officer James Stracek arrived on scene and assisted with rescue efforts until medics arrived.

### **Trooper Kristina Hernandez (West Metro District)**

March 3 – Trooper Kristina Hernandez responded to a crash where she found the driver unconscious and turning blue. Suspecting a narcotics overdose, Trooper Hernandez administered Narcan and assisted paramedics in performing CPR. The driver regained consciousness and was transported to the hospital.

### **Trooper Marshall Freeman (East Metro District)**

May 10 – Trooper Marshall Freeman was the first to arrive on the scene of a man who was reportedly going to jump off a bridge. The man was sitting on a concrete barrier wall over Highway 61. When the man became distracted by another officer arriving on scene, Trooper Freeman rushed up, pulled him off the wall and secured him on the ground.

### **Trooper Eric Maikkula (East Metro District)**

May 12 – Trooper Eric Maikkula responded to a pickup that went off an entrance ramp and crashed into several trees. The passenger said that the driver had lost consciousness while driving. Trooper Maikkula and a deputy pulled the driver out, began CPR and quickly applied an AED.

### **Sgt. Travis Pearson (Virginia District)**

May 24 – Sgt. Travis Pearson responded to a call of a man threatening to jump off a bridge. While Sgt. Pearson was talking to the man, a Hibbing police officer arrived on scene, distracting the man so Sgt. Pearson could pull him off the barrier to safety.

### **Sgt. Mike Hill (Brainerd District)**

July 29 – Sgt. Mike Hill arrived on scene of a medical call where a man had collapsed and stopped breathing while building a fence. Sgt. Hill took over chest compressions while another officer applied the AED and administered two shocks. He continued chest compressions until EMS arrived.



# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

## **Trooper Vincent Wren (East Metro District)**

Aug. 8 – Trooper Vincent Wren was driving while off duty and saw a car go off the road and into a drainage pond. He went into the pond and rendered aid to the driver who had suffered a seizure. He continued to monitor the driver's airway and comforted the passenger until medics arrived.

## **Trooper Darren Ficek (West Metro District)**

**This presentation is combined with a Meritorious Citizenship Award for Matthew Fennema and Collin Murray.**

Aug. 22 – Trooper Darren Ficek responded to a call of a multiple-vehicle injury crash. At the scene, he could see smoke coming from the cab of a truck. Mathew Fennema and Collin Murray told him that there were two people trapped inside. Trooper Ficek and Murray pulled the passenger from the truck while Fennema attempted to put out the flames with a fire extinguisher. Tragically, the cab became fully engulfed before they were able to free the driver. Their quick actions and collaborative effort resulted in saving the life of the passenger.

## **Trooper Nathan Tupy (Brainerd District)**

Sept. 5 – Trooper Nathan Tupy responded to a rollover injury crash where a 3-year-old was trapped in a vehicle upside down in a ditch full of water. Once first responders extricated the child, Trooper Tupy immediately began lifesaving efforts. After multiple rounds of CPR, the child regained a pulse and was transported to the hospital. The child slowly recovered over the next several weeks and returned home Oct. 30.

## **Trooper Nick Kammerer (West Metro District)**

**This presentation is combined with a Meritorious Citizenship Award for Mitchell Bollig.**

Sept. 23 – Trooper Nick Kammerer responded to a report of a vehicle fire. Mitchell Bollig was driving by and had stopped to help. Due to heavy smoke, they couldn't see if anyone was in the vehicle. Bollig reached inside and confirmed there was a person in the driver's seat. Trooper Kammerer and Hennepin County deputies pulled the driver from the vehicle and began lifesaving measures.

## **Trooper Matt Vatsaas (Detroit Lakes District)**

**This presentation is combined with a Minnesota State Patrol Commendation for Deputy Dave Cochran of the Clay County Sheriff's Office and Deputy Ryan Grant of the Wilkin County Sheriff's Office.**

Oct. 26 – Trooper Matt Vatsaas was responding to a driving complaint of a vehicle that went off road and into a field when another report was received that the same vehicle had pulled into a farmstead and the driver was having a seizure. Trooper Vatsaas, Deputy Dave Cochran and Deputy Ryan Grant arrived to find the driver unresponsive with a weak pulse and blue in color. They coordinated lifesaving care until medics arrived.

