

## NEWS

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CONTACT: Elaine Mann Carpenter

1.888.357.3824 (FL.RETAIL)

### FLORIDA LAW ENFORCERS WIN TOP HONORS

#### Polk County Sheriff's Detective Named Retail Officer of the Year

*Runners-Up Honored from Seminole County and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement*

(TALLAHASSEE) - When it comes to investigating crime, **Detective James Ostojic** strives to leave no stone unturned. This quest for information has served Detective Ostojic well and helped him resolve numerous cases during his 13-year career with the **Polk County Sheriff's Office**. His diligence also helped substantially fracture organized retail theft in Central Florida and earn him the prestigious distinction of being named the **2008 Florida Retail Federation (FRF) Law Enforcement Officer of the Year (LEOY)**. Detective Ostojic received a check for \$3,000 and an attractive custom-crafted medallion and plaque when he was honored at FRF's annual awards banquet on **Wednesday, November 19, 2008**, at **LaPlaya Resort** in **Naples, Florida**. His name was added to a plaque that lists each LEOY recipient since the program's inception in 1974. **Major Joe Halman, Jr.**, of the Polk County Sheriff's Office, accepted the plaque on behalf of the department and **Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd**, who nominated Detective Ostojic. **Dan Doyle**, vice president of loss prevention and human resources for Beall's, Inc., and chairman of FRF's LEOY committee, made the presentation on behalf of FRF's nearly 10,000 member companies.

**Two officers were also selected as runners-up** from the field of outstanding nominees that represent various law enforcement entities from throughout the state. They were also honored at the November 19<sup>th</sup> event. They are: **Investigator Christopher J. Ortiz of the Seminole County Sheriff's Office and Special Agent Kirk Veazey of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement**. Each officer received a memento from FRF designating the honor and a certificate of commendation for their outstanding work.

*"The Florida Retail Federation is proud to continue its tradition of recognizing Florida's finest law enforcement professionals and to highlight the outstanding efforts of Detective Ostojic as well as Investigator Ortiz and Special Agent Veazey. We have a unique situation this year in that all three officers are being honored for their contributions toward combating organized retail crime," says **Richard A. McAllister, FRF president and chief executive officer**. "However, all of our nominees are very deserving and are a credit and inspiration to law officers and law-abiding citizens throughout our state."*

#### **2008 RECIPIENT – DETECTIVE JAMES OSTOJIC, POLK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

In June 2007, Detective Ostojic was assigned to investigate an approximate \$4,500 theft of beauty products from a grocery store chain. Upon interviewing the suspects, he recognized that this was not an isolated retail theft case, but part of a multi-million dollar retail theft ring in which high-end health, beauty and cosmetic items as well as over-the-counter medications were being stolen from various chain retailers throughout Central Florida. Realizing the extent of this multi-jurisdictional case, the Polk County Sheriff's Office requested assistance from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, and an ad-hoc task force was formed.

Seven months of investigation revealed that teams of retail thieves known as "boosters" would enter stores and steal several thousand dollars' worth of products at each stop. Each "booster" team would hit numerous stores several days a week and then sell these items to "fences."

In January 2008, numerous search warrants were served in a three-county area resulting in 18 suspects being arrested and charged under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. The total losses to the stores involved over a five-year period are estimated at nearly \$100 million. Had it not been for the hard work, dedication, and perseverance of Detective Ostojic and the other task force members, this investigation never would have progressed beyond an initial retail theft arrest.

(more)

Detective Ostojic joins 38 previous LEOY recipients who represent various branches of law enforcement including police departments and sheriff's offices, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Florida Highway Patrol, and the former Florida Marine Patrol.

### **THE RUNNERS-UP**

#### **Investigator Christopher J. Ortiz, Seminole County Sheriff's Office**

Investigator Ortiz is a community-oriented law enforcement officer whose proactive policing initiatives are greatly beneficial to Florida's retail community. His professionalism and commitment also daily enhance the lives of the citizens he serves by reducing crime and the fear of crime.

Upon being selected as a General Assignment Investigator in June 2007, Investigator Ortiz immediately recognized that large retail stores were experiencing increased thefts perpetrated by organized "professional" theft rings. In response to this, above and beyond his regular duties as a property crimes investigator, Investigator Ortiz created and chairs the Central Florida Organized Retail Crime Enforcement group, or CFORCE. CFORCE is an information sharing group that promotes partnerships between businesses and law enforcement. Its more than 200 members include business owners, managers, and loss prevention and law enforcement professionals from the Central Florida area. Monthly meetings hosted in different locations throughout Central Florida enhance the Web-based information exchange and email alerts. These collaborative efforts can already be credited with the identification and arrest of retail theft perpetrators. As the CFORCE network continues to grow, so too will its impact on curtailing crime.

Investigator Ortiz has worked for the Seminole County Sheriff's Office for eight years. *He was nominated by Seminole County Sheriff Donald F. Eslinger.*

#### **Special Agent Kirk Veazey, Florida Department of Law Enforcement**

Special Agent Kirk Veazey is a sixteen-year veteran of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. He has been involved in numerous investigations in the Jacksonville area over the past year, but one case in particular, accounting for millions of dollars in retail theft losses from multiple major retailers, stands out.

Stemming from what first appeared to be a simple shoplifting crime, Special Agent Veazey managed and directed a labor-intensive year long investigation jointly conducted with the United States Secret Service and other law enforcement agencies, plus retail loss prevention specialists. Through interviews, surveillance, and other techniques, Special Agent Veazey and the team successfully dismantled a decade-old theft ring in which the "fence" equipped "boosters" with shoplifting lists consisting primarily of health and beauty aids. The items were then sold on the Internet and elsewhere. In April 2008, a search of the suspect's property revealed over 13,000 pieces of evidence totaling more than \$205,000 in retail value.

A consummate professional, Special Agent Veazey is active in the Jacksonville community. He serves on the board of directors of the Florida Law Enforcement Property Recovery Unit and the Financial Institution Security Association of Northeast Florida. *Special Agent Veazey was nominated by Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner Gerald Bailey.*

### **THE LEOY PROGRAM**

The Florida Retail Federation Law Enforcement Officer of the Year program has been an annual event since its inception in 1974. The purpose of the program is to support and encourage outstanding police work throughout the state, and to recognize the important contributions made by Florida's law enforcement professionals in promoting safety and security. The program's time-tested campaign theme, *"Often taken for granted, they never stop serving ...because they care,"* remains as relevant today as when LEOY was first introduced.

For more information on the awards event or the LEOY program, please contact Brenda Grindstaff, awards coordinator, at 1.888.357.3824 or [FRFAwards@frf.org](mailto:FRFAwards@frf.org) or visit FRF's Web site at [www.frf.org](http://www.frf.org).

*The Florida Retail Federation is a statewide trade association that represents Florida's most important industry – retailing – and has served as "The Voice of Florida Retailing" since its inception in 1937. Florida retailers pay more than \$35 billion in wages annually, provide one out of every five jobs in the state, and collect and remit approximately \$22 billion in sales and retail-related taxes for Florida's government each year. Visit FRF on the Web at [www.frf.org](http://www.frf.org).*