

## PRESS RELEASE

October 18, 2017

### ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS HOST THEIR 2017 PUBLIC SAFETY PROFESSIONALS EVENT



The Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders commemorated Public Safety Professionals during its annual celebration. Pictured above are (from left to right, back row) Former Fire Director Michael R. Dowd, Lieutenant David L. Whatley, Firefighter Antonio Padilla, Undersheriff Kevin Ryan, Officer Edward H. Carter, Jr., Freeholder Leonard M. Luciano, Captain Michael Ruglio, Freeholder At-Large Lebbby C. Jones (from left to right, front row), Freeholder Wayne L. Richardson, Freeholder Cynthia D. Toro, Captain Monique D. Smith, Officer Amanda Kuchta, Freeholder At-Large Patricia Sebold, Undersheriff Amir D. Jones, and East Orange Councilman Captain Mustafa Al-M. Brent. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

(Newark, NJ) – The Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders held its 2017 Public Safety Professionals Celebration on Wednesday, October 18, 2017, at the Hall of Records to commemorate fire officials, police officers, and first responders in Essex County for their selfless service.

Freeholder President Britnee N. Timberlake began the program with welcoming remarks, celebrating each of the Board's honorees for their bravery and sacrifices. This year's honorees included: **Officer Amanda Kuchta** of Bloomfield; **Captain Monique D. Smith** of Irvington; **Former Fire Director Michael R. Dowd** of West Orange; **Lieutenant David L. Whatley** of Newark; **Captain Michael Ruglio** of Verona; **Undersheriff Kevin Ryan** of Nutley; **Undersheriff Amir D. Jones** of East Orange; **Captain Mustafa Al-M. Brent** of East Orange; **Firefighter Antonio Padilla** of Newark; and **Officer Edward H. Carter, Jr.**, of Newark.

**Officer Amanda Kuchta** is an Essex County Sheriff Officer and United States Marine who graduated from Montclair State University. In 2011, she served in Operation Enduring Freedom Campaign in Afghanistan and enrolled in the Police Academy in 2015. In May 2017, she received the Life Saving Award from the Essex County Sheriff's Office and the United States Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal in 2010. She was further recognized for her life-saving actions when a ricochet bullet struck a Marine, piercing her

comrade's boot and injuring him. In response, she quickly called for assistance and rushed him to the hospital.

Since January 2015, **Captain Monique D. Smith** has served as the Captain of the Records and Evidence Section of the Irvington Police Department. She is currently first on the Captain's List, the second female in the history of the Irvington Police Department to be eligible for a promotion to Captain. She began her career with the United States Army/Wartime Service as Commander 250th Personnel Services Detachment (1st Lieutenant). During her tenure as a Firearms Instructor, she achieved the highest firearm score possible and was the only firearm instructor to receive a perfect score of 300 in the history of the department. She has received a Meritorious Service Medal of Honor Award, a 200-Club award for disarming a man with a 357 magnum during a fight at a local nightclub in Irvington, and was named "Officer of the year" in 2003.

**Former Fire Director Michael R. Dowd** graduated from Kean College (now Kean University), and the National Fire Academy in Emmettsburg, Maryland. In 1974, he began his career as a Deputy Police Officer in Montclair and was a member of the West Orange First Aid Squad, the Newark Fire Department, and the East Orange Emergency Medical Service. In 1980, he was appointed to the Orange Fire Department, and was promoted through the ranks. As Fire Director, he was responsible for the administrative and operational functions of the seventh largest career fire department serving the people of Essex County. In 1996, he was given the "Gold Medal of Valor," and was recognized by Congress for his actions. After 34 years of service, he retired on January 1, 2015.

**Lieutenant David L. Whatley** was born and raised in the City of Newark. He graduated from Montclair State University and earned a Master's degree in Public Administration from Seton Hall University. As a 23-year veteran of the Newark Police Department, he proficiently leads his fellow officers and develops future leaders within the department. He has been a part of the Multi-Agency Task force in Newark and Operation Cross County, a national law enforcement operation targeting child prostitution. He has also collaborated with the International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition (IACC), Recording Industry Association of America, and the Motion Picture Association of America to combat the illegal selling of counterfeit merchandise and pirated recordings.

In 1994, **Captain Michael Ruglio** graduated from Essex County College Police Academy, and soon after, he began his career as a police officer. He was promoted to Detective, Detective Sgt., and Patrol Lieutenant for his efforts, and in June 2017, he became Captain of the Verona Police Department. He has been trained in organizational structure, policy, and procedure and implemented new practices at the Verona Police Department. He also oversees a narcotics initiative in response to the opiate and prescription drug epidemic among youth. He received a Valor Award from the Essex County 200-Club in addition to countless other awards and commendations from the Verona Police Department and the Verona Policemen's Benevolent Association (P.B.A.). He is President of the Verona Chapter of UNICO National, the largest Italian-American service and charitable organization, and founded and served as Chairman of the Verona P.B.A. Political Action Committee.

