

TROOPER OF THE YEAR FOR 2010

The Troop One Trooper of the Year is Trooper First Class Brandon O. Stokes.

TFC Stokes' career with the Highway Patrol began in the fall of 2008. After graduating from Patrol school, he was assigned to Post A where he has gained the respect of his supervisors, co-workers and the citizens of Sumter and Clarendon Counties. He was selected as Troop One's choice for "Trooper of the Year" in 2010. He also has received honors from the Troop One Command Staff for making high numbers of DUI arrests for the last two years. He maintains one of the highest overall averages of arrests within Post A and all of Troop One. He is passionately committed to removing reckless and impaired drivers from the state's roadways.

TFC Stokes looks beyond the initial violation for other criminal activity. One example of that happened in July 2010. TFC Stokes made a traffic stop on a vehicle for failing to yield the right of way on Highway 261 and I-95 in Manning, SC. While he was conducting this traffic stop he noticed inconsistencies with the three occupants of the vehicle. He noticed several indicators and discrepancies with the subjects' stories that led him to investigate deeper into the traffic stop. The results of his diligence and investigation led to the apprehension of the three subjects for trafficking cocaine. This traffic stop netted 1,097 grams of cocaine, which is almost a kilo of cocaine.

When he is off duty, TFC Stokes is an avid hunter and fisherman. He is married to Loree Stokes and has a stepdaughter, Tinley McKinna. They reside in Camden. His parents are Starling and Cindy Stokes of Camden.

The Troop Two Trooper of the Year is L/Cpl. James Ashley:

Lance Corporal Ashley was introduced to law enforcement and the South Carolina Highway Patrol after witnessing first hand the long-lasting impact of drinking and driving on families and friends. On December 7, 2003, the 18-year-old sister of his wife was killed in an automobile collision in Abbeville County after the vehicle she was in lost control at a high rate of speed. The driver of the vehicle had been drinking and was unharmed in the collision. Due to the impact of that day, he regularly speaks to students at local high schools about the dangers of impaired driving and the importance of wearing their seatbelts. Lance Corporal Ashley is dedicated to his role as a state trooper and his mission of preventing other families from experiencing the tragedy of losing a loved one on the roads of South Carolina.

Lance Corporal Ashley's activity in 2010 was impressive within Abbeville and Greenwood Counties with 932 cases made, 847 warnings issued and 27 DUI arrests. He has developed a strong working relationship with local law enforcement agencies as well.

One particularly notable case for L/Cpl. Ashley was when he investigated a collision in Abbeville County that involved a felony DUI/hit and run that resulted in death. This investigation was complicated since both the victim and violator were members of the

same family. To complicate matters further, the family members were the nephews of Abbeville County Deputy Danny Wilson, who was murdered on December 8, 2003, while responding to assist another officer who was also killed. L/Cpl. Ashley recognized the gravity of the situation throughout the course of the investigation as he met with family members. He demonstrated compassion and professionalism.

L/Cpl. James Ashley was born in Donalds, South Carolina where he attended public schools and graduated from Dixie High School. Jamie attended Lander University and is currently attending Piedmont Technical College while working toward a degree in Criminal Justice. Jamie began his law enforcement career after graduating from Patrol School in May 2006.

Lance Corporal Ashley and his wife, Dione Bramlett Ashley, have one daughter, Mayson Grace Ashley. The Ashleys are members of Northside Baptist Church. His mother is Pamela Harmon of Donalds, SC. Jamie devotes much of his time to his family and friends. He enjoys spending time outdoors playing golf, camping, fishing and cooking.

The Troop Three Trooper of the Year is L/Cpl. Bradley J. Shaw:

Lance Corporal Bradley J. Shaw became a member of the South Carolina Highway Patrol in July 1998. He is currently assigned to Troop Three, Post D (Spartanburg).

L/Cpl. Shaw serves as a resource and an example for the other troopers in Spartanburg County. He is always willing to fill the duties of a supervisor if there is not one available. The other Troopers in the county know that if they have a question and a supervisor is not readily available, they can go to Lance Corporal Shaw with any questions or concerns they may have. His supervisors are confident that he will always provide sound guidance for other troopers.

There are two incidents that stand out in the past year that underscore L/Cpl. Shaw's uncommon dedication and compassion.

