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In 1999, Larry Sparks was the first of four rookies who the Burleson Police Department put through the North Central Texas Council of Government's police academy. In January, the undercover officer won the department's Officer of the Year award for 2008. He was one of five officers nominated for the honor.

Sparks is a team leader for the STOP Special Crimes Unit. He won Officer of the Year for the unit for 2008. He is certified as a master peace officer and is certified to investigate methamphetamine labs. He joined the Burleson Police Department's SWAT team in 2001.

"Investigator Sparks has always been a dedicated officer and is always there for anyone, for anything, at anytime," Burleson Police Commander Chris Havens said. "He has a strong work ethic and does his best to make sure that all his investigations are detailed and followed through to take the drugs off the street and put the bad guys behind bars."

Police Commander Doug Sandifer agrees, saying, "I am very proud of Larry for this award. Working with the STOP Special Crimes Unit is a very stressful and demanding assignment. Larry is a very dedicated investigator and he is committed to making an impact on the drug issue that affects our community and our citizens."

Sparks, a 40-year-old Texas native, actually began his public service career as a juvenile counselor and as a magistrate court judge, both in North Carolina. He graduated from high school in North Carolina and has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.



Chief Tom Cowan presents the 2008 BPD Employee of the Year award to Officer Larry Sparks.

“I liked the location, the people I met in the community and the people I met at the police department,” Sparks said about choosing to start his law enforcement career in Burlison. “I liked the opportunity that Burlison afforded me.”

The honoree was trained by Sgt. Wes Routson, officer John Brackett, former corporal Tim Henley, and former officer Shawn Lewis.

“You have to have the ability to listen, have an open mind and the desire to solve problems,” Sparks said of the ingredients for a good police officer. “With the Special Crimes Unit, you have to have the dedication to work relentless hours, you have to have the gift of gab, and you have to be dedicated to the war against drugs. You have to trust in your partners because you put your life in their hands, more than your own, every day.”

The Special Crimes Unit is a unit of more than half a dozen individual officers and one commander from multiple agencies across Johnson County. These officers are the only undercover agents in Johnson County. They handle anything that needs covert surveillance, including murder-for-hire schemes, gang investigations, theft/fencing rings, and methamphetamine labs. STOP Special Crimes Unit officers are solely responsible for cleaning up the methamphetamine labs in Johnson County.

Sparks was praised by the Johnson County District Attorney’s Office and the Special Crimes Unit commander for his work ethic, leadership, professionalism, decision-making skills, and motivational personality.

The job is appealing because Sparks and his partners arrest “serious criminals and we are helping to protect and serve the community to the best of our ability.”

His most memorable cases have included working with the ATF to arrest a man at an RV park who had just under two pounds of methamphetamines in his possession. Another case involved purchasing methamphetamine and stolen property.

“When I gave the signal to the other undercover agents, the guy pulled a gun on me and I had to wrestle him for it,” Sparks said.

Above all, protecting the weak is Sparks’ goal as an officer.

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