

# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

## State Patrol Awards Ceremony Feb. 6, 2025

**Meritorious Citizenship Award:** This award is presented to individuals other than State Patrol employees who have assisted the Minnesota State Patrol in providing a significant service to the public.

**Daniel Baert, Steven Boser and Shelby Erdrich**

Sep. 7, 2023 – Shelby Erdrich and Daniel Baert arrived on the scene of a crash near the city of Pierz, where a van had struck a man operating a riding lawnmower, throwing him into a ditch. Shelby, a registered nurse, quickly assessed the victim and began chest compressions. Daniel then took over for a second round. Steven Boser, a first responder, soon arrived on the scene and opened the victim's airway, while Shelby monitored his pulse. Thanks to their combined efforts, medics were able to get the victim to the hospital where he made nearly a full recovery.

**Christopher Kirk**

Jan. 15 – Christopher Kirk raced to the rescue after seeing a box truck crash through a guardrail in Rogers, plunging into the frozen Crow River below. Christopher rushed down the embankment to find the box truck's cab destroyed. Inside, the driver's feet were stuck in the seat belt and his upper body was submerged in the freezing water. Christopher quickly jumped into the icy river to free the driver and help the man to safety. Thanks to Christopher's quick action, the driver sustained only minor injuries.

**Gary Bjorlin and Paul Sherwood**

Mar. 11 – Gary Bjorlin and Paul Sherwood were driving in separate vehicles when they came upon a fiery crash on Interstate 494 in Bloomington. A single vehicle had crashed into a pole and burst into flames. Without hesitation, both men stopped and tried to rescue the driver from the burning vehicle. They displayed extreme courage and selflessness in their attempt to save a life.

**Michael Coy, Tesfaye Deyasso, Dave Klepaida, Lacie Kramer, Tessa Sand and Kadir Tolla**

Apr. 18 – An SUV veered off Interstate 94 in St. Paul, crashing into a light pole before becoming wedged against a guardrail. The impact blocked the driver's side door, and the vehicle erupted into flames. Despite the danger, bystanders Michael Coy, Tesfaye Deyasso, Lacie Kramer, Tessa Sand, and Kadir Tolla stopped their vehicles and rushed to the fiery wreck, making several attempts to rescue the trapped driver. Just as the SUV was on the verge of being completely engulfed in flames, MnDOT FIRST driver Dave Klepaida arrived, shattered a window, and helped pull the driver to safety.

**Bruce Kompelien**

May 14 – Bruce Kompelien witnessed a crash involving a semi and an SUV just southeast of Montevideo. The SUV started on fire with the seriously injured driver still inside. Bruce pulled the man out of the burning vehicle to



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safety. The driver later said that he would not have been able to get out without help and that Bruce saved his life.

### **Jamaal Johnson**

Jul. 26 – Jamaal Johnson was driving on Interstate 94 in Brooklyn Center when he saw a person lying in the traffic lane. Jamaal remembered he had recently passed a State Trooper conducting a traffic stop nearby. He pulled his semi over and alerted the trooper of the situation. An investigation revealed the individual had been involved in a crash and left the scene to avoid arrest. Jamaal's actions saved that injured person from being hit by traffic and allowed first responders to get them medical help.

**Minnesota State Patrol Commendation Award:** This award is presented to members of another law enforcement or emergency service agency who have assisted the State Patrol in providing a significant service. This year, all the Minnesota State Patrol's Commendation Awards were combined with Life Saving Awards.

**Life Saving Award:** This award is presented to members of the State Patrol who distinguish themselves by performing acts that prevent the death of another.

### **Sgt. Steve Dean (Brainerd District)**

Nov. 6, 2023 – Sgt. Steve Dean arrived at a Brainerd-area home to return personal belongings to a man he had assisted at a crash scene just two days earlier. As he knocked on the door, Sgt. Dean noticed the individual lying unresponsive on the floor. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, he immediately called for EMS and forced his way inside. There, he discovered the man in a pool of blood, struggling to breathe. Without hesitation, Sgt. Dean provided life-saving assistance, helping the man breathe until paramedics arrived about 35 minutes later.

