



Program

Nomination Contact Information

Name of Person or Group Being Nominated

Name / Agency / Business Name: Laura Passanesi, Stephen Leighton, Christine Weiss
MCSO (Martin County Sheriff's Office)

Address: 800 SE Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida 34994

Telephone #: 772-220-7000

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E-mail: cweiss@sheriff.martin.fl.us

Nominated By

Name: Capt. Jenell Atlas

Agency / Business: Martin County Sheriff's Office

Address: 800 SE Monterey Road, Stuart, FL. 34994

Telephone: 772-220-7000

E-Mail: jcatlas@sheriff.martin.fl.us

August 9, 2013

Ms. Laura Passanesi
Martin County Sheriff's Office
800 SE Monterey Road
Stuart, Florida 34994

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| <p>RE: FLORIDA CRIME PREVENTION ASSOCIATION AWARDS OUTSTANDING CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAM NOMINATION</p> |
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Dear Members of the FCPA Nomination Committee:

It is my privilege to nominate the Martin County Sheriff's Office Community Programs "Pillow Case Burglaries" Social Media and Community Awareness Outreach Blue Print Effort for the Outstanding Crime Prevention Program. This newly revamped Unit of three people has taken a new look at an existing program and completely changed the way the Sheriff's Office reaches out to our citizens.

Martin County, like many Florida counties has been plagued with "pillowcase burglaries". The home burglaries are named this because the thieves steal pillow cases in the homes they break into and use them to take haul away cash and other valuables. Since 2011 the Sheriff's Office has investigated more than 92 burglaries involving young men from South Florida who travel to Martin County to break into homes and steal jewelry, cash and guns using pillow cases as their calling card.

Since taking office in January 2013, Sheriff William Snyder tasked the agency, and specifically the Community Programs Unit, with taking a proactive approach that would include a targeted and widely encompassing method. Using a base of the Neighborhood Watch Programs already in place, and calling town hall type meetings, the Community Programs Unit attached a social media component that served as a blue print for reaching as many Martin County residents as possible. This simple formula of using established methods of reaching out to the citizens coupled with social media caught the attention of citizens, the media and the bad guys.

The agency conducted 4 town hall meetings where approximately 700 citizens attended. The Sheriff made many pro-active suggestions for citizens, such as getting an alarm and informing neighbors when they will be away for any length of time. He also suggested going to back to the age old method of watching who comes and goes in your community, taking note of vehicles and guests who may not have business there. Since the effort began, the county has issued approximately 300 new alarm permits, significantly increased the calls for suspicious vehicle activity, and created a renewed sense of ownership for the communities we live in. We

have had 23 requests for new crime watch groups and almost a dozen social media pages created by Home Owners Associations hoping to network to the Martin County Sheriff's page. Since the town hall meetings, we have made 25-additional Pillowcase Burglary arrests due to citizens calling in suspicious vehicles. To date, we have 48 suspected pillow case burglars still in our jail, and we have recovered thousands in stolen property. Moreover, we have increased our Facebook likes by thousands, now approaching 8,000 total. We have managed to turn our social media efforts into a daily ritual for Martin County residents who want to know what is going on in their community. We have actually been able to post information about suspected burglars as it happens, prompting users to give locations, tips and information that has lead us to the capture of many of the suspects. In one posting, the views hit 100,000 within hours of the posting. Through all of our efforts, we have opened up a new line of communication and information flow with the citizens of our county. We have utilized the power of knowledge and transparency when it comes to letting the community know exactly what is going on in our community. By doing so, we are one of the only counties that has been pillowcase burglary free for the past few weeks. In fact, upon questioning the final suspects caught, and posted on Facebook, they told Detectives that the word on the streets is that Martin County was "hot", and it is best to avoid us. Those who came in despite the warning said they got off of the interstate and didn't realize they were in Martin County until the blue lights were behind them.

In just over six months, Martin County residents have been introduced to, and have been instrumental in extinguishing a crime that has plagued our county for almost two years. That was done by utilizing social media, town hall meetings and transparency. This effort has not only proven to be effective, it has actually brought communities closer, and has shown residents that are truly stakeholders in the county. The days of withholding information about criminal activity in our communities is long over. Now, we have proven that information and information flow utilized in conjunction with good law enforcement and crime prevention practices, are the most effective tools in fighting back.

