

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

MINNESOTA STATE PATROL

State Patrol Awards Ceremony

Feb. 5, 2026

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.

- **Brian Lathrop**

Feb. 5 – School bus driver Brian Lathrop was transporting three adult passengers and four children on Highway 169 in Mille Lacs County when a semi crossed the center line and into the path of the bus. Brian quickly reacted and steered away from the oncoming semi, avoiding a head-on collision. The semi sideswiped the bus. Two of the children received minor injuries and were treated and released at the scene. Brian's actions saved the lives of his passengers.

- **Denis Cherniy**

April 12 – Denis Cherniy was driving in Brooklyn Park when he came across a vehicle that had struck a pole. As he approached, Denis observed flames coming from the vehicle with two unconscious people inside. He dialed 911 to report the crash, then proceeded to break a window to gain access to the passenger compartment. At risk to his own safety, Denis pulled both people from the vehicle. His actions saved the lives of others.

- **Cody Pearson and William Roland**

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

Officer Yahya Noor, Faribault Police Department

April 14 – Cody Pearson and William Roland were driving on Interstate 35 near Faribault when they passed by a vehicle that had crashed into a grove of trees. They returned to the scene to assist. The vehicle was on fire and bystanders reported there were people trapped inside. Cody and William pulled the driver and passenger from the vehicle. Faribault Police Officer Yahya Noor arrived at the scene and assisted with carrying the victims to a safe location. Tragically, the passenger later died as a result of their injuries. The driver made a full recovery.

- **Adam Fischer and Shane Wolf**

July 1 – Shane Wolf was traveling on Highway 10 in Blaine when he witnessed a vehicle leave the roadway, crash into a signpost, and catch on fire. He stopped at the scene and pulled the unresponsive driver from the vehicle. Adam Fischer arrived on the scene and helped carry the driver to safety. Shane returned to the smoke-filled vehicle to search for more occupants and alerted Adam there was a passenger inside. Adam located a woman tangled in her seat belt. He cut the seat belt and carried her away from the burning vehicle.



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Due to the heroic actions of Shane Wolf and Adam Fischer, both victims' lives were saved.

- **Wendell Hudspeth**

Sept. 1 – Wendell Hudspeth observed a state trooper attempting to take a male into custody at a local gas station in Motley. The male subject was noncompliant and physically resisting arrest. Wendell voluntarily stepped in and aided the trooper in placing the male's arms behind his back so handcuffs could be applied. Due to his actions, the subject was safely taken into custody without further incident.

- **Mary Pelkola**

Oct. 30 – A driver had suffered a seizure while traveling on Highway 169 in New Hope, causing the vehicle to veer off the roadway, go up an embankment, and crash into a bridge deck and catch on fire. Mary Pelkola was driving by when she saw the burning vehicle. As she approached, it became fully engulfed with flames and she could hear popping noises. Recognizing that time was of the essence, Mary pulled the unconscious victim from the vehicle and carried her to safety. Due to her quick actions and bravery, the victim's life was saved.

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.

- **Trooper Nathan Faust and Trooper Brett Seide (West Metro District)**

Jan. 4 – Trooper Nathan Faust responded to a report of a gunshot victim on Highway 10 in Coon Rapids. The victim had accidentally fired a gun, striking himself in the leg. Trooper Faust applied a tourniquet to slow the bleeding. Trooper Brett Seide arrived and assisted in locating the wound and applying a second tourniquet. Medics at the scene stated the troopers did an excellent job. The victim never lost consciousness, and a full recovery was expected.

- **Trooper Glenn Dirksen (Marshall District)**

March 3 – Trooper Glenn Dirksen assisted with a welfare check of a man who had made suicidal comments near Montevideo. Local law enforcement arrived at the man's home but couldn't get inside. After the landlord provided access into the home, the man was found inside with a rope around his neck, hanging from a door frame. Trooper Dirksen lifted the man by his legs while officers cut the rope. Together, they lowered the male to the ground and provided medical aid to him.

- **Trooper Christopher Cholwek and Trooper Sean Hollencamp (Duluth District)**

June 7 – Trooper Christopher Cholwek and Trooper Sean Hollencamp had completed a traffic stop on a freeway overpass in Duluth when they observed an emotionally distraught man standing next to the railing. As they approached, the man indicated that he intended to jump and end his life. After multiple attempts to



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assist were refused, Trooper Cholwek and Trooper Hollencamp grabbed the man's arms and pulled him to safety. The man was taken to the hospital for further evaluation.