## **Trooper Michael Lundeen (Detroit Lakes District)**

Dec. 7 – Trooper Michael Lundeen assisted in the search for a missing 90-year-old woman with dementia who was last seen leaving a care facility not properly dressed for the weather conditions. He concentrated his efforts on an area the woman was known to walk with a friend. He found footprints in the snow and tracked them to the shoreline of a lake where he found her laying in the snow. Trooper Lundeen held the woman to warm her until medics arrived.



# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

**Chief's Commendation Award – Communications/911:** This award is presented to radio communications operators who provide vital lifesaving services that lead to the rescue of a person, provide outstanding performance during a special event or provide a consistent, sustained high level of customer service.

**Radio Communications Operators (RCOs) Kaci Cavallaro, Katie Geissler and Nick Selness (Statewide Communications – Regional Transportation Management Center [RTMC])**

Jan. 17 – RCO Nick Selness answered a 911 call from a driver who was unable to speak clearly. He recognized the caller was gasping for breath and dispatched medics. RCO Katie Geissler pulled up the map, located the caller and radioed a nearby trooper. When the caller became unresponsive and medics had not yet arrived, RCO Kaci Cavallaro determined another EMS was closer and dispatched them. A trooper arrived on scene and began lifesaving measures until EMS arrived. The caller later recovered from the medical event.

**RCS Jamey Kime (Statewide Communications – Southern Regional Communications Center [SRCC])**

Aug. 19 – RCO Jamey Kime received a call from Freeborn County that a vehicle had been stolen and the suspect had run over the driver's foot as he fled. Kime reviewed MnDOT cameras and located the suspect vehicle. He continued to track its progress and provide location updates. The vehicle was ultimately stopped by allied partners.

**RCO Don Hakes (Statewide Communications – SRCC)**

Oct. 20 – RCO Don Hakes dispatched troopers to a non-injury crash. Soon after, the responding trooper radioed that he was in a physical altercation and needed assistance. Hakes quickly advised troopers and other responding agencies of the location and notified supervisory personnel. He continued to monitor the event until it safely concluded.

**Meritorious Service Award:** This award is presented to employees for acts involving personal risk posing hazards which could lead to serious injury or loss of life to the employee.

**Trooper Jacob Miller (East Metro District)**

April 5 – Roseville Police Department dispatched an "all-call" for an officer-down shooting. A man had been firing rifle rounds into the air and striking nearby homes. A responding Roseville police officer was shot in the face. The exact location of the suspect was unknown. Trooper Jacob Miller was one of the first troopers to arrive on scene. He was met by a Roseville police officer and firefighter who were evacuating the injured officer to an ambulance stationed a few blocks away. With his squad nearby, Trooper Miller made the decision to drive the injured officer out of the chaotic scene and rush him to the hospital. Trooper Miller then returned to the scene to further assist. Trooper Miller's quick thinking and concern for others before self is commendable.



# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

## **Trooper James Noxon (East Metro District)**

**This presentation is combined with a Minnesota State Patrol Commendation for Officers Luke Dohman and Marc Verrill of the White Bear Lake Police Department.**

June 5 – Trooper James Noxon attempted a traffic stop on a speeding vehicle on Interstate 35E in St. Paul. While in pursuit, Trooper Noxon saw a flash of gunfire from the driver’s side of the vehicle. The State Patrol Flight Section and White Bear Lake Officers Luke Dohman and Marc Verrill took over monitoring the vehicle as it fled at high speeds on city streets. State Patrol pilots saw the driver slow down and fire multiple shots at the officers. The vehicle eventually crashed and two occupants fled on foot, and the driver was seen throwing a gun over the freeway fence. Both occupants were taken into custody and the gun was recovered. The driver later pleaded guilty to two counts of drive-by shooting and was sentenced to 82 months in prison. Trooper James Noxon’s decision making and coordination of resources assisted in the safe resolution of a dangerous situation.