Thank You,

Captain Jenell Atlas, MCSO



Award Application For
Outstanding Crime Prevention Program

A copy of the "Award Nomination Categories" page and the "Nomination Contact Information" page must accompany EACH nomination.

Award Nomination Categories

Check one:

- Category A
Outstanding Crime Prevention Organization
- Category B
Outstanding Crime Prevention Program
- Category C
Crime Prevention Volunteer of the Year
- Category D
Crime Prevention Unit of the Year
- Category E
Crime Prevention Practitioner of the Year
- Category F
New Horizon Award
- Category G
Lifetime Achievement Award
- Category H
President's Award (*This award is presented by the FCPA President for outstanding commitment to the area of crime prevention. No nominations are accepted. See Category H, page 12, for additional information about this award*)

Nomination Contact Information

NAME OF PERSONS AND/OR GROUPS BEING NOMINATED

The names and groups being nominated are:

1. The Martin County Sheriff's Office

- Person: **Martin County Sheriff William Snyder**
- Address: Martin County Sheriff's Office, 800 SE Monterey Rd., Stuart, FL, 34994
- Telephone: 772-220-7170
- Fax #: 772-220-7043

2. The Stuart News

- Persons: **Journalists Keona Gardner, Will Greenlee, Laurie Blandford, and Rich Campbell**
- Address: 1939 SE Federal Highway, Stuart, FL, 34994
- Telephone: 772-287-1550
- Fax #: 772-220-8919

3. Neighborhood Watch Groups of Martin County

- Person: **Laura Passanesi, Practitioner**
- Organization: Community Programs Unit, Martin County Sheriff's Office
- Address: 800 SE Monterey Road, Stuart, FL, 34994
- Telephone: 772-320-4749
- Fax #: 772-220-7159
- Email: lgpassanesi@sheriff.martin.fl.us

PERSON DOING THE NOMINATING

- Name: **James Brown**
- Address: 8087 SE Coconut Street, Hobe Sound, FL, 33455
- Telephone: 772 546 0985
- Fax: None
- Email: hobesound@comcast.net

ORGANIZATION INFORMATION

- **Name of major organizations who implemented the program:**
 - Martin County Sheriff's Office.
 - Stuart News.
 - Neighborhood Watch groups of Martin County.
- **Date the program was implemented:**
 - Program was implemented in full swing starting April 2013.
- **Crime problem targeted:**
 - Pillowcase burglars from Broward County and copycats from other counties.
- **Community group or geographical area targeted by the program:**
 - Martin County.
- **Accomplishments from October 2012 to September 2013 entitling them to this nomination:**

Martin County Sheriff's Office -- Sheriff Bill Snyder:

- Since officially becoming the Sheriff of Martin County on January 8, 2013, William Snyder decided his department needed additional help from the community to stem a wave of pillowcase burglaries in his county that began June 2011. **The only way his department was going to catch them is (1) in the act with the help of Martin County residents, (2) by sharing information with the people to help them avoid being victimized, and (3) encouraging the residents to call 911 if they saw anyone who did not appear to belong in the area.** In other words, the best defense against these pillowcase burglars who strike during the day when residents are away from home is alert neighbors who look out for one another.
- Residents can often spot suspicious activity in their own neighborhood more quickly than law enforcement officials. They know who belongs there and knows who does not. Sheriff Snyder would love to put a deputy on every block, but his resources are finite.
- **At his four Town Hall meetings in April 2013 attended by more than 500 people**, Sheriff Snyder discussed the following concerning the pillowcase burglars;
 - He has 100 percent zero tolerance for these pillowcase burglars.
 - Burglars' method of operation.
 - Late teens to mid-20s from Broward County, driving a rental car with dark-tinted windows and possessing tools to gain entry into the home.
 - Traditional crime prevention measures such as fences, alarms and large dogs do not deter them. In Palm City, for example, the burglars used pepper spray on dogs present in a home being burglarized.
 - *"They have really good instincts. They have a good sense about which houses to hit."*
 - They usually knock on the front door, and if somebody answers, they pretend to be some type of salesman or say *"Oh, I am looking for this person. If you get a suspicious visitor like that, and does not look right, call 911 immediately."*
 - If no one answers the door, the thieves enter the homes by shattering sliding glass doors or windows. In less than 5 minutes, they toss a room, pulling out drawers looking for cash, coins, jewelry, cameras, firearms, small electronic equipment, and knocking pictures off the walls searching for safes. Part of their method of operation is taking pillowcases off the victims' beds to carry the stolen property.
 - Message from Sheriff Snyder to the Martin County residents.
 - Urged the neighbors to communicate with each other to learn neighbors' routines and their vehicles.

