



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
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## Centre County 2022 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Nominees

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[Bellefonte, PA] Each year the Centre County District Attorney's Office receives nominations from the public, law enforcement and government agencies of individuals to be recognized for their exceptional work in law enforcement, above and beyond the call of duty. The nominees represent a snapshot of the work that police do in our community every day. It took multiple meetings to narrow the list of candidates to the following law enforcement officers:

### 1. **Detective Caleb Clouse – Ferguson Township Police Department**

Detective Caleb Clouse of the Ferguson Township Police Department has been nominated for his efforts in solving a cold case homicide which haunted our community since Jean Tuggy was found shot in her Pine Grove Mills home in 2016. Despite diligent efforts the case grew cold, and in 2019 Detective Clouse was tasked with putting a fresh set of eyes on the investigation.

Detective Clouse reviewed the initial investigation and located a minute detail from an interview about a coworker who had shown romantic interest in the victim. That detail would break the case. Detective Clouse used that minor detail to identify the person as Christopher Kowalski, and confirmed that he had been a coworker of the victim's through 2014. Working with a digital forensics expert, Detective Clouse was able to locate Facebook conversations on the victim's hard drive showing Kowalski had been to the victim's home on prior occasions.

Detective Clouse discovered that Kowalski had purchased a 9mm handgun about a month before the murder and had sold the gun to a local gun shop about eight months later. He obtained the firearm from the new owners and a comparative analysis of a bullet shot from the firearm to those found in the victim revealed several shared characteristics including the caliber, the same rare type of rifling, and other unusual markings.

In February of 2021 Detective Clouse interviewed Kowalski. Though Kowalski initially sought to explain away Ms. Tuggy's death, Detective Clouse – through his persistent and professional questioning – was able to achieve a full confession of how Kowalski killed Ms. Tuggy. Following trial in late 2022 Kowalski was found guilty but mentally ill of

Murder in the First Degree and received a life sentence. Absent Detective Clouse's diligent police work Kowalski would still be at large, and the community would still not have an answer as to who killed Jean Tuggy.

## **2. Officer Lisa Larkin – The Pennsylvania State University Police Department**

Officer Lisa Larkin of The Pennsylvania State University Police (with the assistance of Officers Benzel, Lucas, Berry, and Holliday) was dispatched to a report of a domestic incident in student housing and was immediately met with a hysterical teenage victim. Officer Larkin attended the victim empathetically and showed that she was appropriately sensitive to the situation. She allowed the conversation to move to a place where the victim was more comfortable and private by asking for permission to come into her room to take photos, etc, by patiently giving the victim time to collect herself and be consoled by her roommate, and by spending sufficient time with her to allow for as comfortable and complete a conversation as possible. While she was spending an extensive period of time with the victim, her team conducted a thorough investigation including speaking with multiple witnesses and obtaining a statement from the defendant confessing to his actions.

After the filing of the case, Officer Larkin continued to support the victim and worked with the District Attorney's office to develop more information across two different victim interviews. She retraced the victim's steps looking for surveillance footage capturing what happened in the time shortly before the assault. As a direct result of the sum of her attention to this case and the relationship of trust she built with the victim, the strength of the case was quickly apparent. Due to the thorough investigation by Officer Larkin, the case resolved without a trial (or testimonial hearing of any kind) and with a sentence that was carefully tailored to the specific concerns expressed by the victim.

## **3. Officer Macy Neideigh – Bellefonte Police Department**

Beginning in June 2021 and ending in late January 2022, Centre County experienced an escalating rash of serious, violent crimes including car break-ins, armed burglaries and two armed robberies. The car break-ins included thefts of seven firearms including a rifle and six handguns. Armed robberies were committed in Bellefonte; an armed robbery and several armed burglaries in the State College Police jurisdiction; an armed robbery in Benner Township, and two armed burglary attempts in Ferguson Township. As the year went on, the level of violence increased.

In November 2021, the defendant fired a bullet into the doors of the South Atherton CVS pharmacy to gain entrance and steal controlled substances. In December 2021, the defendant fired a 9mm bullet into a door of a South Atherton Street Riteaid pharmacy, smashed the door and stole numerous controlled substances. In January 2022, he once again fired a 9mm bullet into the showcase window of a store at the Nittany Mall to gain entrance and steal money. On January 3, 2022, the defendant approached a man at the Super 8 Motel in State College, pointed a firearm at him, made him take his clothes off

and then robbed him. On January 7, 2022, the defendant fired a bullet into the doors of a North Atherton Riteaid pharmacy intending to steal controlled substances.

On January 8, 2022, the defendant created a fake profile on a dating website. Via that website, the defendant arranged to have the victim meet a female at the Econo Lodge on Benner Pike. When the victim knocked on the agreed upon door, he was approached by the masked defendant who at gunpoint threatened to kill him and ordered the victim to place his wallet and phone on the ground. When the victim complied, the defendant kicked him and struck him in the head with his handgun. Centre County law enforcement had concluded all of these incidents were likely committed by one individual, but had been unable to identify the defendant.