- **Trooper Michael Perbix (West Metro District)**

July 14 – Trooper Michael Perbix responded to a call of a woman who had climbed a freeway overpass fence and was dangling above Interstate 94 in Minneapolis. When Perbix arrived, he noticed the woman was in crisis. Trooper Perbix patiently and calmly spoke with the woman, took her hand, and assisted her back to safety. Medics arrived on scene to provide additional care to the woman.

- **Trooper Trisha Bauman and Trooper Levi Ward (Duluth District)**

July 22 – Trooper Trisha Bauman was dispatched to a stalled vehicle blocking the right lane of Interstate 35 in Duluth. When Bauman arrived, she found an unresponsive man in the driver's seat. After securing the vehicle and moving the man to a safe location, CPR was administered. Trooper Levi Ward arrived on scene and assisted with chest compressions until medics could take over care.

- **Trooper Ryan Moeser (Saint Cloud District)**

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

Deputy Chanse Pederson, Wright County Sheriff's Office

In addition to Meritorious Citizenship Awards for:

Marcus Shonblom

Megan Spears

Nicholas Stoops

Sept. 3 – Trooper Ryan Moeser responded to a report of a single-vehicle crash near Clearwater. Flames and smoke were seen coming from inside the vehicle with the injured driver still inside. Trooper Moeser, Deputy Chanse Pederson and residents Marcus Shonblom, Megan Spears and Nichols Stoops worked as a team to remove the driver from the burning vehicle and away from danger. Because of their efforts, the driver's life was saved.

- **Trooper Paul Tierney (East Metro District)**

Oct. 3 – Trooper Paul Tierney responded to a driving complaint of a vehicle that struck a concrete median barrier several times before crashing along Interstate 35W in Burnsville. Tierney arrived and removed the unresponsive driver from the vehicle. Tierney provided CPR and breathing assistance to the man until medics arrived.

- **Trooper Lucas Bachman (West Metro District)**

Oct. 27 – Trooper Lucas Bachman was dispatched to a pedestrian on the freeway in Minneapolis. A man had



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climbed over a bridge barrier wall and was hanging by his hands while standing on a ledge above Interstate 94. The man stated he intended to kill himself by falling from the bridge. Recognizing the danger to both the man and people driving on the freeway below, Trooper Bachman quickly took hold of the man and pulled him over the barrier and back to safety.

- **Trooper Jacob Ristau (Rochester District)**

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

Deputy Nick Golbuff, Freeborn County Sheriff's Office

Oct. 18 – Trooper Jacob Ristau was the first to arrive at a fiery, head-on crash near Albert Lea. Trooper Ristau found an unbelted woman in the rear cargo area of the burning SUV, where she had been launched on impact. When the rear cargo hatch would not release, Trooper Ristau lifted the unconscious woman through the window. With the assistance of Deputy Nick Golbuff, they carried the victim to safety. Less than two minutes later, the vehicle became fully engulfed in flames. The victim likely would have died if it were not for the quick actions of Trooper Ristau and Deputy Golbuff.

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.

- **Statewide Communications – RTMC**

RCS Sheldon Carlsted

RCO Kaci Cavallaro

RCO Jacob Hein

RCO Sean McGivern

RCO Shannon Scherz

March 31 – RCO Shannon Scherz fielded a 911 call reporting a shooting on Interstate 94 in Minneapolis and initiated transmissions to surrounding agencies and EMS. Dispatch team members RCO Kaci Cavallaro, RCO Jacob Hein and RCO Sean McGivern reviewed traffic cameras and fielded calls from partners. RCS Sheldon Carlsted worked to locate both the victim's and the suspect's vehicles. Because of their collaborative efforts, the team was able to determine where the event began and where the suspect's vehicle exited the freeway. Each member played an essential role in ensuring a quick response.

- **RCO Brenden Dowd (Statewide Communications – RTMC)**

Aug. 11 – RCO Brenden Dowd fielded a call from a man who indicated he planned to die by suicide. He located the man on an overpass looking down at the freeway below and dispatched law enforcement and medical personnel to the area. Meanwhile, RCO Dowd built rapport and gained the man's trust through conversation.



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Due to his efforts, the man stepped down from the overpass and met officers on the bridge deck.

