

MEDIA RELEASE

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Gurnee Police Officer Receives Medal of Valor

Gurnee – At the Village of Gurnee Board meeting Monday night, September 28, 2020, several Gurnee officers were recognized and honored for their exceptional service, bravery, and heroism during a shooting incident that occurred over the summer. On July 3, 2020, officers responded to reports of a female with a gunshot wound to the stomach in the 6700 block of Derby Drive. The initial responding officers located the female victim and immediately took action by going above and beyond the call of duty. Here is their story:

Officer Ruth and Officer Branick were the first officers to arrive at the scene that evening. They located a female with a gunshot wound lying on the floor of the apartment and asking for help. Standing next to her was her toddler son. The female notified officers that the shooter was still in the apartment, and she pointed in the direction of his location. Aware of the imminent threat to their safety and the safety of others, the two officers forced open the locked screen door in an attempt to rescue the female and her toddler. When the toddler began to run back into the apartment, Officer Ruth called out to the toddler and was able to encourage the child to come back to him. Officer Ruth picked up the child and took him safely out of the apartment as Officer Branick provided cover from the armed shooter inside. Officer Yencich arrived at the scene and immediately carried the female victim away from the apartment and brought her to the rescue staging area that was established by Officer Ruth.

The Gurnee Fire Department arrived with an ambulance and were made aware of the on-going active threat in the area. For everyone's safety, Officer Ruth instructed the rescue team to leave with the victim as soon as possible.

Officer Ruth continued to provide leadership for the incoming responding officers and directed them to establish a perimeter around the apartment. He also deployed two teams to each of the apartment's doors while Officer Yencich attempted to make contact with the suspect. Ensuring the officers had the necessary equipment to protect themselves, Officer Ruth provided them with helmets, shields, tactical supply bags, and medical kits. He further initiated the evacuation of residents from nearby apartments and moved them to safety. Officer Ruth briefed command staff when they arrived at the location and assisted with managing the scene until relieved by NIPAS personnel.

Because of their actions, these officers were able to provide the victim with prompt medical care for a critical injury, and the threat to others was quickly contained. The shooter in this instance was found a short time later inside the apartment with a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

The Medal of Valor was presented to Officer Dan Ruth for his act of bravery and heroism beyond the normal demands of police service.

The Meritorious Service Award was given to Officer Tom Branick and Officer Tom Yencich in recognition for their exceptional service in a stressful emergency situation.

The victim and survivor, Eboni Hardge, surprised officers by attending the Board Meeting and reconnecting with the men who saved her and her son that tragic evening. Officer Branick was overjoyed to see the victim last night and stated, "Nothing I can say substitutes seeing the survivor here tonight. I've actually thought about her almost every day. We were there at the scene, but we don't always know what happens after. You can't help but wonder what they're going through. Just seeing her here makes my day."

The response and actions of the officers and dispatchers on the night of the incident was exemplary and aided in the successful rescue of someone who needed help. "It is my honor to present these awards for the fine work that the officers do every day in our community. Especially in this incident, where they responded to a life or death situation and they reacted appropriately to save a life and a family," stated Police Chief Brian Smith. "These officers serve with compassion on a daily basis. We are proud of them and we thank them for everything that they do."