### **Trooper Jesse Roseberry (Mankato District)**

**This presentation is combined with a Minnesota State Patrol Commendation for:**

#### **Deputy Jase Guetter, Blue Earth County Sheriff's Office**

Jan. 1 – Trooper Jesse Roseberry responded to a shooting in Eagle Lake where a man suffered significant injuries to his right arm and substantial blood loss. Trooper Roseberry and Blue Earth Co. Deputy Jase Guetter worked together to apply two separate tourniquets and provide life-saving measures until EMS crews arrived. A trauma surgeon later credited the two tourniquets for helping the victim survive.

### **Retired Trooper Darcy Gagnon (Brainerd District)**

Mar. 14 – Trooper Darcy Gagnon responded to a medical emergency for a teenage boy who had shot himself in Nevis. Amid the chaotic scene, Trooper Gagnon maintained her professionalism and began to provide life-saving medical care. After medics arrived and the victim was stabilized, Trooper Gagnon assisted with setting up a landing zone for medical air transport, ensuring the boy received the medical care he needed.



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## Lt. Mike Gensmer, Trooper Jesse Einhorn, and Trooper Nick Brown (East Metro District)

This presentation is combined with a Minnesota State Patrol Commendation for:

### **Inver Grove Police Department members**

**Sgt. John Decker**

**Officer April Harrington**

**Officer Ashley Leschyshyn**

**Officer Jamar Meeks**

**Officer August Williams**

**Police Cadet Rheanna Deal**

### **Inver Grove Fire Department members**

**Captain John Patnaude**

**Lt. Neal St. Onge**

**Firefighter Adam Caneff**

**Firefighter Anthony LaForte**

Apr. 2 – Lt. Mike Gensmer, and Troopers Jesse Einhorn and Nick Brown responded to a call of a suicidal man who had crawled onto a sign over Highway 62 in Inver Grove Heights. The man had a rope around his neck and was threatening to harm himself. As officers from the Inver Grove Heights Police Department worked to remove him from the sign, Trooper Einhorn removed the rope from his neck. Once Inver Grove Heights Fire Department Captain John Patnaude attached a harness to the man, troopers, officers and firefighters worked together to pull him to safety. The seamless teamwork of all the agencies involved helped save this man's life.

## Trooper John Kubat (East Metro District)

Apr. 27 – Trooper John Kubat was dispatched to a freeway ramp in Pine Springs, where he found a man lying on the ground outside of an SUV, appearing to be in cardiac arrest. After detecting no pulse, Trooper Kubat applied his AED, delivering a life-saving shock, followed by chest compressions. The victim's heartbeat was restored, and he began to breathe on his own again.

## Chief Jeff Schroepfer

### (formerly Commercial Vehicle Section, currently City of Northfield Police Department)

May 9 – Former State Patrol Captain Jeff Schroepfer responded to a report of a man attempting to jump off the Mendota Bridge in Mendota Heights. Through calm and compassionate communication, Schroepfer established a rapport with the man, allowing officers to secure a rope around the man and pull him to safety. Schroepfer now serves as the city of Northfield's Police Chief.

## Trooper Brett Farniok (Detroit Lakes District)

May 11 – Trooper Brett Farniok arrived to assist with a medical call in Wadena, where he found a family member actively performing CPR on their unresponsive loved one. Trooper Farniok took over CPR and performed several rounds of chest compressions on the man. Meanwhile, a deputy applied an AED and administered a shock. Trooper Farniok continued chest compressions until medics arrived. The man survived.

## Trooper Ryan Moeser (Saint Cloud District)

May 20 – Trooper Ryan Moeser responded to a report on an unresponsive man at a home in Gilman. When he



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arrived, the man was not breathing, his face was blue and a woman was performing chest compressions. Trooper Moeser took over chest compressions while a deputy attached an AED. After multiple shocks were delivered, the team continued with rounds of chest compressions. Eventually, the man began to breathe on his own.

### **Trooper Zachary Caldwell and Trooper Justin Mathes (West Metro District)**

Jun. 8 – Troopers Zachary Caldwell and Justin Mathes responded to a serious injury crash in Coon Rapids where an SUV left the roadway and rolled multiple times, before coming to rest in a grassy median. When they arrived, the troopers discovered the driver didn't have a pulse and had been thrown from the SUV by the force of the crash. Trooper Mathes began chest compressions and Caldwell attached an AED. While providing life-saving care, Trooper Mathes noticed the man seemed to be impaired. After the man was stabilized and taken to the hospital, Trooper Mathes conducted a DWI investigation.

