

COUNTY OF KENT  
**OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF**

**LAWRENCE A. STELMA, SHERIFF**



Sheriff Larry Stelma would like to extend a personal invitation to all our friends in the media to attend the Kent County Sheriff's Office Annual Awards Ceremony scheduled on Thursday, May 16, 2018, doors open at 5 PM, award presentation starts at 6 PM, at the Kent County Sheriff's Office Equestrian Training Center, 4687 Kroes Avenue, Rockford.

Awards to be presented include Military Deployment Awards, a Unit Citation, and Life Saving awards. Citizens will also be recognized for their contributions to public safety; receiving Life Saving Awards and Letters of Appreciation.

We are also pleased to announce that the following employees have been selected as the 2017 Deputies of the Year and Civilian Employee of the Year (see attached information):

**Diane Kawa**, Clerk Steno III, selected as 2017 Civilian Employee of the Year  
**Deputy Matthew Kennedy**, selected as 2017 Deputy of the Year - Corrections  
**Detective Aron Bowser**, selected as 2017 Deputy of the Year - Law Enforcement  
**Captain Don DeGroot**, selected as the 2017 Traffic Squad Special Deputy of the Year

These individuals will be honored during the Kent County Sheriff Department Annual Awards Ceremony on Wednesday, May 16, 2018. Please join us in celebrating all of these accomplishments.

Media contact: Sgt. Joel Roon, 616-632-6236

## 2017 CIVILIAN EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

### DIANE KAWA



It is with great pleasure that the Kent County Sheriff's Office names Diane Kawa as 2017 Civilian Employee of the Year.

Diane Kawa began her career with the County of Kent on January 10, 2000 as a Clerk II. Diane transferred to the Sheriff's Office on June 26, 2000 assigned as Clerk II in the Records Bureau. On December 4, 2000, Diane was promoted to Clerk Steno III in the Jail Administration Office.

Diane serves as the Kent County Correctional Facility's office administrator. In this role, Diane not only has countless duties and tasks she completes daily, but she also manages many varied and unpredictable situations that arise. Diane is always willing to work with security and civilian staff throughout the jail and facilitates the daily administration office business by ensuring requests and services are handled in an efficient and professional manner. Co-workers know they can go to Diane for answers as she is very knowledgeable in her field. Regardless of the duty, Diane is proficient and consistent.

As the saying goes, you do not appreciate everything a person does until they are gone. This could not be truer in the case of Diane. While Diane was off work last year dealing with health issues, her duties were evaluated and temporarily reassigned. It took not just one person to cover her duties but several persons. This fact indicates how efficient Diane is with her workload. Her list of duties is long, varied, and complex, and she completes them competently and proficiently.

Diane's day-to-day contributions are significant and cannot be contained within a single letter. Her devotion to the Sheriff's Office continually enriches our environment. Diane's high ethics and morals are evident not only in her work, but in her values as a mother and grandmother. Simply said, Diane is an exceptionally respected person with a positive attitude and we are proud to have her as a member of the Kent County Sheriff's Office team.

Diane Kawa has exhibited qualities and standards of excellence well worthy of our praise. Along with your fellow officers, I wish to extend my personal gratitude for a job well done and congratulations on being named 2017 Civilian Employee of the Year.

## 2017 DEPUTY OF THE YEAR - CORRECTIONS

### DEPUTY MATTHEW KENNEDY



It is with great pleasure the Kent County Sheriff's Office names Deputy Matthew Kennedy the 2017 Deputy of the Year - Corrections. Matthew began his career at the Sheriff's Office on November 18, 2002, responsible for the general supervision and custody of inmates, conducting inmate searches, transfers, and investigations regarding alleged incidents within the facility.

Matthew has proven to be an asset to the Sheriff's Office. He possesses an excellent work ethic and great leadership qualities. He is currently a member of the Correctional Engagement Response Team (CERT) and is also a Critical Incident Response De-Briefer. In 2016, Matthew was assigned as a member of the Kent County K-9 Unit, with his K-9 partner, Deputy RJ. RJ assists with performing cell searches and with narcotic detection.

Matthew is willing and capable to work any position within the jail and does so without complaint. He is reliable, dedicated, and professional. He multitasks effectively and has proven himself capable of handling a high stress work assignment. This is demonstrated by his work assignment history of Intake and Classification. Deputy Kennedy has an upbeat attitude and demonstrates excellent interpersonal communication skills.

