

**Inside this issue:**

1. Message from the Executive Director - Page 2
2. Fall Grantee Conference - Page 3
3. Public Education/Prevention Campaign Continues —Page 4
4. Young Driver Auto Theft Education - Page 4
5. In the News - Page 5

## Auto Theft Investigator of the Year Recognized

The fourth annual Scott A. Wertz Auto Theft Investigator of the Year Award was presented at the Fall Grantee Training Conference in October. The award was established in 2007 to honor Officer Scott A. Wertz, who was killed in the line of duty while working an auto theft detail in Reading City in August 2006. Officer Wertz was a police officer with the Reading City Police Department, assigned to the PA State Police's Central Auto Theft Task Force. Nominations for the award are made by grantees who seek to recognize a peer who provides extraordinary service in auto theft investigations and/or prevention that are above and beyond that which is expected of them in their day-to-day duties.



*ATPA Executive Director Michelle Staton presents award to Trooper John McGeary*

The recipient of this year's award was Trooper John McGeary, with the PA State Police Central Auto Theft Task Force. Trooper McGeary was chosen for the award due to the strong passion he has for auto theft investigations, which has led to outstanding investigative service and professionalism for the residents of the Commonwealth. John has been the lead investigator in several major investigations involving chop shops, re-tagging operations, and heavy equipment thefts. He has also conducted several undercover purchases of stolen heavy equipment and vehicles, which has led to numerous arrests.



*Pictured (left to right): Front row—Captain Waggoner, Corporal Colyer, Officer Eddinger, Trooper McGeary, Trooper Myers, Officer Merkel; Back row—Lt. Hunter, Trooper Conrad, Officer Mayer, Sgt. Fisher, Detective Murphy, Trooper Sarafinko.*

John successfully led a multi-state, multi-jurisdictional investigation involving the re-tagging of high-end vehicles. To date, numerous suspects have been indicted federally and over 20 vehicles, valued in excess of \$500,000, have been seized.

His drive and dedication to complete each and every assignment is a trait every bit as important as his investigative abilities. He routinely works endless hours doing whatever is needed to complete the job. When accepting the award, John credited the other members of his unit, as he believes it takes a cooperative effort to be successful in fighting auto theft. Trooper McGeary was presented the award by ATPA Executive Director, Michelle Staton. Members of the PA State Police Central Auto Theft Task Force and command staff were on-hand as he was recognized with the award.

## Message from the Executive Director



Fall is such a great season and is my favorite time of year! The changing leaves usher in beautiful scenery, cooler temperatures; and, hopefully, a break from the summer season where we have the highest auto theft rates of the year.

As we move into the season, we just hosted another successful annual grantee training conference. We are also very excited to be launching the second phase of our public education and prevention campaign for the fiscal year—30-second commercials in movie theaters over the holiday season. The spots will have a holiday theme and will use humor to deliver the message to vehicle owners reminding them to take steps to protect themselves from becoming a victim of auto theft. In the spot, Santa forgets to do all of the things we all know he should do—lock the car, take the keys, and hide valuables. One of his helper-elves reminds him—and points out to audiences of all ages—what he forgot to do. Messages delivered in a captive audience setting will increase the number of people who take action and take the steps to protect themselves from becoming an auto theft victim. The holiday movie season is filled with great movies for all ages to see, and our message about preventing theft will be seen by thousands of people around the state.

Please enjoy the season and all that comes with it—great scenery, football games, Fall festivals, family gatherings, etc. But, please also remember to lock your car, take your keys and hide your valuables. Become proactive and take the extra steps to protect yourself and your vehicle.

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Staton  
Executive Director  
PA Auto Theft Prevention Authority

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# Annual Grantee Training Conference



Each year, the Pennsylvania Auto Theft Prevention Authority hosts a training conference to advance the expertise of their grantees. The conference, held in October, in Gettysburg, PA, focused on cargo theft investigations. Experts were brought in to train auto theft investigators on cargo theft trends and techniques, in response to an increase in cargo theft cases in PA and nationwide.

Grantees from across the state attended the training conference, with over 100 investigators in attendance. The gathering was an effective way to learn, network, discuss collaborative cases and share information. Investigators from Maryland were invited to the conference, because of the close proximity of the training and cargo thieves know no boundaries.

The training began with New Jersey State Police Lt. Michael McDonnell, who is an internationally renowned expert in cargo theft investigations and trends. Training continued with Kurt Duesterdick, National Investigations Manager for National Retail Systems, giving the group an understanding of how the trucking industry works. The training concluded with instruction from Special Agent William McCleod, U.S. Customs, ICE, on trailer seals and leaking.

A highlight of the conference was the presentation of the Fourth Annual Scott A. Wertz Auto Theft Investigator of the Year Award to Trooper John McGeary, PA State Police Central Auto Theft Task Force.

It was a fantastic conference, and we thank all of the speakers, grantees, board and staff who made it yet another successful seminar. Planning for the 2011 conference is underway, and we look forward to seeing everyone next year!