- Urged the residents of Martin County to "be our eyes and ears", and "call 911 whenever you see anything suspicious. If you call us, we will come and we will catch them."
- The Sheriff's method of operation is taking a proactive approach by blanketing targeted areas with uniformed and plainclothes deputies and asking the public to call 911 to report suspicious activity in order to nab as many suspects as his department can.
- **In May 2013,** and since these burglars ride with tinted windows, the Martin County Sheriff's Office started to flag motorists to stop for an inspection of their tinted windows to determine if they meet the tinted window laws as part of its overall strategy to stop pillowcase burglaries. Snyder's message is *"we want these pillowcase burglars to know that we are stopping cars with dark tinted windows with the express intent of catching them."*
- **In June 2013,** the Sheriff's Office partnered with the Martin County Fire Rescue where residents receive phone messages when these burglaries or other issues are occurring in their neighborhood. In one case, the Sheriff's Office put out a Reverse 911 phone alert to hundreds of residents after a manhunt for burglars began. Deputies said it put people into the streets looking around and being alert. The burglar was caught due to a vigilant resident and good law enforcement work.
- Since people are also getting their news from the Internet and social media, the Martin County Sheriff's Office has enlisted the public's help through social media. Its Facebook page has seen its popularity jump from about **1,200 "likes"** at the beginning of this year to now almost **8,000 "likes"**. The goal of their Facebook page is to reach out to the community to let them know what is going on at the Sheriff's Office, and letting them take part in what they are doing. For example, on June 23, 2013, its Facebook page alerted the citizens the pillow case burglars have branched out into vehicle burglaries.
- For residential burglaries, the State Attorney for the Treasure Coast and the judges have agreed the bail bonds could be as high as \$500,000, and as high as \$1,000,000 if there is an occupant in the residence during the burglary. Furthermore, the money used to bond out of jail must be proven it came from legitimate sources, not illegitimate ones such as money made from previous burglaries.

Stuart News -- Keona Gardner, Will Greenlee, Laurie Blandford, and Rich Campbell:

- The local news media and especially the Stuart News joined this effort by giving unprecedented coverage of these Sheriff Town Hall meetings as well as to the pillow case burglars and their copycats as they occurred. Their journalists, Keona Gardner, Will Greenlee, Laurie Blandford, and Rich Campbell provided most informative and comprehensive news reports for the citizens of Martin County to read. ***The daily readership of the Stuart News is 45,000.***
- Click on <http://www.tcpalm.com/news/news/pillowcaseburglaries/> for examples of their in-depth coverage, including solutions from law enforcement and residents. The residents of Martin County can view a map of the burglary locations, and get more information on suspect descriptions, crime prevention tips, and similarities among all burglaries. You will note credit is given to residents whenever they were helpful in assisting the deputies in apprehending the pillowcase burglars.
- **On June 26, 2013,** the Stuart News sponsored an-hour long internet chat (<http://tcpalm.com/digitaltownhall/>) moderated by journalists Laurie Blandford and Lawrence Reisman, Port St. Lucie Chief John Bolduc and Sheriff William Snyder. **Hundreds of readers tuned in.** These two law enforcement officials informed the audience about the burglars' methods of operation, their descriptions, and crime prevention tips to better protect the audience's property. *They again urged the residents to immediately call 911 whenever anything does not appear "just right" to them.* When asked what message Sheriff Snyder has for the pillowcase burglars from Broward County, he stated the following:
 - *"We have arrested 50 of you now, and if you keep coming, we will keep arresting you.*