On May 30, 2010, during a routine license check, a vehicle drove through a checkpoint while all troopers were involved with other vehicles. The subject fled and eventually jumped into a lake, refusing to return to the shoreline. The suspect began having trouble staying afloat. Lance Corporal Shaw and Senior Trooper Bastian, due to their quick thinking, were able to gain access to a boat, rescuing the suspect who was arrested and later found to be in possession of a stolen ATV.

In September, L/Cpl. Shaw was dispatched to a traffic collision which involved two fatalities. Two elderly women lost their lives in the collision and both had young grandchildren in the car with them. Lance Corporal Shaw investigated the collision but also took extra care and compassion with the young children who were visibly shaken. He made numerous contacts with family members after the collision to ensure they understood the events of the collision.

Lance Corporal Shaw's commitment, dedication, willingness to work and lead, as well as his ability to enforce the laws of South Carolina while still showing concern and compassion are hallmarks of his character as a trooper.

He is married to Kristin Shaw and has one daughter, Peyton. Shaw is an Anderson native and he and his family currently reside in Boiling Springs.

Trooper of the Year for the entire state:

The Troop Four Trooper of the Year is L/Cpl. Earl D. McAbee:

Lance Corporal Earl D. McAbee is dedicated, dependable and his integrity is beyond reproach. He is well-respected by other troopers and law enforcement officers in Cherokee and Union counties. His attention to detail has led to several notable arrests in the past year.

On April 27, 2010, L/Cpl. McAbee was running stationary RADAR on I-85 when he clocked a white Ford pick-up at 85 in a 65 mph zone. He got behind the vehicle and realized it matched a BOLO for a murder and arson suspect out of Spartanburg County. He called for back-up from the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office before initiating a traffic stop. Upon activating his blue lights, the violator fled. L/Cpl. McAbee pursued the violator to the NC state line where he had to terminate his participation in the pursuit. NC authorities picked up the pursuit and chased the subject to Lexington, NC, on I-85 where his tires were deflated with stop-sticks. A stand-off ensued, lasting several hours and the subject was eventually taken into custody and now faces murder and arson charges.

L/Cpl. McAbee attempted to stop a DUI suspect on I-85 in October. He pursued the suspect into Spartanburg County until he came upon a construction zone, at which time L/Cpl. McAbee terminated the pursuit. As he reduced his speed and continued south, he came upon the suspect again where he had wrecked in a construction zone. He found the driver trapped in the vehicle, which had caught fire. He retrieved his fire extinguisher and put the fire out, saving the driver's life. The driver was under the influence and was charged with felony DUI-great bodily injury by Spartanburg County for causing injuries to his passengers in the crash.

L/Cpl. McAbee also worked two hit and run collisions with injuries during the year. He invested the time into both of these to identify the driver and vehicles involved. This attention to detail also helped L/Cpl. McAbee identify a case of insurance fraud resulting from a one-car collision in Union County. When confronted with the evidence, the driver admitted it was a staged wreck and he was doing it for insurance money.

In addition to his duties with the Patrol, he also serves on the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office Bloodhound Tracking Team on his own time. Before joining the Patrol, L/Cpl. McAbee served 10 years as a Blacksburg Police Officer and Cherokee County Deputy Sheriff.

The Troop Five Trooper of the Year is S/Tpr. J. T. “Tommy” Hicks:

Troop Five’s nominee for S.C. Highway Patrol Trooper of the Year for 2010 is Senior Trooper J. T. “Tommy” Hicks. S/Tpr. Hicks developed an interest in becoming part of the South Carolina Highway Patrol due to unfortunate circumstances. He was involved in a serious collision in Marion County in May of 2006 that resulted in two people losing their lives and resulting in his own injury.

S/Tpr. Hicks was highly impressed with the way the collision was handled by the Patrol and was more impressed with the level of professionalism displayed by the investigating Trooper. This experience was the overwhelming reason S/Tpr. Hicks decided to submit his application in an attempt to become a part of the South Carolina Highway Patrol. S/Tpr. Hicks was accepted and reported to the Criminal Justice Academy in July of 2007. Upon graduation he was assigned to Troop 5 and stationed in Post B (Florence/Dillon/Marion).

S/Tpr. Hicks has displayed a high level of overall activity and is first to respond to calls for service in his assigned area. S/Tpr. Hicks is vigilant in patrolling the identified areas of the Post that have the highest number of overall collisions and alcohol-related collisions. S/Tpr. Hicks has been a model trooper since coming to Troop 5.

He is a member of the Mullins Church of God where he has served as Deacon, Sunday School Teacher and Youth Director for 20 years. He has been involved with many charitable groups within his Church and is a World Missions Representative for Churches in Jamaica and Kenya.