At the age of 15, **Undersheriff Kevin Ryan** began his career in public service as an aide to New Jersey State Senate President Carmen Orechio. Soon after, he became a senior staff member, personally guiding his colleagues through the complexities of government bureaucracy. He went on to serve in the New Jersey General Assembly from 2010 to 2011. He is best known for his public service as a law enforcement officer, including serving for 4 years at the Nutley Police Department and being a 25-year veteran of the Essex County Sheriff's Office. He currently directs the day-to-day operations of the Field Operations Division and manages the Dignitary Protection Detail Service. He currently serves as a Board Member for Essex County Vocational-Technical School and has earned numerous citations and accolades from civic and charitable organizations.

In 2012, **Undersheriff Amir D. Jones** began his career with the Essex County Sheriff's Office and has been assigned to several units, including: the Transportation Division; the Patrol Division; the Bureau of Narcotics; the Patrol Detective Bureau/Criminal Investigations; and the Fugitive/ Warrant Squad, to all of which he has excelled. He has received the Medal of Merit Award for capturing an armed suspect and the Sheriff's Department's Excellent Police Duty Award for the capture of two armed suspects who had robbed a Market Street jewelry store. He has also distinguished himself on several investigations with the Newark Police Department, the F.B.I., and the United States Marshals Service. He is an active member in the Essex County Chiefs of Police Association and the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE).

In 2002, **Captain Mustafa Al-M. Brent** earned a degree in language and religious jurisprudence from Madina University in Saudi Arabia. In 2016, he was elected to serve as a member of the City of East Orange Council, representing the fifth ward. Additionally, he serves as Captain of the Newark Fire Department, a position he has held since 2006, and is a Licensed New Jersey State Fire Inspector. From 2013 to 2016, he served as the Vice President of the East Orange Board of Education. He co-founded FMF Homes, Inc., a residential redevelopment company, and founded Youth Empowering Self and Uplifting Someone-else (Y.E.S.U.S.), a nonprofit organization. He serves as a Clergy member for the Newark and Orange Fire Departments and is an Assistant Imam at Masjid Ashabul Yameen.

In 2006, **Firefighter Antonio Padilla** began his career as a firefighter in Newark, serving as a Cadet and later as a probationary firefighter. In 2011, he assisted the Captain of the Fire Division of Community Relations, hosting community events, assisting families after suffering a loss due to fire, and instructing fire safety and prevention classes for the community, churches, and civic groups. In 2014, he was appointed instructor of the Department of Public Safety's Fire Division Training Academy where he educates supervisors, firefighters, and recruits within the largest municipal fire division in the State of New Jersey. He is the 1st Vice President of Vulcan Pioneers of New Jersey, Inc., the Hispanic Firefighter Association, and the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters. He was recently honored along with the Mayor Ras J. Baraka of Newark as one of the "100 People of Newark" of the 100 People Foundation who partnered with PSEG.

**Officer Edward H. Carter, Jr.**, graduated from Vailsburg High School with honors and enlisted in the United States Navy where he was honorably discharged. In 2001, he began a career in law enforcement as a Patrol Officer. Most notably, on December 16, 2016, Officer Carter and his colleagues saved the lives of several citizens during an early morning house fire, rescuing them. He is a founding member and Sergeant At Arms of the North Star Dallas Cowboys Fan Club in Newark, an organization that vigorously gives back to the community. He served on the Executive Board of FOP LODGE 111 on two different occasions, and now serves as Second Vice President of the Union. He is also a member of Metropolitan Baptist Church in Newark, and in his spare time, he mentors youth that attend the church.

During the event, vocalist, recording artist, and composer Carmen Jon awed the audience with his voice, and Bishop Charles E. Mitchell, Sr., of True Vine Cathedral of Asbury Park and Reverend Alfredy Fletcher of Christian Love Baptist Church of Irvington delivered the prayers for the occasion. A catered reception for the honorees and their guests followed the program.

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**For Additional Information:  
Medinah E. Muhammad, Public Information Officer  
Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders  
465 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.,  
Newark, New Jersey, 07102  
(973)-621-4452  
[mmuhammad@freeholders.essexcountynj.org](mailto:mmuhammad@freeholders.essexcountynj.org)**