



Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association

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Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association Honors Individuals at Inaugural Law Enforcement & Corrections Award Ceremony

BOSTON – The Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association (MSA) proudly celebrated the outstanding achievements and unwavering commitment of law enforcement and corrections professionals at its inaugural Law Enforcement & Corrections Award Ceremony on Tuesday, November 14, 2023. The event, held at The Great Hall in the Massachusetts State House, honored recipients in 12 award categories for their exceptional dedication and service.

The award ceremony highlighted stories of heroism, dedication, and innovation within the law enforcement and corrections communities.

“So much of our work as corrections and law enforcement professionals happens away from the public and out of the spotlight. I’m happy that we’re taking a statewide look at these amazing individuals and their stories of bravery, as they save and change lives,” said Hampden County Sheriff Nick Cocchi, President of the Massachusetts Sheriffs’ Association.

Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey was the esteemed guest speaker at the ceremony, offering words of praise and gratitude for the award recipients.

“The law enforcement and corrections professionals celebrated today go above and beyond each and every day to keep our communities safe and strong. It is a privilege to honor their courage and compassion, and on behalf of Massachusetts, we thank them for their dedicated service to our communities,” said Massachusetts Governor Maura T. Healey.

The Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association commends these exemplary professionals for their dedication, professionalism, and service. Their efforts continue to inspire positive change, improving outcomes for those individuals returning to our communities, and making Massachusetts a safer and more resilient state.

Please see a list of the award recipients below:

- 1. Meritorious Service Award:** *John Birtwell (Plymouth County Sheriff's Office)*
John Birtwell's dedication to public service, spanning over five decades, was recognized for his contributions as a prominent reporter, Press Secretary for Massachusetts Governor Paul Cellucci, and mentor, leaving a lasting impact on journalism, law, and public service in Massachusetts.
- 2. Correctional Officer of the Year:** *Corrections Officer Jonathan Manolakis, Corrections Officer Brian Collins, Sergeant Chris DeBeaucourt, Case Manager Corey Decker, Assistant Deputy Superintendent Justin Fagan, and Assistant Deputy Superintendent Rick Vivier (Middlesex Sheriff's Office)*
These six corrections professionals demonstrated exceptional bravery and skill when they revived a colleague suffering from a heart attack through CPR and the use of an AED, saving his life during a critical moment of crisis.
- 3. Correctional Training Officer of the Year:** *Corrections Officer Gina Walters (Hampden County Sheriff's Office)*
Officer Gina Walters excels as a Defensive Tactics and CPR/First Responders Instructor and has made a positive impact on staff members, instilling departmental expectations and delivering exceptional training, shaping their success post-academy.
- 4. Correctional Supervisor of the Year:** *Sergeant James Ridley (Essex County Sheriff's Office)*
Sergeant James Ridley exhibited outstanding leadership during critical situations, including performing CPR, administering Narcan, and stopping fights, demonstrating quick thinking and excellent communication de-escalation skills.
- 5. Deputy Sheriff of the Year:** *Christopher Ellis (Suffolk County Sheriff's Office)*
Deputy Christopher Ellis exemplifies dedication, contributing to the United States Marshal Service Fugitive Task Force and more specifically the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Program (HIDTA). His contributions have helped apprehend high-risk fugitives, ensuring the safety and well-being of the community through his proactive approach and quick thinking.
- 6. Jail Administrator of the Year:** *Assistant Superintendent Rachelle Steinberg (Suffolk County Sheriff's Office)*
Assistant Superintendent Rachelle Steinberg is a dedicated public servant, pioneering treatment and reentry initiatives, emphasizing equality and inclusivity, and overseeing medical services, ensuring uninterrupted medical care for justice-involved individuals.
- 7. Innovation of the Year:** *Internal Perimeter Security (IPS) Team, Plymouth County Sheriff's Office)*
The IPS team implemented cutting-edge protocols, including mail scanning and advanced technology, transforming safety measures in the correctional facility, making it a safer environment for everyone involved.
- 8. Strategic Partner of the Year:** *New England Culinary Arts Training Program (Suffolk County Sheriff's Office)*
The New England Culinary Arts Training Program, in partnership with the Suffolk County Sheriff's Office, offers a comprehensive culinary training program to chronically unemployed individuals, empowering them with culinary expertise and employment skills.
- 9. Service Provider of the Year:** *Dr. Thomas Lincoln (Hampden County Sheriff's Office)*
Dr. Thomas Lincoln's Public Health Model for Correctional Health Care has reshaped inmate health care nationwide, focusing on quality medical treatment, bridging health care gaps, and fostering diversity and

equity in health care, improving the health of justice-involved individuals.

10. Program of the Year: *Supporting Transitions & Reentry Program (STAR) (Essex County Sheriff's Office)*
STAR provides support, supervision, and services to justice-involved individuals, aiding successful reentry into communities. The program's emphasis on clinical, educational, vocational, and employment support contributes to public safety and reduces recidivism.

11. Employee of the Year: *Superintendent Michael Colwell (Suffolk County Sheriff's Office)*
Superintendent Michael Colwell embodies public service and correctional professionalism, reshaping substance use disorder treatment and behavioral health care for justice-involved individuals, setting a new standard for care in the industry. In addition to his role in Suffolk County, Michael is a crucial leader and advocate for all of our sheriff's offices.

12. Sheriff Michael J. Ashe Award: *Superintendent Michael Colwell (Suffolk County Sheriff's Office)*
This award recognizes individuals who embody innovation, compassion, and professionalism, leading the way within the field of law enforcement and corrections. Each year the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association will choose and honoree as the recipient of the Sheriff Michael J. Ashe Jr. Award. This year, this prestigious award was presented to Superintendent Michael Colwell an individual most deserving for his legacy of collaborative spirit, enlightened approach to justice, and leadership.

The Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association supports, promotes, and advocates for each of the 14 Sheriff's Offices in the Commonwealth. The MSA facilitates cooperative and collaborative relationships among the Sheriffs for the purpose of developing standardized training, providing governance over shared projects, discussing operational best practices, and evaluating research and data on matters of mutual interest and concern. The MSA improves public safety by promoting a greater understanding of issues impacting the Massachusetts Sheriffs and by bringing together law enforcement and criminal justice professionals.