During the early morning hours of January 29, 2022, Off. Neideigh was on patrol in Bellefonte Borough. She encountered and stopped a dark blue Chevrolet Malibu for traffic violations and suspended registration. During the traffic stop, Off. Neideigh recognized the female driver as the woman from the fake dating profile. She also noticed characteristics of the male occupant consistent with the description of the suspect. She took the suspects into custody and further investigation confirmed that the driver was the one responsible for all the crimes listed above.

Officer Neideigh is well known in Bellefonte as an officer who is invested in the community and keeping its citizens safe. She is diligent in her duties and as a result of these ethics, the enforcement of a small, relatively minor violation resulted in taking an offender off the streets whose crimes were escalating and was a real risk of seriously injuring or killing someone.

#### **4. Detective Lucas Nelson – Spring Township Police Department**

Detective Lucas Nelson of the Spring Township Police Department is an example of what it means to be a law enforcement officer who protects and serves their community. He is actively involved in all facets of policing in his community and county. Detective Nelson is also Intervention Team (CIT) trained and effectively defuses tense situations through his calm, cool, and collected demeanor. Throughout the course of his law enforcement career in Centre County, he has consistently maintained a good relationship with his community, treated all his encounters fairly and professionally, and goes out of his way to help those in need.

During one particular incident, Detective Nelson and Officer Daren Brown responded to a situation involving an individual experiencing an active mental health crisis. Neighbors called for assistance when the individual began following them while they were walking their dog. As the individual approached them, he was threatening to harm and kill them, for reasons unknown at the time. The nature of the call necessitated several agencies to respond with multiple officers. Detective Nelson, as soon as he arrived on scene, approached the individual and was one of the first law enforcement officers to interact with him. Throughout the course of their interaction, the individual made numerous statements threatening harm to others in his community. Detective Nelson spoke to him

in a friendly and calm manner which never wavered and kept the situation under control.

Because of the positive interaction officers like Detective Nelson and Officer Brown had with him, the individual never carried out threats of harm to himself or others and always interacted with law enforcement in a manner that was able to be defused and de-escalated. On one particular incident, the individual armed himself believing there was an imminent invasion taking place in Spring Township. From those positive interactions with law enforcement, the individual chose to go to the Spring Township Police Department and inform them of his belief of events to take place. Officers were able to positively speak with the individual and the situation ended with him turning over the firearm without incident.

Any citizen of Centre County who interacts with Detective Nelson will be greeted by someone who takes his job seriously but also does his utmost to make the interaction friendly and safe. His dedication to his community, passion for protecting those he serves, and unmatched work ethic make him a true example of positive policing. Detective Nelson not only embodies the standard a community expects from their law enforcement officers, he routinely exceeds it.

#### **5. Detective Tom Snyder – Patton Township Police Department**

Det Snyder conducted an investigation into a sexual assault allegation in March 2021. His investigation into that particular incident led to the probability that there were additional victims, ultimately identifying 5 others. Det Snyder executed numerous search warrants and conducted interviews in different parts of the state in order to gather evidence for prosecution. Most importantly, he recognized the trauma that the victims had experienced and were experiencing as a result of having to relive these events as they prepared to testify. Detective Snyder built a relationship of trust with the victims and that support helped them to endure the process of holding the defendant accountable in a criminal prosecution. Ultimately, after a diligent, months long investigation, Det Snyder was able to obtain a warrant in November 2021 charging the suspect with numerous counts of rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, and strangulation. The suspect was arrested and has been successfully prosecuted. It is due to Det Snyder's professional investigation that these victims received some measure of closure and any potential future victims were spared the trauma of an assault.

#### **6. Criminal Investigator Andrew Stager – The Pennsylvania State University Police Dept.**

Det Stager has been a nominee the last several years for the LEO recognition. He not only brings thoroughly investigated cases to the DAs Office, he also goes out of his way to help other local police agencies. Det Stager performs exemplary electronic forensic analyses, testifies extremely well, and is consistently a pleasure to work with. He has had a hand in the majority of major cases coming through Centre County where electronics are involved. In the past Detective Stager's investigative work played a major role in addressing and preventing serious risks posed by an out of state mentally ill man criminally fixated on a local resident. Det. Stager diligently pursued every conceivable

evidentiary lead in the case, including extensive analyses of the defendant's electronic devices and obtaining medical records from out of state. His efforts led to the individual being psychologically evaluated, treated and prevented the possibility of serious harm. In the case where an individual attempted to burn down the County Courthouse, it was Detective's Stager's assistance and forensic analysis of the defendant's phone which was a key piece of evidence in the case. That evidence led to the successful prosecution which has been sustained on appeal.

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