- *We will keep you in our jail for as long as the law allows.*
- *We will work with the State Attorney.*
- *We will not do any plea bargaining.*
- *If you get caught in Martin County, my detectives know we take no plea bargains.*
- *The only bargain we like is 15 to 20 years in state prisons.*
- *We are not tired of fighting with you, and we will keep fighting with you by doing everything we can in mobilizing this agency to stop what you are doing.*
- *Do not expect any mercy if you come to Martin County."*

Neighborhood Watch groups of Martin County -- Laura Passanesi:

- The Martin County Neighborhood Watch groups under the leadership of Laura Passanesi have also joined this war on these burglars and copycats by having as a goal to take their neighborhoods off the map for these burglars.
- The burglars realize most suburban residents live in isolation from their neighbors. The residents may know the family that lives next door, but what about people two or three doors down? In the past, our communities were populated with stay-at-home moms. Because today there are fewer of residents around during the day to keep watch on the neighborhood, residential burglaries have increased.
- Realistically, the police cannot be in every neighborhood on every street, but the citizens can. A Neighborhood Watch Group is a great way to get additional eyes into the community that the Martin County Sheriff's Office does not have all of the resources to do so.
- Laura Passanesi, who coordinates community programs for the Martin County Sheriff's Office, advised various communities they can help by forming a Neighborhood Watch Group so as to minimize the chances of the residences being victimized. To date, Martin County has 68 Neighborhood Watch communities. They meet monthly with Laura Passanesi to review and discuss the latest activities of the Martin County Sheriff's Office to combat crimes. They in turn report, on a monthly basis, these latest activities and recommendations to the residents of their communities. Some of these activities recently forwarded to these residents are:
 - Updates on pillowcase, distraction and car burglaries, and how best to prevent being burglarized.
 - Craig's List, purchasing cars over the internet, grandparents' scams, and other scams, and how best to prevent the residents from being scammed.
 - Stolen vehicles and trucks, and how best to prevent them from being stolen.
 - Launching new systems such as cell phone reporting and "On line reporting", and reverse 911 information.
 - How the pawn shops operate.
 - Remind people to make sure they "Like" us on the Martin County Sheriff's Office Facebook.
- One of her community programs is to coordinate National Night Out. This year, it was a smashing success. Families from Martin's Crossings, Martin Meadows, Willoughby Cay, North Hobe Sound Shores and Palm Lake Park came out in their neighborhood to support this event. **500 people took part.**
- Laura also does residential security surveys to make security recommendations for target hardening. Since October 2012, she has made over 100 such surveys.
- Laura also advises the coordinators of the major pillow case burglaries by email within 24 hours after they occur as well as discussing them at her monthly meetings.
- Laura also schedules the one-day Citizen's Academy which provides a greater perspective, respect and appreciation for the challenges and decisions faced daily in safeguarding Martin County.
- Laura provides a monthly report of criminal activities for each Neighborhood Watch community to the Neighborhood Watch coordinators so that they can mail it to the residents of their communities.

NOMINATING SUMMARY

As a result of Martin County's outstanding crime prevention program, the overwhelming reason that Martin County has now seen a lull in pillow case burglaries is the use of a 3 pronged approach – Martin County Sheriff William Snyder, the Stuart News and Laura Passanesi's Neighborhood Watch Group.