Deputy Matthew Kennedy has exhibited qualities and standards of excellence well worthy of our praise. Along with your fellow officers, I wish to extend my personal gratitude for a job well done and congratulations on being named 2017 Deputy of the Year - Corrections.

## 2017 DEPUTY OF THE YEAR - LAW ENFORCEMENT

### DETECTIVE ARON BOWSER



It is with great pleasure that the Kent County Sheriff's Office names Detective Aron Bowser the 2017 Deputy of the Year - Law Enforcement.

In January 1995, Aron Bowser began his career at the Kent County Sheriff's Office as a County Patrol Officer. Aron was assigned to the Investigative Division in 1998 and has served on numerous teams, including Domestic Violence Unit, Financial Crimes-Metro Fraud Unit Task Force, General and Major Case Teams, and was elected Team Leader for the Department's TAC Team from 1996-2008.

Throughout his career, Aron investigated several high-profile cases. He was the first detective to join the newly formed Metro Fraud Unit Task Force, where his contacts from the financial community have often been used by other detectives. While assigned to the Major Case Team, he investigated a murder of a 16-year-old girl. The case resulted in a guilty plea by the suspect, who was her brother. As a testament on how Aron treats others, the victim's family wrote a letter thanking Aron for his empathy and support. They said his willingness to answer their questions and guide them through a foreign process helped them with their grief and healing. Aron was lead detective in a disturbing arson fire that resulted in the death of thirteen Equine Therapy Horses. Although the suspect was immediately identified, it was a difficult case to prove as it was further complicated by the fact that the fire investigator did not have conclusive evidence to rule it an arson. Detective Bowser spent hundreds of hours investigating the case that ultimately ended in the suspect pleading guilty.

Aron carries out his duties in a professional and courteous manner. He is a dedicated and hardworking deputy with a strong work ethic. Even after having a significant health issue, Aron was eager to come back to work as soon as possible. He comes to work every day with a positive attitude and is team oriented. Aron is well respected by his peers and supervisors and is considered a natural leader due to his experience.

Detective Aron Bowser has exhibited qualities and standards of excellence well worthy of our praise. Along with your fellow officers, I wish to extend my personal gratitude for a job well done and congratulations on being named 2017 Deputy of the Year - Law Enforcement.

**KENT COUNTY TRAFFIC SQUAD  
2017 SPECIAL DEPUTY OF THE YEAR**

**CAPTAIN DON DEGROOT**



It is with great pleasure that the Kent County Traffic Squad names Captain Don De Groot the 2017 Traffic Squad Deputy of the Year.

Don De Groot joined the Traffic Squad and completed the then six-week training regimen in 1976. In 1977, he developed a comprehensive training academy. This new academy was in conjunction with Grand Valley State University and the Michigan Law Enforcement Standards Training Counsel. He then managed the Traffic Squad Academy in 1978, 1979 and 1980.

Beyond improving and developing the Squad Academy, Don continued to greatly enhance the Squad's value to the Law Enforcement community and the citizens of Kent County over the years. As he was appointed Captain of the Traffic Squad, it became and remains his goal to set and maintain the standards necessary to meet or exceed the high levels of professionalism, conduct and presence expected of all Kent County Traffic Squad deputies.

In 2005, Sheriff Stelma requested that the Squad develop a Mounted Unit. Don was integral in building a team to research the scope, make-up and specifications of both the unit and the necessary facilities. Through hard work and the generosity of the community, over \$1.5 million was raised, culminating in the outstanding unit and facility that serves Kent County today.

In addition to holding numerous leadership positions and board seats in the community, Don owns and runs a financial consulting firm specializing in business succession planning, executive benefits design, and estate planning. He has been married to his wife Cheryl for 35 years and is the proud father of five children. He has also been able to watch his son John share his passion and serve with the Kent County Sheriff's Office in Road Patrol and the Detective Bureau and rise to rank of Sergeant.

With his vision, goal-driven operating style, continuous pursuit of excellence, tireless work ethic, dedication to community service and most of all his sincere desire to help those around him succeed, Captain De Groot exemplifies great leadership. The Squad would not be the organization it is today without him.

Captain Don De Groot has exhibited qualities and standards of excellence well worthy of our praise. Along with your fellow officers, I wish to extend my personal gratitude for a job well done and congratulations on being named Kent County Traffic Squad Special Deputy of the Year.