



ILLINOIS SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
February 10, 2020

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2019 Deputy of the Year Award

On February 3, 2020, the Illinois Sheriff's Association awarded Winnebago County Sheriff's Deputy Sarah McWhirter their "Deputy of the Year" award at its annual Winter Conference in Normal, Illinois.

Sheriff Caruana nominated Deputy McWhirter for this award as a result of an incident that occurred in 2018. On the night of August 21, 2018, WCSO Deputy McWhirter was off-duty when she visited a Rockford restaurant. At approximately 10:30 p.m. McWhirter and a citizen left the restaurant and McWhirter got into the driver's seat of her car while the citizen remained outside the driver's door. As they talked, McWhirter observed a man approach them with his sweatshirt hood pulled over his head and covering his face. The man walked to within a few feet of McWhirter before brandishing a handgun and pointing it at McWhirter.

McWhirter drew her handgun and ordered the man to back away. The male then opened fire at McWhirter, and she returned fire while seeking cover behind her car's dashboard. At McWhirter's direction, the citizen was able to run behind her car for cover. After a brief exchange of gunfire in which more than 8 rounds were fired, the suspect fled from the scene. McWhirter then called the Communications Center and Rockford Police Officers responded to the scene to investigate. Deputy McWhirter and the citizen were not seriously injured this attack. This case remains under investigation.

Sheriff Caruana said that "Deputy McWhirter's quick and heroic action saved her life, the life of the citizen and undoubtedly prevented an armed robbery from occurring." McWhirter is a four-year veteran of the Winnebago County Sheriff's Police and currently assigned to the Sheriff's Crime Scene Unit.

Deputy McWhirter demonstrated her tremendous heroism that is always present either on or off duty. Thank you and congratulations on a job well done.

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