



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
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**PRESENTATION OF CENTRE COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT
OFFICER OF THE YEAR AWARD**

On July 26, 2022, the Centre County District Attorney's Office presented the 2021 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year award to the following members of the State College Police Department: Officer Dean Woodring, Lt. Barret Smith, Officer Larry Crawford, Officer Ben Capozzi and Officer Cameron Earnest.

The award is given annually to a Centre County law enforcement officer in recognition of exceptional service to law enforcement and the citizens of Centre County above and beyond the call of duty. As we address issues of criminal justice reform and policing, it is also important to acknowledge the good work that local law enforcement does for us and our community. It can be all too easy to lose sight of the fact that the men and women of law enforcement fulfill an important and necessary function of ensuring we live in safe communities and bring justice to victims of crime.

The following is a description of the events that led to this recognition.

On March 18th, 2021 at approximately 1400 hours, State College Police were dispatched to a residential fire with entrapment. Dispatch advised that this was an assisted living facility where the caregiver of the resident could not get her out of the house. Officer Dean Woodring was first on scene and was met by a house heavily engulfed in fire. The caregiver was in the driveway, frantically telling Woodring that there was still someone inside the house. Officer Woodring entered the open garage which had heavy smoke coming out of it. Woodring opened the door from the garage into the house and was immediately thrown backwards by the excessive heat and smoke inside the residence. The resident continued yelling for help. Woodring entered the doorway, calling back to her, and began using his flashlight to locate the victim through the smoke. His view inside the residence was obscured by heavy smoke extending from the ceiling to approximately 2 feet off the floor. Upon locating the victim, approximately 6 feet away, he attempted to have her grab onto her walker so he could pull her out of the smoke-filled house. The victim was unable to hold onto the walker as Woodring pulled. Woodring radioed for additional help in the garage. While waiting for additional help, Woodring was overcome by the smoke and heat condition, and had to leave the garage to get oxygen and clear his vision.

As Woodring exited the garage, Lt. Barret Smith, Officer Larry Crawford, Officer Ben Capozzi, and Public Works Employee (Milesburg Volunteer Firefighter), John McClure had just arrived and were directed inside to the victim by Woodring. All four enter the smoke-filled garage, followed by Woodring. Smith and Capozzi attempted to enter the house doorway to retrieve the victim. Shortly thereafter, Capozzi was overcome by the conditions and is forced back outside of the garage. Extremely heavy smoke can be observed on the officers' body cameras billowing out of the garage at that point in time. Officer Cameron Earnest arrived at the garage as Capozzi exited.

Smith, Woodring, Earnest, and McClure are then forced outside due to the conditions. As they fled the garage, the garage door began to collapse, forcing Earnest and Smith to force it back open. Earnest entered the garage alone and located the victim inside the residence and attempted to pull her out. After a few seconds of recomposing themselves, the others all re-enter the garage and successfully began pulling the victim out of the house, into the garage. The group needs to disengage and get more fresh air before pulling her to the threshold of the garage. Again, they had to disengage and step away for fresh air. The smoke intensified to the point that they had to pull the victim to the sidewalk to escape the smoke. As they were dragging the victim, officers reported hearing the roof of the garage collapse and a small explosion, later determined to be an oxygen tank bursting inside the residence. At the sidewalk, the group was still inside a heavy smoke cloud. Body camera footage shows all the officers in heavy distress from the fire exposure.

Officer Earnest, Crawford and Capozzi tended to the victim prior to caring for themselves by providing her supplemental oxygen. Smith and Woodring were directed by Sgt. Hubler to a rally point for the officers, away from the active fire which had fully engulfed the house. Earnest, Crawford and Capozzi remained with the victim until EMS and Fire took over her care. All officers were subsequently seen by responding EMS and transported to Mount Nittany Medical Center by ambulance for smoke inhalation, where they were treated and released.

Lt. Smith, Officers Crawford, Earnest, Woodring, and Capozzi exhibited the highest degree of bravery, placing their own lives at risk to save the life of another. Under extreme conditions, the officers had to physically remove the victim, who weighed 473 pounds, approximately 65 feet from the burning home to safety. The officers were exposed to the smoke and fire conditions for the 3.5 minutes it took to extricate the victim. The actions of the nominees reflect the highest degree of courage in the face of danger, thereby distinguishing their actions and self-sacrifice as being above and beyond the call of duty.