The Troop Six trooper of the Year is S/Tpr. Z.K. Thompson:

S/Tpr. Z.K. Thompson is an important contributor to the success of Troop Six. He enjoys his work and is a leader among his peers. He consistently demonstrates the qualities of investigative and enforcement leadership.

In 2010, S/Tpr. Thompson made more than 1,700 cases and arrested 26 drivers for driving under the influence. One quality that sets him apart is his time management skills. This wise use of his time allows him to have a significant impact in his patrol duties.

S/Tpr. Thompson has an excellent rapport with his fellow troopers, supervisors, and local law enforcement. He places the needs of his team before his own. He demonstrates this daily by volunteering for collisions and taking assignments in which he can help or relieve a fellow trooper.

S/Tpr. Thompson’s drive for excellence enables him to pursue collision investigation in a professional and thorough manner with diligence, skill, knowledge, and a strong desire to ensure that the results of the investigation are appropriate and achieved within the parameters set by his training.

S/Tpr. Thompson's performance during 2010 is a credit to the mission of the Highway Patrol and the Department of Public Safety. He demonstrated enforcement and investigative leadership and professional law enforcement consistently throughout the year.

The Troop Seven Trooper of the Year is TFC Willie McCauley Jr.:

Trooper McCauley is a personable professional who is held in high esteem by his supervisors and co-workers. He displays a sincere commitment to highway safety, especially in the area of alcohol enforcement. He continues to be highly motivated to arrest and prosecute impaired drivers. For the second consecutive year, he led Troop Seven with 53 arrests for impaired driving. He displays a sincere commitment to highway safety, especially in the area of alcohol enforcement.

Trooper McCauley witnessed firsthand the dangers on the highways on December 8, 2008. At approximately 6:10 p.m., just hours after patrol school graduation, he was traveling home on a secondary road in Lee County. While approaching a vehicle traveling from the opposite direction, he suddenly saw a vehicle in his lane attempting to make a pass. The passing vehicle struck his patrol car head-on causing injuries to Trooper McCauley. He was shaken and sore from the impact of the collision and was transported to the hospital. He was later released and able to report to his duty station on time the following week.

Trooper McCauley displays a quiet demeanor, but motivates his co-workers with his strong work ethic and dedication to impaired driving enforcement. His dedication goes beyond the arrest and focuses also on successful prosecution in these cases to prevent these drivers from returning back to the roadways.

In addition to his enforcement duties, Trooper McCauley also volunteers for special assignments such as career day and reading to elementary school students in the community. He is the son of Willie and Mary Lee McCauley and was born and raised in Sumter County. He graduated from Bishopville High School in 1998 and joined the United States Army, where he served until 2004.

Trooper McCauley presents himself in a mature manner and is a role model for everyone he works with.

The Troop Eight Trooper of the Year is L/Cpl. Darrell Smith:

L/Cpl. Smith has been a member of the Highway Patrol since 2003 and assigned to the Safety Improvement Team since 2009. He prides himself on his thorough knowledge of South Carolina Laws, especially those that apply to his current assignment to the Region I Safety Improvement Team. He impartially and professionally enforces the work zone laws while motivating his teammates to follow suit. He can be depended on by both his supervisor and co-workers for support, advice, and guidance.

L/Cpl. Smith's dedication to his career and to improving the safety and welfare of the citizens of South Carolina is reflected in his outstanding job performance. L/Cpl. Smith's accomplishments for 2010 include: 16 DUI arrests and 61 collision investigations. L/Cpl. Smith made 2,287 total contacts of which he wrote 1,197 traffic citations and 1,231 warnings. Through his enforcement, and education of the public, he has -- without a doubt -- prevented many injuries or deaths as a result of unsafe driving in our state's work zones.

He is also a member of the Advanced Civil Emergency Response Team where he has had the opportunity to improve his skills in defensive tactics, strength conditioning and marksman skills. Trooper Smith is an active runner and enjoys working out.

Prior to his employment with the Highway Patrol he was a graduate of Bamberg-Ehrhardt High School and a proud member of the US Marine Corps, serving his country from 1991 to 1995. During his time in the military he served as a communications officer and had the opportunity to travel to many underdeveloped countries. After helping with the Haitian refugees, he realized how fortunate he was to have the comforts and amenities of home.