## **Trooper Matt Carlson (St. Cloud District)**

Sept. 29 – Trooper Matt Carlson responded to a call of wrong-way driver on Highway 10 near Sauk Rapids. The conduct of the vehicle indicated the driver was likely impaired and several attempts by other agencies to stop the driver were unsuccessful. Trooper Carlson made the decision to use his squad to physically stop the vehicle. As the vehicle approached him, Trooper Carlson reduced his speed and was struck head-on by the wrong-way driver. The suspect was taken into custody and processed for criminal vehicular operation. Trooper Carlson was taken to a local hospital where he was treated and released for his injuries. Trooper Carlson placed himself in harm’s way with the greater goal of protecting the public.

**Exceptional Service Award:** This award is presented to employees who have provided extraordinary service in the performance of their duties.

## **Lt. Abigail Burch and Trooper Elijah Allen (Virginia District)**

While temporarily assigned to the Highway Enforcement for Aggressive Traffic (HEAT) campaign, Lt. Abigail Burch and Trooper Elijah Allen developed an enforcement plan that created momentum with station troopers and collaboration with partner agencies. Their work undoubtedly contributed to safer roadways.

## **RCO Katie Geissler (Statewide Communications – RTMC)**

RCO Katie Geissler answered a 911 call from a distraught father on this way to the hospital to see his infant son who was critically ill and near death. Geissler showed great empathy and kindness as she explained to the father an escort was not possible, but that his route appeared clear. With her guidance and support, the father got to the hospital in time to say goodbye to his son.



# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

## MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

### **OASS Holley Gries (St. Cloud District)**

Holley Gries regularly balances her district duties with added responsibilities including trooper training academies and statewide deployments. With her large area of responsibility and heavy workload, Gries consistently maintains a positive attitude and produces an excellent work product.

### **RCOs Don Hakes and Hope Harmon (Statewide Communications – SRCC)**

Troopers responded to three separate events involving the same person who was experiencing a mental health crisis. In discussing recent events that occurred throughout the district, RCO Hope Harmon remembered a specific descriptor related to the vehicle. In collaboration with RCO Don Hakes, they linked the three events together to create a stronger case and assist the individual in getting the help they needed.

### **RCO Tim Jensen (Statewide Communications – SRCC)**

RCO Tim Jensen aired a trooper's request for a second squad on a traffic stop. When the routine traffic stop quickly turned into a pursuit, he remained calm and utilized all his resources to regularly update responding troopers and partner agencies. Jensen did a phenomenal job of coordinating resources, which led to the safe apprehension of all suspects.

### **RCS Sarah Johnson (Statewide Communications – RTMC)**

RCS Sarah Johnson is highly knowledgeable in her field and consistently provides exemplary service. She has been recognized by dispatchers on multiple occasions for her leadership, especially during critical events. Sarah deftly manages the complexities of payroll and scheduling for a 24-hour 911 center. She is dedicated to the mission and consistently displays the core values of the State Patrol.

### **Sgt. Alex Koepsell and Sgt. Adam Rochlin (Thief River Falls District)**

June 17, 2022 – Officers were dispatched to a head-on collision resulting in two fatalities. Sgts. Adam Rochlin and Alex Koepsell began a comprehensive and in-depth investigation. Evidence revealed the at-fault driver was using a cell phone prior to the crash. On Oct. 5, 2022, the defendant pleaded guilty to two counts of third-degree murder and was sentenced to 330 months in prison. Sgts. Alex Koepsell and Adam Rochlin provided exemplary service to the state by using their investigative skills to hold the driver accountable for his actions.

### **Sgt. Tomasz Krolak (Commercial Vehicle Section)**

Sgt. Tomasz Krolak is a leader in hazardous materials enforcement. He continually evaluates enforcement practices and training in an effort to provide excellence in commercial vehicle inspections. He is considered an expert in his field by partner agencies and industry partners and has developed valuable relationships locally and nationally. Sgt. Krolak takes the core values instilled in him and applies them on a daily basis.

