



# Recent awards recognize police, parks, events

If the first quarter is any indication, 2008 is going to be a very good year for the City of Suwanee. The City has been recognized for excellence in several areas, adding plumes to its award-winning cap. City representatives recently accepted awards from the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce, Park Pride, and Southeast Festivals and Events Association.

## You can take these awards to the bank

The Suwanee Police Department is batting 1.000 when it comes to tracking down and arresting those who attempt to rob banks in the City of Suwanee. Last year, there were an unprecedented six bank robberies in Suwanee; arrests were made in each case, sometimes almost immediately following a pursuit of the robbers and sometimes a few weeks later following good detective work. In all, nine arrests were made, resolving not only the six Suwanee robberies but several others in the metro area and beyond as well.

In recognition of its exceptional skill, expertise, innovation, and results, Suwanee's Criminal Investigation Division was named Public Safety Unit of the Year – and Sgt. Dwayne Black won a bronze Medal of Valor for bravery and heroism – when the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce presented the 2008 Valor Awards March 28 at the Atlanta Hilton Northeast. The Criminal Investigation Division includes Lt. Dan Clark, Det. Shane Edmisten, and Det. Rob McCoy. Lt. Matt Scott was nominated for a Valor Award as well for his pursuit and apprehension of a suspect in one of the robberies.

To put a 100 percent robbery clearance rate in perspective, Edmisten notes that FBI agents at a recent Atlanta conference were very proud of the 50 percent clearance rate for the metro Atlanta area, which led the nation in bank robberies last year.

"It was a lot of luck," Edmisten says of the Suwanee PD's 6-for-6 record in 2007. "But it was also many hours of investigation and help from our citizens."

An example of key citizen assistance is provided by the case for which Sgt. Dwayne Black received the Valor Award. On March 12, 2007, the RBC Centura on Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road was robbed. An off-duty bank employee, who happened to be at the nearby Office Depot and witnessed the robbers' escape, contacted police, and followed the suspects down I-85 until Black caught up with them. With the assistance of the Gwinnett County Police Department, the two suspects were eventually arrested off Pleasantdale Road.

Citizen communication was essential in the case that Lt. Matt Scott was nominated for as well. As luck would have it, Scott was in Buford April 16, 2007 picking up a fleet vehicle that had been serviced when the "be on the lookout" call for a white car with custom black rims heading north on Peachtree Industrial came in.

At the intersection of Highway 20 and PIB, just such a car, wanted in connection to a robbery of the former Wachovia Bank at Peachtree Industrial and Suwanee Dam, turned by Scott and headed east on Highway 20. Again, after a brief vehicle and foot pursuit, two suspects were taken into custody.

Sometimes the arrests don't come so quickly, and a case's resolution relies on detective work – both the old-fashioned kind that involves interviewing witnesses and combing the scene for evidence and the high-tech kind that requires Internet research.

Perhaps the most notorious of Suwanee robbery suspects was Bobby Joe Philips, the "Grandpa Bandit" who allegedly robbed the SunTrust at Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road on October 24, 2007 as well as six other banks throughout Georgia and Tennessee. Philips was arrested November 10 in Perry. It was the Suwanee PD, through information provided by a witness and evidence found near the robbery scene, who, with the assistance of the FBI, identified the suspect.

"The best thing," notes Scott, "is that, despite the high number of robberies, no one has been hurt. We've been very fortunate."



*Serve and protect with valor* The Suwanee Police Department's 2008 Valor Award winners and nominees were recognized for their 100 percent clearance rate of bank robberies that took place in Suwanee in 2007. From left are Det. Shane Edmisten, Det. Rob McCoy, Lt. Matt Scott, Sgt. Dwayne Black, and Lt. Dan Clark.