### **Trooper Gustavo Culbeaux and Officer Michael Mays (West Metro District)**

Jun. 16 – While responding to a fiery crash in Minneapolis, Trooper Gustavo Culbeaux and former Trooper Michael Mays helped extinguish the flames and remove an injured man from the vehicle. After realizing the man may be suffering from a drug overdose, Trooper Culbeaux administered two doses of Narcan. After the man was taken to the hospital, Mays conducted a DWI investigation. Mays now works as a Roseville police officer.

### **Trooper Trevor Dostal and Trooper Justin Turbes (East Metro District)**

Jun. 18 – Troopers Trevor Dostal and Justin Turbes responded to a medical call in Minneapolis involving an unresponsive driver who had pulled off to the side of the road. When they arrived, Trooper Dostal realized the man was not breathing and Trooper Turbes could not find a pulse. Together, they removed the man from the vehicle and began rendering life-saving aid. In addition to CPR, three shocks were administered from an AED. The man was taken to the hospital where he regained a pulse and began breathing on his own.

### **Trooper Tyler Lenz (Brainerd District)**

Aug. 2 – Trooper Tyler Lenz was the first to arrive at a reported shooting in Akeley, where a man had lost a significant amount of blood. Trooper Lenz rendered medical aid while talking to the victim to keep him conscious. When medics arrived, Trooper Lenz continued life-saving measures and helped stabilize the victim as he was being taken to the hospital.

### **Trooper Seth Kuhn (Brainerd District)**

Aug. 17 – While responding to a shooting north of Walker, Trooper Seth Kuhn located the gunshot wound on the victim and applied a tourniquet to slow the bleeding. Trooper Kuhn rode in the ambulance and continued to put pressure on the wound while EMS worked to stabilize the man on the way to the hospital. The victim was able to make a full recovery.

### **Trooper Sara Evans and Trooper Kelvin Harris (West Metro District)**

Aug. 25 – Troopers Sara Evans and Kevin Harris helped save a woman in crisis sitting atop an interstate overpass in



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Minneapolis. As Trooper Evans talked to the woman and offered positive reinforcement, Trooper Kelvin Harris positioned himself in a spot where he could take hold of the woman. Together, both troopers lowered her to safety and continued helping her until medics arrived.

- **Trooper Jacob Christopherson (Duluth District)**

Oct. 26 – Trooper Jacob Christopherson helped an ATV crash victim who suffered a serious arm injury in rural Pine County. Trooper Christopherson quickly applied a tourniquet to the man's upper arm, just above a makeshift tourniquet that bystanders had already placed. He then further stabilized the arm before the man was flown to the hospital. Trooper Christopherson's actions to prevent further blood loss likely saved this victim's life.

**Trooper James Noxon (East Metro District)**

**This presentation is combined with a Minnesota State Patrol Commendation for:**

**Apple Valley Police Department members**

**Officer Tyler Grieves**

**Officer Jordan Mack**

**Officer Nick Swanson**

Nov. 23 – When Trooper James Noxon arrived to a medical call in the city of Apple Valley, Officers Tyler Grieves, Jordan Mack and Nick Swanson were already performing CPR on the unresponsive victim. Trooper Noxon joined the officers, and together they continued CPR until EMS arrived to take the victim to the hospital. Thanks to their collaborative efforts, the individual survived.

**Chief's Commendation Award – Communications/911:** This award is presented to radio communications operators who provide vital life saving services that lead to the rescue of a person, provide outstanding performance during a special event, or provide a consistent, sustained high level of customer service.

**RCS Tim Jensen and RCO Don Hakes**

**(Statewide Communications – Southern Regional Communications Center [SRCC])**

**RCO Christina Nguyen and RCO Jordan Weidenhaft**

**(Statewide Communications – Regional Transportation Management Center [RTMC])**

Oct. 22 – RCS Tim Jensen dispatching for the Mankato and Marshall patrol districts and RCO Don Hakes dispatching for the Saint Cloud district, coordinated a response to stop a vehicle involved in multiple carjacking events across Minneapolis, Carver County and McLeod County. RCO Christina Nguyen and RCO Jordan Wiedenhaft coordinated MSP Flight assets and set up a common radio channel, ensuring seamless communication between all responding units. The team of dispatchers also worked with staff from OnStar to disable the stolen vehicle. Thanks to their exceptional teamwork, the armed murder suspect was apprehended outside of Willmar.