### **Trooper Troy Larson (Brainerd District)**

Trooper Troy Larson responded to a call of a wrong-way driver. When he located the vehicle he learned the elderly driver was lost. Trooper Larson contacted the family who told him the man was in the early stages of dementia. Trooper Larson



# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

gave the man a ride to family members and continued his service by bringing a grandson back to the traffic stop location so the vehicle could be returned without being towed. Trooper Larson exemplified the core values by demonstrating a high level of care and compassion.

## **Sgt. Mike LeDoux (Duluth District)**

Sgt. Mike LeDoux stopped a vehicle for expired registration. The driver gave him a Wisconsin driver's license that did not match any information in their system. After further research, Sgt. LeDoux determined the information on the license was not correct and detained the man for fingerprints. On the way to jail, the man gave his real identity. He had an active first-degree intentional homicide warrant out of Wisconsin. Sgt. LeDoux's instinctive skills and diligence led to the subsequent capture of this individual.

## **Lt. Andrew Martinek (West Metro District)**

Lt. Andrew Martinek participated on a collaborative team with partner agencies to improve roadside safety. In addition to leading discussions on performance data and training, he conducted his own research, becoming an expert on traffic incident management and quick clearance. Lt. Martinek went above and beyond his normal scope of duties to improve the safety of troopers and partners and further enhance the efficient movement of traffic on Minnesota roadways.

## **Trooper Nick Otterson (Brainerd District)**

Trooper Nick Otterson, along with his K-9 partner Busa, epitomize the values of the State Patrol. With his knowledge and experience, he is considered a subject matter expert in drug interdiction. Trooper Otterson is always actively learning and passes his knowledge on to others to ensure the highest level of service. He regularly appears at various events to educate the public on traffic safety and the effects of drugs on our roadways.

## **RCO Terri Prins (Statewide Communications – SRCC)**

RCO Terri Prins provided exceptional service to troopers and partner agencies during the course of a pursuit. Her calm demeanor and professionalism were on full display as she anticipated next steps throughout the evolving event. At the conclusion of the pursuit, troopers and partners expressed their gratitude for her assistance.

## **Body-Worn Camera Team**

Lt. Nate Danley (Fleet)

Lt. Jon Wenzel (Marshall District)

Lt. Jason Hanson (Duluth District)

Sgts. Rick Harjes, Jason Halvorson (Training and Development Section)

Steve Bluml, Brent Jaeger, Pat Pueringer (Headquarters/MnIT)

The body-worn camera project team was developed to begin tackling the daunting goal of outfitting over 700 members of the State Patrol with body-worn cameras, fleet cameras, Tasers, signal sidearms and smartphones with evidence-gathering capabilities. On Dec. 1, 2021, the statewide deployment of Axon body-worn and fleet camera systems began. From that date forward, a team of instructors traveled to each district across the state to provide the training. In total, approximately 100 training sessions were conducted over a five-month period. Members of the State Patrol IT staff worked diligently behind



# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

## MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

the scenes to ensure the technology structure was in place. The issuance of new Tasers and signal sidearm technology and the necessary training fell to our training and development section, along with their group of dedicated firearms and Taser instructors. This was large-scale project that required collaboration from many areas of the organization and was completed in less than a calendar year. It was a true example of how teamwork and a common purpose all came together to ensure a successful deployment.

### **Street Racing Team**

Lts. Mike Lee, Pat Miles, Tyler Uthe (East Metro District)

Lts. John Fritz, Denise Lien, Andrew Martinek, Tiffani Nielson (West Metro District)

Lt. Jill Frankfurth (Capitol Security)

Lt. Craig Benz (Flight Section)

RCSs Justin Dejarlais, Katie Webb (Statewide Communications)

**This presentation is combined with a Minnesota State Patrol Commendation for:**

Intelligence Analyst Deepak Kukade (BCA)

Intelligence Analyst Sonja Sivarajah (Ramsey County Sheriff's Office)

