

Members of Naperville police honored for service

Naperville Police Officer Jim Sakelakos won the Pradel Award Thursday night. | David Sharos~For Sun-Times Media

Updated: May 22, 2013 11:08AM

The citizens of Naperville took time recently to honor members of the city's Police Department as Citizens Appreciate Public Safety hosted an awards dinner to recognize public safety employees for service beyond their usual duties.

Based on nominations from Naperville residents, the CAPS committee selected five award winners for this year's annual event. The evening was highlighted by the George Pradel Award, given to one of the five winners, which represents the highest award for employees involved in service to the community.

CAPS chairman Ron Davidson said a total of 14 police personnel were nominated for various acts of service that were unique and selfless.

"We had everything from an employee that spent the entire night with a family giving them support during a crisis to people who give of their own time to offer training about safety to youngsters," Davidson said. "So many of these people go well beyond their normal duties, and this event is a way to recognize them in a more formal manner."

CAPS award winners this year included Sgt. Jason Arres, Police Social Worker Michael Hoffman, Officers Juan Leon and Jim Sakelakos and Detective Jennifer Johnson.

All spoke modestly about their contributions including Arres, who said he "helped coordinate an emergency response for a despondent subject in another town."

"I've worked here for 12 years, and as corny as it sounds, I took this job to help people and to save lives," he said. "All I did was my job — the job I am supposed to do."



Naperville Police Officer Jim Sakelakos won the Pradel Award Thursday night. | David Sharos~For Sun-Times Media

Officer Juan Leon said he helped find a 13-year-old runaway girl that was missing for more than half a day. Like Arres, Leon said his efforts were based on merely doing his job and that he was happy to be involved in a case that involved another side of law enforcement.

“A lot of people see police work often as being negative, because you have to deal with people who break the law,” Leon said. “It gives you a good feeling about your job to have helped someone like this. But it’s not really about going above and beyond.”

Johnson was recognized for over a decade of work with the peer jury program and said it was a great way to help kid offenders as well as the jurors themselves.

“We got to work with a lot of excellent kids, who I think learned from their mistakes and went on to become productive members of society,” she said.

Hoffman said he has worked for 24 years in his field and was able to provide support for surviving family members following a tragic double homicide.

“This was a difficult case that involved a horrific tragedy, and I was glad to be able to help that family cope,” Hoffman said about the effort. “We have a unique service in that when something happens, we respond to it immediately. People hopefully get the help they need today. They don’t have to wait. There are potentially traumatic things that can happen daily and we need to be available.”

The Pradel Award was given to Jim Sakelakos, whose skill sets that extend beyond police work allowed him to do something extraordinary. A licensed airplane pilot, Sakelakos was able to arrange emergency transportation for a son in Cleveland who wished to see his father here in the area before he died.

“The father had sustained a head injury and they were able to keep him alive until we were able to fly his son here,” Sakelakos said. “I was fortunate to be able to get him on a plane from Cleveland. Things like this are the things we’re supposed to do.”

Pradel expressed his appreciation for having an award named after him but said the real privilege was seeing the many recipients who have been recognized over the years.

“I just feel this is a way of saying thank you to those who have gone above and beyond what they were expected to do,” Pradel said. “Police work is about providing care and protection and being there when needed.

It’s about making the safety of residents a priority.”

Others recognized Thursday night by Police Chief Robert Marshall included:

Animal Control Unit (Joanne Aul, Cindy Bickle, Julie Kincade, Christine Maybach) — Meritorious Unit Award

Detective Mike Caruso/Officer Marty Creighton — Chief's Commendation

Custodian Mike Kerr — Distinguished Service Award

Officer Jeff Lizik — Life Saving Award

Officer James Tanksley — Enterprise Policing Award