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Karen Dawkins is someone you can call on at any time of the day or night and she will answer. That dedication earned the public safety communications supervisor the Burleson Police Department's 2015 Civilian Employee of the Year award. The honor was presented Feb. 25 at the annual banquet.

"Karen Dawkins is dedicated to helping her fellow employees within the communications office," according to the nomination. "She is always willing to help cover shifts or supplement other dispatchers during times of high call volume. She has been a driving force in developing a comprehensive training program for new employees within her section and ensures that all employees are trained to the fullest capabilities before they are released to a shift by themselves.

"No task assigned Karen is left undone," according to the nomination. "She sees all of her responsibilities through to the end, including her part in maintaining operations during the recent move into the new police facility."

Dawkins said she is "extremely honored to have been nominated, and overwhelmed at having been selected to receive this award. There are so many within the department who are worthy and I wish each could have shared this experience with me."

The honoree was born in Nebraska but her family moved to Fort Worth when she was very young. Dawkins was hired by the Burleson Police Department in January 2000.

"I knew I wanted to move into a career which would enable me to be there for others," she said.

Her career in public safety started in 1996 when she began doing volunteer work with the City of Forest Hill Police Department. That led to part-time employment as a records clerk. In 1997 she moved to fulltime as a dispatcher (telecommunications operator) and began training other dispatchers.

When the dispatcher position opened up in Burleson, Dawkins said, "I couldn't get my application in fast enough. I had never wanted a job more than this one. Some 15 years later I am still passionate about it."

It only took her 18 months with Burleson before the award winner began training new operators in May 2001, the same month she earned her certification. Dawkins earned her advanced telecommunications certificate in December 2004, was appointed as the lead public safety communications specialist in March 2007, and in May 2015, she became the public safety communications supervisor.

Dawkins is familiar to many who attend the Burleson Independent School District's annual track meet for special needs students. She coordinates the police department's volunteers and she is right there on the line to hug those students as they cross the finish line.

This is not the first honor for Dawkins. In August 2003, she was honored with the 9-1-1 Silent Hero Certificate of Achievement Award by the State of Texas – Commission on State Emergency Communications.

"I have made it a personal goal throughout the years to be one step ahead of our first responders' needs (both police and fire). Serving our community, while maintaining the safety of the men and women who serve them, are the most important aspects of my job," she said.

The honoree has a personal mantra – "Today I will do my best to protect those who protect the rest."

"I truly care for the health and happiness of each member of our public safety communications team, patrol and fire personnel as well as the many city employees and members of all other departments we work with to serve our community," she said.

She didn't get to where she is on her own. When asked who her mentors have been, Dawkins said, "There have been so many over the years, both from within and outside of this profession, who have encouraged and supported me. I would like to thank my family for the sacrifices they have endured and for their love and support over the years."