Sgt. Tyler Abrahamson (Fridley Police)

Sgt. Dan Misgen (Minneapolis Police)

Officer Ben Campbell (Minneapolis Police)

Amy Tripp-Steiner (Minneapolis City Attorney's Office)

Kacy Wothe (Hennepin County Attorney's Office)

Michael Radmer (Hennepin County Attorney's Office)

To properly address the dangerous and unlawful activities associated with street racing in the Twin Cities metro area, it became very clear that a holistic, team approach was needed. These were large-scale enforcement details that included real-time intelligence assets, dedicated communications operators, flight resources, prosecutorial support and supervisory-led field operations. To put the work of this group into perspective, when the enforcement team was first formed, it was not uncommon for groups of 200 to 300 vehicles to "take over" an area for sliding events. In the late summer of 2022, the groups have struggled to gather more than 15 to 20 vehicles. The commitment each of these award recipients displayed is an example to many and raises the bar when it comes to unselfish service to the public.

### **Eagle Squadron Award**

Each year, the Eagle Squadron Award is presented to the Minnesota State Patrol trooper who arrested the greatest number of impaired drivers the previous year.

### **Trooper Gustavo Culbeaux (West Metro District)**

Impaired driving enforcement continues to be job number one for every State Patrol trooper. Aggressive enforcement in this important area saves countless lives and injuries each year. In 2022, Trooper Gustavo Culbeaux arrested 171 impaired drivers. This is the fourth year in a row Trooper Culbeaux has earned this award.



# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

## MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

**Leadership Award:** This award is presented yearly to the employee who consistently exhibits outstanding leadership and excellence in public safety through their personal actions, guidance, direction and professional involvement.

### **Lt. Tyler Uthe (East Metro District)**

Lt. Tyler Uthe is a sought-after leader in assisting, organizing and documenting operations. He always answers his phone and has a can-do attitude. His demeanor is calm and collected. During the past year, he has assisted with several special enforcement events on top of his regular duties and responsibilities of FTO, scheduling, community events and recruiting. He is a confident leader and his commitment is an example of unselfish service to the agency, his partners and the public.

**Civilian Employee of the Year:** This award is presented to the non-sworn employee who best demonstrates outstanding work performance, initiative, leadership and effective interpersonal relations.

### **Ray French (Headquarters)**

Ray French has worked for the Department of Public Safety for 38 years, 20 of those with the State Patrol. Ray exemplifies the mission and positively impacts the people of our agency. Whether it is purchasing items for the warehouse, assisting districts with purchasing questions or acting as backup for the office phones, he is always willing to step up and do what needs to be done. His humility, commitment, honesty, integrity and resilience make him a true leader.

**Trooper of the Year:** This award is presented to the trooper who best demonstrates outstanding work performance, initiative, leadership and effective interpersonal relations.

### **Sgt. Rachel Jurek (West Metro District)**

Sgt. Rachel Jurek is this year's Trooper of the Year recipient. She is currently assigned as a district investigator in the west metro district. Her performance during 2022 was exemplary and reached all corners of the agency. Some notable contributions Sgt. Jurek made to the State Patrol in 2022:

- Managed over 300 incidents including street racing, violent weapons offenses and criminal vehicular homicide cases.
- Managed the intake of over 2,200 individual items of evidence, with 136 of those being guns.
- Spent numerous hours gathering data, researching best practices, reviewing internal policies and developing lesson plans that has enabled the State Patrol training program to become one of the best in the state.
- Made multiple presentations at all levels of command and developed safer roadside procedures, which were both important given the uptick in violent crime
- Sgt. Jurek worked tirelessly on a fatal crash that resulted in criminal vehicular homicide charges. For weeks, she was in contact with the victim's family and provided them case updates. The amount of professionalism and comfort that Sgt. Jurek provided to these victims in a time of tragedy is hard to put into words.

Sgt. Jurek is a sought-after mentor within the agency who lives by the State Patrol core values on and off duty. She puts the agency's mission at the forefront of everything she does and constantly shows compassion for the victims in her case.