**RCO Tiffany Blodgett**

**(Statewide Communications – Regional Transportation Management Center [RTMC])**





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Oct. 26 – RCO Tiffany Blodgett answered a 911 call from a suicidal individual threatening to jump off a bridge. Throughout the call, RCO Blodgett remained calm, compassionate, and professional offering a sense of reassurance during a time of crisis. Her ability to remain composed under immense pressure, combined with her active listening skills, empathy and quick thinking was instrumental in de-escalating this volatile situation. Thanks to her efforts, responders were able to intervene and provide resources to the individual.

## **RCS Sheldon Carlsted**

### **(Statewide Communications – Regional Transportation Management Center [RTMC])**

RCS Sheldon Carlsted played a vital role in the success of the 2024 street racing details that were held every Friday and Saturday evening. Carlsted consistently delivered exceptional dispatching services, providing seamless support to the assigned teams. RCS Carlsted's positive radio presence and his commitment to provide outstanding service ensured a coordinated and unified response to make the streets safer.

**Meritorious Service Award:** This award is presented to employees for acts involving personal risk posing hazards which could lead to serious injury or loss of life to the employee.

## **Trooper Tyler Crabtree (Rochester District)**

Mar. 21 – Trooper Tyler Crabtree responded to the scene of a crash on Interstate 90 near Albert Lea involving a driver trapped in a pickup. As he arrived, he noticed flames coming from underneath a pickup. After several failed attempts to get inside, Trooper Crabtree broke a window and found an unconscious man still belted in the driver's seat with flames and heavy smoke surrounding the cab of the truck. Trooper Crabtree pulled the driver from the pickup and into the ditch where he started CPR. Additional first responders arrived and were able to restore the male's pulse. During the rescue, Trooper Crabtree suffered cuts to both hands and inhaled a large amount of smoke.

## **Sgt. Vang Yang (West Metro District)**

**This presentation is combined with a Meritorious Citizenship Award for:**

**Terrance Maynard                      Elliot Peterson                      Joseph Wold**

Sep. 9 – Sgt. Vang Yang responded to a crash on Interstate 35-W in Roseville, where a vehicle had run off the road, struck a light pole and was smoking. When he arrived on scene, Sgt. Yang found the driver unresponsive, with smoke quickly filling the passenger compartment. After unsuccessful attempts to get inside through the locked doors, citizens Terrance Maynard, Elliot Peterson and Joseph Wold assisted Sgt. Yang in breaking the driver's window, cutting the man's seat belt, and pulling him to safety just moments before flames took over the vehicle. Had it not been for the quick actions of Sgt. Yang, Terrance, Elliot, and Joseph, the driver likely would have died in the fire.

## **Trooper Zachary Gruver (Detroit Lakes District)**

Sep. 17 – Clay County Dispatch notified area law enforcement about a runaway SUV with a teenager behind the



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wheel. The vehicle's accelerator was stuck, and despite the teen's attempts to slow it down, the SUV was speeding at over 100 miles per hour. Trooper Zachary Gruver attempted to get in front of the runaway vehicle to deploy stop sticks, however, there was not enough time. Trooper Gruver then made the decision to pull ahead of the speeding SUV and use his squad car's brakes to slow the vehicle down. A Clay County Deputy called the teen driver and instructed him to hit the rear of Trooper Gruver's squad. Once the collision occurred, Trooper Gruver applied his brakes to safely bring both vehicles to a stop. Trooper Gruver placed himself in great personal danger to save the life of the young driver.

**Exceptional Service Award:** This award is presented to employees who have provided extraordinary service in the performance of their duties.