- **RCO Katie Geissler and RCO Erin Madison (Statewide Communications – RTMC)**

Aug. 27 – RCO Katie Geissler and RCO Erin Madison received multiple 911 calls reporting an active shooter at Annunciation Church and School in Minneapolis. Recognizing the urgency, they immediately notified troopers in the area and continuously provided updates. RCO Geissler and RCO Madison collaborated with partners from local jurisdictions to manage the event and clear the roadway, allowing EMS units to quickly transport critical patients to trauma centers. Their actions during a tense and tragic situation undoubtedly saved lives.

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

- **Trooper Mark Vande Steeg (West Metro District)**

Sept. 21, 2024 – State Patrol dispatch took a report of a crash on Interstate 94 in Minneapolis. While troopers were responding to the scene, updated information indicated that a subject had fired multiple gunshots at an occupied vehicle. Trooper Mark Vande Steeg arrived and located the suspect traveling on foot south of the crash scene. After signaling for the suspect to stop, the suspect began to fire multiple gunshots toward Vande Steeg, striking his marked squad car. Due to the imminent threat to his safety and the safety of others nearby, Vande Steeg returned fire. The suspect continued to flee until responding officers took him into custody. Neither the suspect nor responding law enforcement officers were struck by gunfire. Trooper Vande Steeg displayed remarkable courage in the face of an imminent and deadly threat.

- **Trooper Bennett Sukalski (Mankato District)**

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

Deputy Casey Stotts, McLeod County Sheriff's Office

July 22 – Trooper Bennett Sukalski and Deputy Casey Stotts responded to a call of a man trapped inside a grain bin in Hutchinson, buried up to his neck in corn. Sukalski and Stotts climbed into the grain bin and began clearing corn away from the victim's face and chest area. The outside air temperature that day was near 90 degrees with high humidity. When the fire department arrived, Sukalski and Stotts assisted in the rescue operation as barriers were placed around the victim and the corn was suctioned away from him. About one hour later, the victim was freed. Due to the extreme heat and humidity, both Sukalski and Stotts were treated for dehydration and heat exposure. The victim was hospitalized and recovered. Trooper Sukalski and Deputy Stotts placed themselves at great risk to save the life of another.

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



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- **Trooper Chad Kucza (Virginia District)**

Jan. 2 – Trooper Chad Kucza assisted in the search for a lost elderly woman who had texted a relative stating she was stuck in the woods and didn't know her location. Temperatures at the time were below zero and there were concerns for her safety. Trooper Kucza observed tire tracks leading down a maintenance road and followed them onto a narrow trail. He found the missing woman in rural Itasca County standing next to her burned-out vehicle. Without shelter in those conditions, it is unlikely she would have survived without Kucza's help.

- **Trooper Aaron Myren (Detroit Lakes District)**

Feb. 12 – Trooper Aaron Myren responded to a report of a suicidal teenager with a firearm in a rural area near Alexandria. Upon arrival, he observed the teen in the driver's seat of a parked UTV. The teen had shot herself in the stomach and reportedly was no longer in possession of the firearm. Trooper Myren led a controlled approach to the girl's location and began emergency medical care. As deputies monitored the teen, Trooper Myren set up a landing zone for air medics. Due to Trooper Myren's leadership and coordination skills, the teen was stabilized and transported for further care.

- **RCO Sydney Stodolka (Statewide Communications - RTMC)**

March 22 – RCO Sydney Stodolka received a transfer call involving a suicidal teenager near Forest Lake. As she spoke with the distressed teen, RCO Stodolka maintained a professional, calm and compassionate demeanor. She built rapport with the teen and obtained critical information. Due to her diligence, first responders found the teen and provided necessary services and support.

- **Trooper Yahya Abdi (East Metro District)**

March 25 – Trooper Yahya Abdi responded to a call of a man walking along Highway 13 in Burnsville. The elderly Somali man showed signs of dementia and was unable to identify himself. Abdi called for medics and assisted with translation before the man was taken to the hospital for evaluation. Abdi then visited local Somali restaurants with the man's photo to help determine his identity. A distant relative was able to provide Abdi with the man's full name. Trooper Abdi made the connection with an attempt to locate alert for a missing adult with dementia and the man's family was notified of his location.

