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The Burleson Police Department's Citizens On Patrol (COPs) program was honored not once, not twice, but four times recently at the Texas Citizens On Patrol Association annual convention in Cleburne.

Sgt. Brian O'Heren, coordinator of the program, earned Coordinator of the Year. Burleson COPs won Small Agency of the Year. Caty "Granny" Atkins, the oldest member of Burleson COPs, accepted the Lifetime Member award. And, out of 14 vehicles entered in the car show, the Burleson COPs vehicle won honorable mention.

The Burleson Police Department's COPs program boasts 40 active members, including the 2014 class. The trained volunteers are visible in their light blue polo shirts at most City and community events, including Cinco de Mayo, the Hot Sounds of Summer concert series, Fourth of July Concert and Fireworks Show, Founders Day, Boo Bash, the department's annual Open House, Character March and City on the Hill festival, American Cancer Society Relay For Life, National Night Out, Honey Tour Bike Ride and Spring Meet for Special Athletes. COPs members are on patrol at football games, host the Drug Take Back event, make the calls to encourage those with warrants to take care of the warrant before it results in an arrest, conduct speed surveys, are certified in disabled parking enforcement, and, assist with the Warrant Roundup. COPs members recorded 7,000 hours on patrol in the past year.

The COPS vehicle that earned honorable mention is a 2004 Ford Expedition that was donated by MCMC. The members use the Expedition to conduct vacation checks, close patrols, and business and residential patrols.

Caty "Granny" Atkins was one of four residents from Thomas Square Apartments who graduated from Citizens Police Academy in 2006. She continued and graduated from the Advanced Citizens Police Academy and Citizens on Patrol in 2007. The Lifetime Member became a member of the TCOPA in 2008. Atkins' granddaughter, Kristy Gilbert, graduated from the basic Citizens Police Academy and Citizens on Patrol in 2007 then completed the advanced Citizens Police Academy in 2009. Gilbert is a founding member of TCOPA (2008) and is the treasurer on the state board of directors for COPs.

Sgt. Brian O'Heren is no stranger to awards. He was honored with the Ray Ramon Award for Officer of the Year at the 2013 Texas Citizen Police Academy Alumni Association convention. Now he has earned the top award for TCOPA.

O'Heren took over the volunteer citizen programs in 2009.

"He is a tireless worker who inspires an extremely contagious dedication to the community as a whole and to the CPA/COP programs. His sense of humor and dedication to the COP program and obvious affection for the COPs members and alumni places him firmly in the hearts of all who know him," former chief Tom Cowan said.

Deputy Chief Chris Havens agreed, saying that O'Heren's "unselfish work ethic is top notch. His servant leadership style is very refreshing and his commitment to the program and the citizens are an example that all departments strive for. He is everything that this award stands for."

The Burleson Police Department named O'Heren the 2009 Supervisor of the Year for the guidance he provided on his patrol shift as well as for his work with the Citizens Police Academy.

The Coordinator of the Year was hired by Burleson in October 2001. Previously O'Heren worked with the Johnson County Sheriff's Office (1994-1997) and the Crowley Police Department (1997-2001). He was promoted to sergeant in October 2007 and in August 2010 O'Heren moved from patrol sergeant to the sergeant over the department's traffic unit.

O'Heren is married and the father of three children. He is very involved with his church and enjoys spending time with his family as well as playing softball.

The Citizens Police Academy provides a bridge between the officer in the car and the citizens in the field. O'Heren heads up the free basic 10-week academy each summer, then a 10-week advanced academy every other year. The Citizens Police Academy is open to men and women, 18 or older.

The basic academy topics include the department's organization, recruiting process, Texas Penal Code, criminal investigations, search and seizure, building searches, traffic law enforcement, narcotics investigation, SWAT, patrol procedures, and more. The classes are as "hands on" as possible. Instructors demonstrate techniques used to search a building for an intruder, then participants practice what they've learned. Participants also solve a homicide scenario by identifying evidence, using investigative techniques, and interviewing witnesses. Students ride along with an officer or monitor the communications office.