## **Lt. Mike Eck, Lt. Mike Gensmer, Lt. Pat Miles and Lt. Kevin Skalsky (East Metro District)**

A funeral for fallen Burnsville Police Officers Paul Elmstrand and Matthew Ruge, and firefighter-paramedic Adam Finseth, was held in Eden Prairie on February 28, 2024. As part of the planning, Lieutenants Mike Gensmer and Pat Miles were part of a team, requested by the Dakota County Chiefs of Police, to coordinate the funeral procession. The lieutenants were responsible for staffing 86 traffic posts to ensure the safe movement of the procession.

Another key member of the planning team was Lt. Kevin Skalsky, who served as the State Patrol liaison to the Minnesota Law Enforcement Memorial Association (LEMA). With his extensive Honor Guard knowledge, Skalsky ensured the fallen heroes were honored with dignity. He coordinated the movements of the State Patrol members, the agency's honor guard, and assisted the law enforcement procession after the funeral.

Tragically, just months later, the Minneapolis Police Department planned the funeral for fallen Officer Jamal Mitchell, held on June 11, 2024. Lt. Mike Eck staffed 68 traffic posts to ensure safety during the procession. Lt. Skalsky again led State Patrol movements, while Lt. Gensmer ensured the agency's participation remained professional and organized.

Each of these four lieutenants showed exceptional leadership, commitment and dedication to upholding the core values of the Minnesota State Patrol.

## **RCO Erin Madison and RCO Christina Nguyen**

### **(Statewide Communications – Regional Transportation Management Center [RTMC])**

Jul. 13 – State Patrol Dispatch received a report of a woman on a highway overpass in Minneapolis threatening to jump into traffic below. Over the course of an hour, RCO's Erin Madison and Christina Nguyen worked together to manage the situation, coordinating resources from multiple law enforcement agencies and private companies. Their efforts directly led to the successful rescue of the woman.



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### **RCO Goncole Her**

#### **(Statewide Communications – Regional Transportation Management Center [RTMC])**

Aug. 14 – RCO Goncole Her answered a 911 report of a gun-pointing incident. The caller stated a vehicle had cut in front of their vehicle, braked, fired a gun into the air and then pointed the weapon at them. Using the caller's vehicle description, RCO Her located the suspect vehicle on freeway cameras and followed its location. After it parked off the highway and the driver entered a nearby building, she sent its location to troopers along with a description of the driver. Because of Her's efforts, troopers took the suspect into custody without further incident.

### **Trooper Nick Kammerer (West Metro District)**

Trooper Nick Kammerer has made tackling street racing a top priority. As of October 2024, his efforts have led to more than 100 enforcement stops and 176 citations issued to street racers and spectators. In addition, Trooper Kammerer has been involved in investigations surrounding car meets, including incidents of vehicular assault, threats of violence and other crimes. Trooper Kammerer's work has made a significant impact on stopping this lawless and reckless behavior, and he's become a key player in the success of the Metro Street Racer Task Force.

### **Trooper Eric Ouellette (West Metro District)**

As a member of the Traffic Incident Management Team (TIM), Trooper Ouellette plays a key role in preventing secondary crashes and enhancing the safety of first responders at crash scenes. He collaborated with MnDOT on a pilot program that uses QR codes to help drivers quickly find the nearest exit, speeding up clearance. Trooper Ouellette has also taught several TIM courses, both internally and externally, sharing his expertise. A leader in TIM tactics, he encourages his partners to prioritize safety in every situation.

### **Angi DeSpiegelaere (West Metro District)**

Angi DeSpiegelaere serves as the district's DWI Coordinator. Her duties include publishing DWI data and submitting cases for charging. In the past year, Angi submitted just under 2,000 DWIs and 550 search warrants, consistently earning positive feedback from external partners for her concise and accurate filings. In addition, Angi processes the district's GovQA data requests. Since the program's implementation, Angi has fulfilled at least 6,000 data requests for the courts and public. Angi solves problems with a win-win approach, all while providing outstanding customer service day in and day out.

### **CVI Greg Lind (Commercial Vehicle Section)**

Commercial Vehicle Inspector Greg Lind is committed to helping others succeed. CVIs, troopers and partners in the commercial vehicle industry often seek out CVI Lind's guidance in enforcing commercial vehicle laws. CVI Lind generously shares his insights and best practices with others, always making himself available to answer questions and provide support when he teaches both locally and at district training. CVI Lind's commitment to his duties has built up his reputation as a trusted expert in his field.

