

## **Four officers receive highest honor from the - Beacon News, The (Aurora, IL) - January 20, 2019 - page 6**

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Four Aurora police officers were awarded the highest honor that an officer can receive during a ceremony at the Aurora Police Department on Wednesday.

Officers Ryszard Drozdowski and Bradley Vonhoff received Medal of Valor awards for rescuing a potential drowning victim on May 4, 2018.

A 95-year-old Downers Grove woman had lost control of her vehicle and drove into a Far East Side retention pond near Bilster Road and DuPage Parkway.

Both men shed their uniforms and gear, jumped into the water and swam out to the already submerged vehicle.

"We dove as much as we could underneath and I remember grabbing a limb," Drozdowski said. "I was pulling and pulling and pulling, and at the last time, it slipped away from my hand ... I tried going under again and I couldn't find her."

Aurora firefighters arrived and with their help, they were able to bring the woman to land where CPR was performed.

"I collapsed because I was exhausted," Drozdowski said. "I couldn't even tell you if the water was cold, but we just jumped in. It's a huge honor to receive this and I'm at the tail-end of my career, so it's nice that officers get recognized. At the time right now, officers are getting a bad rep, but people forget we are people too."

Vonhoff said he was shocked to receive the award and said it's an honor.

"It's nothing any of my brothers wouldn't have done here too," Vonhoff said.

Special Operations Investigators Colin Griffin and Matthew Huber also received Medal of Valor awards for their response when they came under gunfire by a known gang member on March 22, 2018, police said.

The pair was conducting a traffic stop investigation on a suspicious vehicle occupied by two men leaving a known gang house, Ziman said. As they approached the stopped car while walking, the 36-year-old driver **Santiago Calderon** reached out his window and fired several times, police said. Griffin was struck by gunfire in the lower leg.

Huber returned fire at the fleeing car, police said. Both of the officers went back to their squad car to tell other officers that the suspect was fleeing.

Calderon was shot and killed in the parking lot on South LaSalle Street during a shootout with police.

"You both did not retreat from the gunfire," Ziman said. "Instead, you sought to apprehend a violent offender at great risk to your own personal welfare."

While each scenario is different, they both involved the same commitment to protecting others without hesitation, Ziman said.

"In both instances, they put themselves in harm's way to protect our community," Ziman said.

The Aurora Police Department also unveiled a new patch that honors its history and takes elements from the patch police used prior to 1969. The patch also includes the city emblem of Aurora.

New employees and retirees were also honored during the ceremony.

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