He currently resides in Lexington County with his wife, Yolanda, and their four children, Darius, Kyrsten, Fatima and Lauren. Together they attend the Gethsemane Baptist Church in Bamberg. L/Cpl. Smith stays busy during his time off -- traveling between Atlanta and Charlotte, with his two daughters, who are very active in cheerleading competitions. He also enjoys giving safety and education presentations at his daughter's school.

The Troop Nine Trooper of the Year is Cpl. Matthew Coffin:

Corporal Matthew B. (Matt) Coffin joined the South Carolina Highway Patrol in January 1993 and MAIT in January 2006 when he was assigned to the Midlands Team.

Cpl. Coffin has been instrumental in the investigation of several high profile cases and two cases involving hit-and-run collisions. On February 5, 2010, Cpl. Coffin received a call from the Lexington County Patrol supervisor who had a question about a pedestrian collision that they were investigating. Although not a mandatory MAIT callout, Cpl. Coffin took the initiative to immediately respond to the scene. Through his efforts and leadership, Cpl. Coffin determined that MAIT needed to have a more comprehensive involvement in the investigation. When media questions later arose about the events of that night, Cpl. Coffin's decision to conduct a more in-depth investigation allowed for these questions to be answered.

Another incident that is representative of his work ethic involved a hit and run. On the morning of December 11, 2010, Cpl. Coffin was the scene supervisor of a collision involving a pick-up truck that struck a motorcycle, killing the rider. The driver of the truck fled the scene on foot. Despite the limited scene evidence, Cpl. Coffin pressed on

throughout the day generating more and more information. Through his efforts and guidance, he and MAIT investigators gathered enough evidence by the end of the day to positively identify the hit and run driver and issue arrest warrants.

Shortly after that hit and run, he responded to another one on Christmas eve in which a pedestrian was struck and killed by a vehicle that fled the scene. As on-scene supervisor, Cpl. Coffin led the team to identify vehicle parts that were left at the scene by the fleeing vehicle. MAIT was able to determine the make, model and year range of the suspect vehicle. Cpl. Coffin was instrumental in locating the vehicle, driver and issuing arrest warrants for the driver and several of his accomplices involved in the cover up of the collision.

Cpl. Coffin is married to Lisa Coffin, of St. Matthews, and they have two children, son Kyle and daughter Brooke. They currently reside in Chapin, South Carolina.

The Troop Eleven Trooper of the Year is Cpl. Monty Coats:

Immediately upon Cpl. Coats' assignment to the Highway Patrol's Emergency Traffic Management Unit, he assumed responsibility for several key projects that had statewide implications. He focused on improving the department's Winter Storm Response Plan by coordinating the assignment of South Carolina National Guard wreckers to vulnerable stretches of interstates, refining communications procedures among the responding agencies, improving personnel accountability processes for responders, and solidifying Unified Command protocols among the lead agencies.

Corporal Coats assumed a key leadership role in winter storm events in January 2010 and January 2011. With only two months of emergency management experience, Corporal Coats coordinated the response to a winter storm during the weekend of January 31, 2010 that included leading conference calls among key response agencies, coordinating the deployment of support personnel and resources, maintaining accountability for deployed resources for the duration of the event, and ensuring the demobilization of these assets.

During the January 11, 2011 winter storm, Corporal Coats managed all logistics and planning aspects of the response, while completing preparations for the Highway Patrol's role in Governor Haley's Inauguration. In addition to Corporal Coats' instrumental work with the Winter Storm Response Plan, he played a vital role in the planning and implementation of Highway Patrol transportation missions for the 2010 Southern Legislative Conference and the 2011 Gubernatorial Inauguration of the Honorable Nikki Haley.

Corporal Coats demonstrated complete attention to detail and an absolute commitment in executing these missions. He produced thorough plans that ensured the timely deployment and accountability of all resources as well as providing for the safety of all participants and dignitaries.

Telecommunications Officer of the Year

The nominee for the Anderson and Spartanburg TCCs is TCO Stephanie Morgan:

TCO Morgan is an excellent communications operator. She shows professionalism to the troopers on the road and is quick to assist the public with their calls for service. She has been a communications operator with the department at the Anderson Telecommunications Center since November 17, 2005.

TCO Morgan is a reliable and dependable employee. She did not miss a day of work for sick leave in 2010. This is just one example of her exemplary work ethic and the concern she shows for her position and fellow operators. In addition to her excellent attendance record, she is willing to help when she is called to come in because the center is short-staffed.

TCO Morgan is also willing to help out in any other job duty that is asked of her and often helps with paperwork without being asked to do so. TCO Morgan is proficient with the CAD and is a trainer for the Anderson TCC.

