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LaJean Whiteside has worked as a telecommunications operator with the Burleson Police Department since March 2007. But she is no novice. She has seven years of experience as an operator, five as a certified communications training officer, and, she was a 2005 nominee for Telecommunicator of the Year for Texas. It's easy to see why her peers selected LaJean for the Burleson Police Department's Employee of the Year for 2008.



“LaJean very deserving of this award,” Burleson Police Commander Doug Sandifer said. “She is a very compassionate person who cares deeply for the citizen she serves. LaJean is a dedicated employee and I appreciate her hard work.”

The 37-year-old Oklahoma native took a break from dispatching for six months before she joined Burleson.

“I wanted to get back into it,” LaJean said. “If this is what you are meant to do, you cannot leave it for long. We tend to get into this line of work because we like to help or 'fix' things.”

LaJean was one of four nominated for the award. According to her nomination, “through adversities big and small, she keeps a positive attitude. She brings a smile to the workplace. Her goal is to be the best dispatcher she can be. She always gives 100 percent. She helped put together the mobile command post resource guide and will sift through mounds of computer files to identify a violator. She has provided exemplary service throughout 2008.”

The job takes patience, good listening skills, the ability to multi-task and “most important, honor, honesty, and integrity.”

The telecommunications operator is the person's first contact when they call 911. Some of those calls are very routine, but the ones that affect LaJean are the calls about children and the elderly.

“An accident, an incident where a child is injured, and those calls from an elderly spouse who wakes to find the partner they have spent 40 years with, deceased, affect you,” LaJean said. “Those kind of calls are traumatic not only to the person they are happening to, but to the telecommunications operator and the officer. These calls change who we are and how we deal with others.”

LaJean grew up as the youngest of three children born to a homemaker and a mechanic. Her sister is 18 years older and her brother is 14 years her senior. She has been married to her husband, Steve, for 18 years and they have two daughters, 14-year-old Kaylee and 10-year-old Madison, as well as one very spoiled dog Boo Boo.

LaJean's training has included Texas Crime Information Center (TCIC) and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) recertification; Amber, Blue and Silver Alert certification; FEMA incident command; and online training in terrorism, identity crimes and drug identification. She has also earned first responder, disaster preparedness and emergency medical dispatch instructor certifications. In her years in the field, she has earned 264 hours of Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) training hours, and, LaJean has applied for her advanced telecommunications operator certificate.

“This job allows me to serve the community and to help others,” LaJean said. “I work with an outstanding group of telecommunicators, officers and administrators. That helps a lot and it makes a difference.”

For more information about this release, call the public information officer at 817-447-5400, ext. 286.