- **RCO Will Persons (Statewide Communications – SRCC)**

April. 25 – RCO Will Persons fielded a report of an object coming off a commercial vehicle and hitting the windshield of a passing vehicle near Stewartville, injuring its driver. Descriptions of the suspect vehicle came in from multiple callers shortly afterward. RCO Persons extensively reviewed traffic camera footage and was able to locate the suspect's vehicle. He continued to track its progress while troopers were en route to investigate. RCO Persons was instrumental in locating the suspect vehicle and expediting the investigation.

- **Trooper Thomas Clark (West Metro District)**



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July 20 – Trooper Thomas Clark was off-duty in Illinois when he was traveling on an interstate and spotted a teenage boy on a concrete wall overlooking the interstate. He pulled over and spoke with the teen.

Recognizing that the teen was experiencing a mental health crisis, Clark called 911 and awaited the arrival of first responders. Trooper Clark's actions led to the teen receiving the care he needed.

- **Trooper Hunter Duprey (East Metro District)**

Sept. 3 – Trooper Hunter Duprey responded to a call of a man in crisis who was sitting on an overpass above Interstate 94 in St. Paul. When Duprey arrived, the man swung his legs over the concrete barrier and said that he wanted to die of suicide. While securing the lane of traffic below and coordinating a response from other agencies, Duprey talked to the man and built rapport with him. He convinced the man to get off the ledge and walk over to the responding units until he could join him on the overpass. The man was secured and taken to the hospital for further care.

- **Capt. Eric Barthel (Training and Development Section)**

Captain Eric Barthel has led the agency through numerous training initiatives related to law changes and legislation. He ensures every state trooper receives a high level of training that meets or exceeds standards. In addition, he oversees the trooper training academy process in its entirety — from interviews, fitness testing, background investigations, to training recruits in the academy. Capt. Barthel is also a visionary. His recruitment, hiring and staffing initiatives will lead the agency into the future. Capt. Barthel's dedication to the agency shows in everything he does.

- **Lt. John Farmakes (West Metro District)**

Lt. John Farmakes plays an essential role in keeping Minnesota State Patrol history alive through his leadership on the Vintage Vehicle Advisory Committee. Lt. Farmakes manages event requests, logistics and staffing, often adjusting his own schedule to attend events. Lt. Farmakes also ensures that vintage vehicles and equipment are well maintained and ready for public display. Because of his dedication, the State Patrol has been able to connect with communities across the state and share its mission at public events.

- **Holley Gries (St. Cloud District)**

Holley Gries has a wide skill set, and her contributions extend well beyond the Saint Cloud District. In addition to her regular duties, Holley has supported eight trooper training academies. Her ability to multitask and meet deadlines has proven to be invaluable to training staff. Holley also supports the Mobile Response Team and responds to team callouts and coordinates logistics, often on short notice. Through her dedication and commitment, Holley truly reflects the agency's core values in her work every day.

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

If one word was chosen to describe Trooper Nick Kammerer's work ethic and drive when it comes to traffic safety, it would be relentless. Whether on routine patrol or working street racing enforcement, Trooper



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Kammerer continuously seeks out dangerous driving conduct. His enforcement activity has led to numerous zero-tolerance citations and arrests for reckless and dangerous driving. Trooper Kammerer's efforts have resulted in a substantial decline in illegal street racing takeover activity, making Minnesota's roads safer for everyone who uses them.

- **Taser 10 Transition Team**

Technical Sgt. Jason Halvorson (Training and Development Section)

Lt. Kyle Backer (St. Cloud District)

Trooper Don Cobban (Rochester District)

Trooper Gerald Veaux (Mankato District)

Trooper Andrew Larsen (Marshall District)

Trooper Brianna Cline (East Metro District)

Trooper Madeline Droher (West Metro District)

Trooper Mark Shafer (Brainerd District)

Sgt. Jason Brown (Brainerd District)

Sgt. Shawn Rominski (Thief River Falls District)

Sgt. Jason Halvorson and a team of instructors led the agency-wide transition to the Taser 10, a major update from the Taser 7. He researched best practices, worked closely with AXON representatives and guided the instructors through hours of testing, planning and evaluation. Their hard work produced a high-quality, streamlined training program delivered to every sworn member of the agency. The team's dedication and effort exemplified the agency's core value of excellence.

