



DA's Office award winners announced

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Courtesy photo District Attorney Thomas Hogan, center, during the awards ceremony at the Chester County Courthouse. Hogan began the awards ceremony after taking office four years ago, as a way to reward those who have contributed to his office and the law enforcement community at large, and to highlight the teamwork that prosecutors and police in the county engage in to fight crime.

WEST CHESTER >> Members of the police community in Chester County assembled in Courtroom One of the Justice Center to hear a veteran prosecutor pay tribute to them and their efforts to protect the community even as he was honored himself.

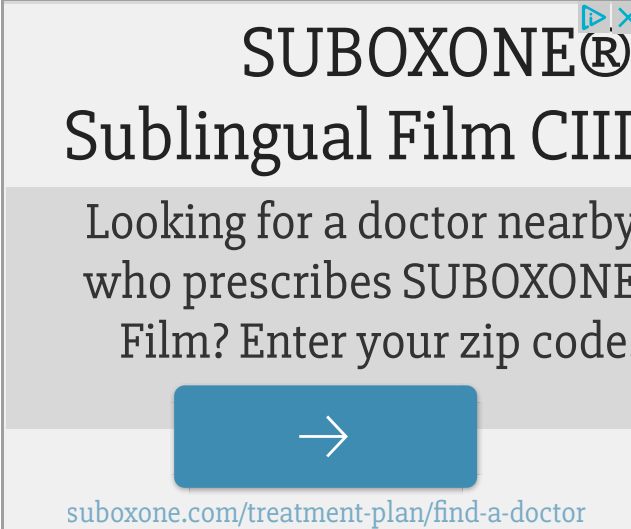
"You are the people who give voice to those who have no voice," Deputy District Attorney Carlos Barraza told the officers who sat before him in the grand courtroom. "Most importantly, you bring justice to those who have been victimized."

Barraza was given the Prosecutor of the Year Award, one of three such honors handed out by county District Attorney Thomas Hogan. Also feted were Downingtown Detective Andy Trautman, named Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, and retired Chief James Vito, named Chester County Detective of the Year.

Hogan began the awards ceremony after taking office four years ago, as a way to reward those who have contributed to his office and the law enforcement community at large, and to highlight the teamwork that prosecutors and police in the county engage in to fight crime.

"No matter what changes come, we still remain the county in southeast Pennsylvania with the lowest crime rate, and some of the strongest law enforcement members in the country. It is important we respect and honor our law enforcement every year," Hogan said.

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Barraza was given his honor for cases that ran the gamut between violent crime, police misconduct, and drug trafficking. He led the DA's use of the county grand jury, and now heads the office's Drug Unit. He won guilty verdicts against a Coatesville man who fired shots at two city police officers, and wrapped up a ring of inmates that had set up a drug ring inside Chester County Prison, using a corrections officer as their tool.

In presenting the award, First Assistant District Attorney Michael Noone also highlighted

Barraza's efforts at mentoring young prosecutors as they came into the office, creating a "sense of family" among the young assistant district attorneys.

"Carlos does a tremendous job of filling the roles of mentor, father-figure, friend, and quirky uncle," Noone said, as Barraza's biological family - including his wife, three children, siblings, and parents - looked on.

Barraza has been with the DA's office for 14 years. He received his undergraduate degree in mathematics from the University of Connecticut and his law degree from the University of Wisconsin School of Law. In his remarks, he singled out members of the DA's office administrative staff - including assistants Diane Bartlett and Christine Conte, and chief administrator Cheryl Greener - and the prosecutors who had been honored before.

He gave emotional remarks about this family, speaking in his native Spanish, downplaying his accomplishments in comparison to the help they had given him in maturing.

But he especially was eloquent in describing a case he had tried that involved a sexual assault. He said it was a problematic case that a predecessor had been ready to resolve, but that he agreed to take the case to trial after listening to the lead police investigators tell him how believable the victim was.

The case indeed turned out to have its problems, but even though the defense attorney bragged he would get an acquittal in less than an hour the jury stayed deliberating for more than nine hours. Ultimately, the verdict came back not guilty, Barraza said, leaving his team devastated.

But he said that months later the victim saw him by chance and told him how her life had changed since the trial. She was at school, living in Philadelphia, and doing well. "Thank you for believing in me," she told Barraza.

The honor to Vito came one month after he retired from the detectives office, after spending 36 years there, the last as chief. The award was a surprise, he said, pulled on

him by Hogan and his successor, Chief Kevin Dykes, who asked him to attend because another detective was going to get the award and he owed it to be there.

"I will deal with those gentlemen later," Vito told those assembled, grinning.

The former chief said that among his fondest memories of his time in office had come at the conclusion of the swearing in of Dykes as new chief, when those law enforcement officers stood in a hallway outside the courtroom where the ceremony took place and saluted him as he left. The statue he received commemorating the Detective of the Year honors would help remind him of that.

"I am going to put this award in a place so when I look at it, I will be reminded to salute you and the services you provide to the citizens of Chester County," Vito said.

Trautman was given his award by Hogan for the various roles he plays as an officer in Downingtown. He helps train the strategic response teams, acts as the resource officer for Downingtown Area School District, and was responsible for the arrest and ultimate conviction of an international con man who is now serving a 15-to-30 year term in state prison for stealing thousands of dollars from an elderly East Caln man.

"He embodies all of the different skills a police officer in Chester County has to have," Hogan said. "Andy is a warrior, because he wants to protect the innocent."

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