### **RCO Christina Nguyen**

#### **(Statewide Communications – Regional Transportation Management Center [RTMC])**





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RCO Christina Nguyen served on a workgroup assigned to meet the accreditation goals for statewide communications. RCO Nguyen applied her exceptional organizational and writing skills to play an integral role in meeting the 13 standards assigned to the workgroup.

### **Lt. Paul Stricker (Investigative Services Section)**

Since 2013, Lt. Paul Stricker has provided leadership to troopers assigned to enforce E-ZPass, inspiring them to be some of the most proactive troopers within the Minnesota State Patrol. Through his collaborative approach, he built strong relationships with MnDOT, ensuring the success of the E-ZPass program. In addition to Lt. Stricker's daily duties, he leads the planning, organizing and execution of VIP motorcades in the state. During a particularly busy political season, his dedication, teamwork and tireless efforts were on full display, highlighting his commitment to excellence.

### **Lt. Kali Kleinschmidt (Training and Development Section)**

In 2024, Lt. Kali Kleinschmidt demonstrated exceptional leadership and organizational skills by successfully managing multiple complex training initiatives that impacted every member of the agency, including both sworn and non-sworn personnel. While simultaneously supporting the 68<sup>th</sup> and 69<sup>th</sup> academies, Lt. Kleinschmidt planned and executed an agency-wide wellness seminar and Centralized In-Service Training. In addition, she meticulously prepared for the POST Board audit to ensure the Minnesota State Patrol was meeting the highest standards for law enforcement. Lt. Kleinschmidt's ability to embrace challenges combined with a solutions-oriented mindset exemplifies the agency's core values.

### **Technical Sgt. Dave Johnston (Training and Development Section)**

Technical Sgt. Dave Johnston has served as a full-time coordinator assigned to the Training and Development Section at Camp Ripley for two years. During this time, Sgt. Johnston has developed training plans to address the changing needs of the State Patrol. Sgt. Johnston has played a key role in introducing new equipment to troopers, including breaching tools and rifle plate carriers. He was also instrumental in the agency's transition to a new rifle light. Sgt. Johnson's passion for researching, developing and executing training plans has helped the Minnesota State Patrol quickly adapt to using new technology and safety strategies.

### **Eagle Squadron Award**

Each year, the Eagle Squadron Award is presented to the Minnesota State Patrol trooper who arrested the greatest number of impaired drivers the previous year.

### **Trooper Gustavo Culbeaux (West Metro District)**

Impaired driving enforcement continues to be job number one for every State Patrol trooper. Aggressive enforcement in this important area that saves countless lives and prevents injuries each year.

In 2024, Trooper Gustavo Culbeaux arrested **222** impaired drivers. In recognition of his efforts, he is presented with the Eagle Squadron Award for his tireless dedication to the Minnesota State Patrol's mission of protecting



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the public and preventing tragedies by removing impaired drivers from our roadways.

**Leadership Award:** This award is presented yearly to the employee who consistently exhibits outstanding leadership and excellence in public safety through their personal actions, guidance, direction and professional involvement.

### **Lt. Kevin Skalsky (East Metro District)**

Lt. Skalsky's remarkable career with the State Patrol began in 1997. Following a two-year assignment in the West Metro District, he transferred to the Aitkin station in the Brainerd District, where he worked until his promotion to the East Metro Lieutenant in 2012. It was here that he will complete his impactful career.

As a trooper, Lt. Skalsky routinely stopped over 2,000 vehicles each year. He became a recognized leader in DWI, seat belt, and speed enforcement, earning numerous traffic safety awards for his commitment to public safety. Upon transitioning to leadership, Lt. Skalsky's influence only grew. His exemplary work ethic, passion for excellence, and strong sense of integrity had a profound impact on everyone around him. Known for his approachability, knowledge, and passion he earned the respect of his colleagues and became a trusted mentor to many.

Since 2014, Lt. Skalsky served as the commander of the State Patrol Honor Guard. Under his leadership, the Honor Guard not only upheld the proud traditions of the State Patrol but also played an instrumental role during numerous line-of-duty funerals across the state. A particularly memorable moment came in 2015 when Lt. Skalsky was called to serve as the incident commander for the funeral of an Aitkin County investigator.

