



Date of occurrence: June 24th, 2021

Employee Name: Captain John Healy, Acting Sergeant Craig Lovellette, Officer Kemuel Gambirazio, Officer Ariol Lage and Officer Joseph Matthews

Classification: Police Captain and Police Officer

Unit/Division: Patrol Division

Award/Commendation type and recommendations: Officers of the Month

Narrative:

On Thursday, June 24, 2021, Officers responded to 8777 Collins Avenue in reference to a general fire alarm at the Champlain Towers South condominium. Upon arrival, Officers Craig Lovellette, Kemuel Gambirazio and Ariol Lage encountered what seemed like smoke filled air, but no smell of burning or flames were observed. They quickly discovered a surreal and unbelievable sight. The Champlain Towers South Condominium had partially collapsed. Officers heard screams for help, but could barely see through the dust filled air making it difficult to even breathe. Despite the treacherous conditions these first responding officers entered a very dangerous zone without hesitation to assist anyone they could. Their bravery and selflessness are admirable.

Officer Lovellette was the acting sergeant on this tragic early morning call and assumed command. Immediately understanding the severity of this situation, he quickly called for additional resources and notified the SPD Command Staff. Officer Lage and Officer Gambirazio coordinated with the first responding units of the Miami-Dade Fire Department and police units from neighboring jurisdictions. They secured a hot zone perimeter to prevent further disaster in what potentially could have been an additional collapse of the remaining portion of the condominium and rapidly worked on evacuating nearby buildings.

Captain Healy was awakened moments after the collapse and arrived just minutes later, living just blocks from the site. His experience as a police commander was immediately a notable asset on this chaotic scene. He established command and control, ensured our officers safety while quickly assessing the situation and determining the next operational needs. Captain Healy designated the Town of Surfside Community Center as the best

staging location for survivors and other evacuees to gather safely and arranged for the facility to be opened. These first responding officers directed the many dazed and confused citizens to safety. Thank you to the wonderful Parks & Recreation Staff that without hesitation assisted at the Community Center in the middle of the night and for many days thereafter.

Officer Joseph Matthews was assigned to the Communications Dispatch Center when the first calls for help in this incident were received. As the telephone lines began to ring nonstop and the police radio transmissions described the severity of this disaster, Officer Matthews' calm and professional manner was essential in helping desperate loved ones and citizens asking questions, while at the same time he was relaying critical information to officers on the scene and coordinating additional personnel response.

In addition to the aforementioned exceptional actions by the first to respond, I commend the many SPD members both civilian and sworn who selflessly gave their all working as one team to assist those so tragically affected by this disaster. Officers worked long hours for many consecutive days, assigned to traffic and perimeter posts in extreme heat and battling inclement weather. Civilian staff supported those efforts by coordinating water, meals and other logistical matters to assist the operation.

Officers Tammy Campbell and Alberto Knight are noteworthy examples of the extraordinary work performed. These officers were the first assigned to the Police Incident Command Post joined by Miami-Dade Police and other high-ranking commanders and were instrumental in providing me and the SPD command staff critical operational briefs and relaying orders and information among the various agencies working together. SPD Detective Diana Leon was assigned to work with the Miami-Dade Homicide Unit and quickly established herself among the most seasoned homicide detectives in the county. Detective Leon was part of the homicide team tasked with the difficult duty of tracking and identifying the victims lost and notifying the next of kin. These officers were praised for their professionalism by the highest levels of command in the Miami-Dade Police Department.

I am extremely proud of and commend all the SPD personnel who under unimaginable circumstances met every challenge with poise, courage and compassion. The dedication and professionalism exhibited in response to the worst tragedy ever suffered by the Town of Surfside will forever be appreciated. Congratulations to Captain John Healy, Acting Sergeant Craig Lovellette, Officer Kemuel Gambirazio, Officer Ariol Lage and Officer Joseph Matthews as the recipients of the June 2021 Officers of the Month Award in recognition of their actions in the immediate aftermath of the Champlain Towers South collapse.