- As of March 27, 2013, there were 92 pillowcase burglaries committed since 2011, 16 of which were committed since January 1, 2013. As a result, the newly elected Sheriff of Martin County declared war, in March 2013, by mobilizing, engaging and educating the residents of Martin County of their activities by having four Town Hall meetings in April 2013. These meetings were in Stuart, Palm City, Jensen Beach and Hobe Sound.
- Another purpose of Sheriff Snyder's Town Hall meetings was to encourage the residents of Martin County to partner with law enforcement to catch these pillowcase burglars by being ever so vigilant of their surroundings, property and happenings in their neighborhoods. Most importantly, these residents were urged by Sheriff Snyder to immediately call 911 whenever anything does not appear "just right" to them in order to assist the Martin County Deputies to catch these burglars to put them in jail. If their neighborhood does not have a Neighborhood Watch group, he urged them to start one by contacting Laura Passanesi at the Martin County Sheriff's Office for additional information. **Approximately 500 residents attended these four town meetings.**
- The local news media and especially the Stuart News joined this war by giving unprecedented coverage of these Town Hall meetings as well as to the pillow case burglars and their copycats. Their reporters, Keona Gardner, Will Greenlee, Laurie Blandford, and Rich Campbell provided in-depth coverage, including solutions from law enforcement and residents. The residents of Martin County viewed a map of the burglary locations, and got more information on suspect descriptions, crime prevention tips, and similarities among all burglaries. You will note credit is given to residents whenever they were helpful in assisting the deputies in apprehending the pillowcase burglars. **The daily readership of the Stuart News is 45,000.**
- On June 26, 2013, the Stuart News sponsored an-hour long internet chat moderated by journalists Laurie Blandford and Lawrence Reisman, Port St. Lucie Chief John Bolduc and Sheriff William Snyder. These two law enforcement officials informed the audience of the burglars' method of operation, their descriptions, and crime prevention tips to better protect their property. They again urged the residents to immediately call 911 whenever anything does not appear "just right" to them. **Hundreds of listeners tuned in.**
- The Martin County Neighborhood Watch groups under the leadership of Laura Passanesi have also joined this effort against these burglars and copycats by having as a goal to take their neighborhoods off the map for these burglars. Since the Town Hall meetings of Sheriff Snyder occurred in April, nine communities have started their own Neighborhood Watch Groups. The Neighborhood Watch Coordinators of these nine groups and 11 from other Neighborhood Watch groups meet monthly with Laura Passanesi to review the latest criminal activities of the County. They in turn keep up to date on these latest criminal activities and discuss recommendations to prevent them from happening to the residents of their communities. **The estimated number of residents in these Neighborhood Watch communities is approximately 5,000.**
- For residential burglaries, the State Attorney for the Treasure Coast and the judges have agreed the bail bonds could be as high as \$500,000, and as high as \$1,000,000 if there is an occupant in the residence during the burglary.
- To date, the 911 calls have helped apprehend **50 pillowcase burglars**, with at least 18 this year. 19 of them are still in jail waiting to be tried. Since this intensive crime prevention program started in April 2013, **the number of pillowcase burglaries has declined dramatically.**
- **Martin County has had, to date, one of the most arrests of pillowcase burglars than any counties in Florida. In other words, if these pillowcase burglars come to Martin County, they will disturb the bee hive, and the 45,000 bees will come out in masses to sting them!**

Dave Lucas
8565 SE Palm Street
Hobe Sound, FL, 33455, USA

August 21, 2013

Dear Jim:

As a result of the number of arrests of pillowcase burglars in Martin County, my wife and I agree Martin County Sheriff William Snyder, the reporters at the Stuart News, and the Martin County Neighborhood Watch Groups managed by Laura Passanesi, Practitioner of the Community Programs Unit of Martin County Sheriff's Office, stand out like shining stars, and should be recognized for their outstanding 2013 Crime Prevention Programs.

Prior to April 2013, only a minority of the residents in Martin County were aware of the rash of burglaries known as "pillowcase burglaries." Due to the major efforts of the above individuals, the majority of the people in Martin County are now (1) aware of who the pillowcase burglars are, (2) their mode of operation, (3) the similarities among all pillowcase burglaries, and (4) how best to protect their property.

Most importantly, the majority of the residents of Martin County are now aware their Sheriff's Office needs the assistance of the public, especially if they are home, not working, or they happen to be retired, by (1) just keeping a keen eye on their neighborhood by observing who is coming in and out of the neighborhood, and (2) knowing what cars their neighbors have. If they notice something odd or something that appears out of place, they are to call 911 immediately.

Based on what we have observed, once immediately called, the Martin County deputies will pursue suspects with a dogged tenacity until apprehending as many of them as possible to put them in jail. In other words, if these pillowcase burglars come to Martin County, they will disturb the bee hive, and the bees will come out in masses to sting them!

Sincerely yours,

Dave Lucas