Lt. Skalsky's service also extended to the Mobile Response Team (MRT), and Chemical Agent Response Team (CART) lead operator. He helped teach MRT operations and tactics to law enforcement agencies across the state, as well as military reserve units looking to expand their response to civil unrest.

In February 2025, after more than 28 years of dedicated service to the State of Minnesota, Lt. Skalsky will be retiring. The Leadership Award is a fitting tribute to his decades of outstanding service and the profound impact he has made on his colleagues, the agency, and the communities he served.

**Civilian Employee of the Year:** This award is presented to the non-sworn employee who best demonstrates outstanding work performance, initiative, leadership and effective interpersonal relations.

### **CVI Sgt. Chris Hudson (Commercial Vehicle Section)**

Sgt. Hudson's dedication to public safety and service spans more than 23 years with the State of Minnesota. He began his career with the State Patrol Commercial Vehicle Section as an inspector and has advanced up to his current position as Chief School Bus Inspector. In this position, he oversees 14 school bus inspectors across the state and is responsible for monitoring the annual school bus inspections program.



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In 2024, Sgt. Hudson took on the challenge of developing a six-hour course designed to provide a deeper understanding of the school bus inspection process. The course guides people through the school bus inspection manual, offering invaluable insights into the critical steps involved.

Sgt. Hudson has consistently demonstrated his commitment to addressing the needs of the school bus industry without sacrificing safety. After hearing consistent concerns from the school bus industry about rising failure rates during inspections, Sgt. Hudson and his team developed a training program. The program has now been presented at multiple events across the state. As a result, the failure rate has dropped from 23.6 percent to 18.5 percent.

In addition to his technical expertise, he has also improved communication and collaboration within the school bus inspection team and developed templates with contact information for school districts and contractors in each region. He's also demonstrated his commitment to teamwork by driving buses for the Mobile Response Team and contributing to the DPS website redesign. Finally, as a Command Sergeant Major with the Minnesota National Guard, Sgt. Hudson brings over 30 years of military service to his role.

Sgt. Chris Hudson's unwavering dedication to ensuring a safer and more reliable transportation system for Minnesota's schoolchildren makes him the ideal recipient of the Civilian Employee of the Year Award.

**Trooper of the Year:** This award is presented to the Trooper who best demonstrates outstanding work performance, initiative, leadership and effective interpersonal relations.

### **Technical Sgt. Kyle Backer (Saint Cloud District)**

Sgt. Backer embodies all the qualities that define the Trooper of the Year. From the early days of his career as a trooper in the St. Cloud district, where he spent countless nights removing impaired drivers from the road, Sgt. Backer has consistently delivered outstanding performance. His work earned him numerous accolades, establishing him as a dedicated and driven trooper committed to the safety of Minnesota's roads.

As a natural leader, Sgt. Backer has consistently taken the initiative to drive positive change within the Minnesota State Patrol, earning recognition as the "most notable agent of change." His commitment to professional growth is evident in his certifications as a crash reconstructionist, forensic mapping specialist and CDR tool technician. These specialized skills, combined with his extensive experience have made Sgt. Backer a go-to expert for law enforcement agencies and traffic safety organizations, where he's helped build strong networks and valuable relationships.

His fellow troopers say he always delivers, calling him a "mentor, leader and a person they look to for feedback and assistance."

Over the past year, Sgt. Backer has worked on several notable cases, including:



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- A fatal crash investigation where a driver, speeding at nearly 150 miles per hour, rear-ended another vehicle. Sgt. Backer was able secure charges for third degree murder, two counts of criminal vehicular homicide, and two counts of criminal vehicular operation. This was achieved by using electronic video evidence and a significant amount of investigative networking.
- A serious injury car vs. pedestrian case, where he worked with other state agencies to help discover a larger issue of negligence by a local bar.
- A high-profile crash investigation that involved the tragic death of two boys and left a third critically injured. Sgt. Backer worked diligently to uncover the facts and secure electronic evidence in the case.

Sgt. Backer lives by the core values of respect, integrity, courage, honor, and excellence. He continues to show up every day prepared to make a difference and is, without question, the future of our agency.

The Minnesota State Patrol is honored to present Sgt. Kyle Backer with the Trooper of the Year award.