She participated in selling merchandise for the Special Olympics in 2010 and was one of the top sellers. She is quick to jump in and help out with special events of this nature.

TCO Morgan is married and has a 1-year-old daughter named Allie. She attends West Pelzer Baptist Church.

The nominee for the Charleston TCC is TCO Brittney Garrett:

TCO Garrett came to our center on March 17, 2008, and then became a full-time Telecommunications Operator on August 17, 2008. She was born in Clarendon County and graduated from Manning High.

She comes from a Law Enforcement family and she knew what it meant to be a Telecommunications Operator. Therefore, we knew what we could expect from her and that she recognized the level of professionalism needed to perform this job well. Within a short period of time she was off and running the radio with minimal supervision. She learned her duties very quickly.

TCO Garrett has a good work ethic and is very dependable. She was the first to volunteer to work in another center due to the death of one of their operators. She makes every effort to assist others without being asked and works well with everyone.

The nominee for the Florence TCC is TCO Terry C. Trejo:

TCO Trejo joined the Communications Unit on January 17, 2009, from Dillon County Communications. Since coming to the Department, Terry has excelled in all aspects of

training, attaining all required certifications, and remains driven and determined to learn all aspects of the duties of a telecommunications operator.

It is incumbent upon the communications manager to insure proper staffing of the communications center. Success in this aspect is impossible without cooperation and flexibility from our operators. TCO Trejo came to us with a very strong work ethic as proven by her flexibility in scheduling and her willingness to change hours, rest days, and even leave time in order to assist in adequate staffing of the Florence Communications Center. She is bilingual and has used her ability to fluently speak Spanish in order to assist the public and co-workers.

TCO Trejo serves the needs of our personnel as well as the general public in a compassionate, professional, and proficient manner. She has developed -- and maintains -- a great working relationship with her supervisors, her subordinates, and uniformed personnel.

Telecommunications Officer of the Year:

The nominee for the Greenwood Telecommunications Center is TCO Margie Kirby:

On October 21, 2010 at 2:40 p.m., TCO Margie Kirby received a call in the Greenwood Telecommunication Center about a reckless driver on I-26 WB at the 78 mm. The complainant advised that it was a green Pontiac Sunfire speeding, switching lanes and almost causing a wreck.

She gave out the BOLO and had two units on the lookout for the vehicle. This is when ACE Unit L/Cpl. T. K. Teaster Jr. advised that he would be at the split of I-26 and I-385, waiting to see if he spotted this vehicle. At 3:03 p.m., L/Cpl. Teaster advised that he was stopping the vehicle. He then advised TCO Kirby that he had a male who was belligerent in the front passenger seat.

When TCO Kirby asked L/Cpl. Teaster if he needed the county to be en route to him, he didn't answer her. However, she stayed very calm and asked if someone in the room would call the county for her.

The Telecommunication Center from Greenville TCC advised that L/Cpl. Teaster had hit his Emergency Alarm and said that shots had been fired and they needed an ambulance. Then, the TCC found out from Laurens County that a suspect was down and there was an ambulance en route. But there was still no confirmation that L/Cpl. Teaster was ok.

During all of these events, TCO Kirby remained calm, getting all the units to the scene and ensuring the proper people were notified. TCO Kirby was instrumental in coordinating the help needed in an emergency situation such as this by remaining calm and professional. Trooper Teaster was injured by the suspect in this incident but has returned to duty.

Regardless of the task, TCO Margie Kirby is given she is ready, willing and able to do whatever is asked of her. She is a very reliable trainer to the new TCOs that come into Greenwood Telecommunication Center.

The nominee from the Blythewood Center is TCO Lavatron Clisby:

TCO Clisby came to work with the Department of Public Safety on December 17, 2005. He is always willing to go the extra mile to assist the Blythewood Communications Center in any capacity needed. On several occasions he has worked unscheduled hours to ensure coverage. TCO Clisby plays a vital part in the Hurricane Evacuation Drills. He is always willing to assist other operators and the supervisors whether it is calling wreckers, running traffic, entering warrants, or assisting in any capacity needed. TCO Clisby does an excellent job ensuring all documentation is complete and that all CAD calls have all the information required.

TCO Clisby is also a designated trainer for the Blythewood Telecommunications Center. He has trained several operators within the last two years and has done an excellent job of making sure that the new operators are trained correctly. TCO Clisby makes it very clear that his top priority in the communications center is officer safety.