- **Investigative Services Section**

Trooper Tony Butler

Technical Sgt. Dan Dixon

Technical Sgt. Kris Geiger

Technical Sgt. Shawn Mathews

Lt. Chad Mills

Technical Sgt. Kelly Phillips

Technical Sgt. Scott Smith

Technical Sgt. Shaun Stang

The Investigative Services Section provides specialized support that goes beyond routine patrol work, helping improve traffic safety, support criminal investigations and assist agencies across the state. This team consistently goes above and beyond, integrating new technology like the interior drone project, establishing safety protocols, training multiple dogs to national certification standards, creating an improved drone asset tracking system, all while providing instruction and mentorship to others.

- **Clean Slate Act Team**



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Nop Chayabutr
Lindsay Daraitis
Angi DeSpiegelaere
Lt. Rick Harjes
Jeff Katers
Sean Meagher
Nate Ourn
Ken Paschke
Kris Wilkens

When the Clean Slate Act took effect, it mandated the automatic expungement of certain criminal history records that previously required a court petition. The scope of data maintained by the State Patrol is vast, interconnected and sensitive. This group took on one of the most complex data and legal challenges ever faced by the State Patrol — building new systems, tools and safeguards to accurately expunge and protect more than 360,000 records across multiple critical platforms. Their precision, innovation, and collaboration ensured full legal compliance while preserving the integrity of our law enforcement systems. In doing so, they protected the agency, upheld the rights of the public and set a new standard of excellence.

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. 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.

Trooper Gustavo Culbeaux (West Metro District)

In 2025, Trooper Gustavo Culbeaux arrested **190** impaired drivers. In recognition of his efforts, he is presented with the Eagle Squadron Award. Trooper Culbeaux's dedication to making an impact in the critical area of removing the impaired driver from our roadways has earned him this award. This is the the seventh year in a row that Culbeaux has led the State Patrol in impaired driver arrests.

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. Steve Fischer (Training and Development Section)

Lt. Steve Fischer has more than 25 years of leadership experience with the Minnesota State Patrol, serving in roles that include instructor, Special Response Team member, technical sergeant, Mobile Response Team supervisor and lieutenant in multiple districts and the Training and Development Section. Throughout his career, he has earned a reputation as a steady, respected leader who brings professionalism, sound judgment and a deep



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commitment to public safety to every assignment. Colleagues at all levels consistently praise his leadership, mentorship and ability to remain calm and supportive in high-pressure situations, while living the core values of respect, integrity, courage, honor and excellence. Through his servant leadership approach, Lt. Fischer continues to elevate those around him, making him a deserving recipient of the Minnesota State Patrol Leadership Award.

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.

Shyliana Gibson (Investigative Services Section)

Shyliana Gibson, administrative coordinator for the Investigative Services Section, is a standout example of excellence. Over the past year, she has coordinated hundreds of hotel bookings, flights, rental cars and conference registrations for troopers in training, while also handling calls for the Vehicle Crimes Unit, payroll, expense reports, vet bills for the canine team and more. Beyond these administrative duties, Shyliana has helped onboard two new canines and their handlers, two regional crash reconstructionist sergeants, a crash reconstructionist coordinator, a Vehicle Crimes Unit sergeant and a DEA taskforce trooper. Her coworkers consistently praise her professionalism, leadership and selflessness, and her attention to detail, proactive problem-solving and confident leadership have earned her 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.

Sgt. Scott Schneider (East Metro District)

Since his promotion to district investigator in the East Metro District in 2023, Sgt. Schneider has demonstrated exceptional skill and work ethic in investigating criminal cases. His attention to detail and tenacity have led to successful results in complex cases, including multiple serious and fatal car crashes, assaults and fleeing incidents. Between 2024 and 2025, he investigated 30 gun-pointing/assault cases and 37 criminal vehicular operation/homicide cases, and assisted other state agencies, including helping apprehend two suspects involved in an ATM jackpotting scheme. He is also trusted with highly sensitive cases involving high-profile crashes and incident at the State Capitol.

Sgt. Schneider serves as a mentor and informal leader in his district, guiding troopers and helping them build confidence and skills as first responders. With over 20 years in law enforcement, he consistently demonstrates excellence, builds strong relationships with allied agencies, communicates effectively and fosters trust and transparency. His self-initiative, professionalism and commitment to the core values of respect, integrity, courage, honor and excellence make him a model district investigator and a deserving recipient of the Trooper of the Year Award.