## THE AUTHORITY'S GRANTEEES

- Allegheny County District Attorney's Office
- Delaware County District Attorney's Office
- Good Shepherd Mediation Program
- Lancaster City Police
- Lehigh County District Attorney's Office
- Northeast Regional Task Force
- Pennsylvania State Police Auto Theft Unit (Central Region)
- Pennsylvania State Police Auto Theft Unit (Eastern Region)
- Pennsylvania State Police Auto Theft Unit (Western Region)
- Philadelphia District Attorney's Office
- Philadelphia Police Department
- Pittsburgh Police Department Auto Squad

## Public Education and Prevention Campaign Continues

The Authority is launching the second phase of its public education and auto theft prevention campaign for fiscal year 2010-2011. The project involves an exciting partnership with digital movie theaters across the state throughout the holiday season. Moviegoers will see a 30-second commercial delivered right before the feature movie in over 40 theaters across the state, on almost 500 movie screens. Messaging will be delivered to educate vehicle owners on protecting themselves from vehicle theft during the holiday season.



The new campaign is designed to deliver creative, holiday-themed auto theft prevention messaging to captive audiences of all ages to increase awareness and engage people to take action. The spot uses humor to deliver the message—lock your car, take your keys, and hide your valuables—using Santa, his updated “sleigh”, and a less-than-conventional elf. We believe movie-goers will connect with the elf as he tries to get Santa to do the right things to protect his “sleigh” during the holiday season (and beyond). So, everyone, make sure you look for the trailer at a movie theater near you!

## Young Driver - Auto Theft Prevention/Education Program

The ATPA previously designed a video and lesson plan for young drivers, delivered in the school setting during driver education classes. The DVD and lesson plan was sent to all public and private schools across the Commonwealth. Follow-up contacts were made to determine how many teachers and schools were using the auto theft lesson plan. There was an overwhelming response from teachers that in-class time is limited, and they would rather see the materials developed for a take-home assignment.

To offer options to teachers who are crunched for time, the ATPA adapted the lesson plan to an online learning tool to be assigned by teachers as homework for students. Research was conducted by a local student during driver education classes to determine how kids like to learn, what things they enjoy doing in their free time, and how would they want to see auto theft prevention messaging delivered to young drivers. After the results were compiled, there was one common theme that rang true with all students surveyed—most, if not all students, played video games and would rather see the auto theft message delivered in a similar manner.



Following the direction of the research, the ATPA took the lesson plan previously developed and mixed it with the video game concept involving car customization. The website designed for young drivers is the [WatchYourWheels.org](http://WatchYourWheels.org) site. Students progress through the “game” by receiving and answering questions correctly about auto theft prevention. With each series of questions answered correctly, students are allowed to select and custom-

ize a car. Students can pick paint colors, graphics, custom wheels, etc. at each stage. When they complete the lesson plan, their completion status is emailed to their teacher and the student has the option to print or use the custom vehicle they designed (e.g., screensaver).

The auto theft message is delivered in a fun and engaging manner to facilitate the learning process for young drivers. Learning important safety procedures at a early age will increase the number of young drivers who carry those good habits throughout their adult years.

Letters were sent out to all public and private schools across the Commonwealth by the Department of Education in September about the WatchYourWheels online learning tool.

### Driver in 'wild crash' a suspect in auto thefts

Police said a Shamokin man, who was suspected in a series of auto thefts, was one of the people involved in a wild accident in Elysburg, when a stolen Acura SUV came to rest on its roof tangled in power lines along Route 487, police said.

The 20-year-old man slammed the Acura into a tree and took out a utility pole on Rt. 487 just north of Knoebels Amusement Resort in Franklin Township, according to Locust Township Officer Nick Thorpe, as reported in the Bloomsburg Press Enterprise.

The driver, and a 17-year-old boy riding with him, also of Shamokin, were taken to Geisinger Medical Center, Danville, by ambulance and were treated and released, according to Thorpe.

When the vehicle was righted onto all four wheels, a number of full beer cans, some apparently smashed during the accident, were left lying on the road.

Milton state police are investigating the theft of the Acura MDX. The vehicle was taken sometime between 11:00 pm and the morning of the accident, according to Thorpe.

The driver, who doesn't have a license, is a person of interest in a string of auto thefts, though he's yet to be charged in those crimes, Thorpe said.

Despite the presence of the beer cans, Thorpe said, the mid-morning crash was caused by speeding, not alcohol. Thorpe is expecting to file charges of reckless driving, driving without a license, receiving stolen property and filing false reports to law enforcement.

*The News-Item*

### City man stole gas, crashed stolen minivan in NJ, police say

A Reading man was arrested in Vineland, NJ, after he stole gasoline from two convenience stores and then led police on a brief chase before crashing the stolen minivan he was driving.

The 21-year-old of Woodward Street was under police guard in Cooper University Hospital in Camden, NJ, where he was flown by helicopter following the crash. He was arraigned in the hospital and will be committed to Cumberland County jail in lieu of \$105,000 bail when he is discharged. He was charged with theft, fleeing police and related offenses.

A 21-year-old female passenger in the vehicle who also is from Reading, suffered minor injuries in the crash and was treated in South Jersey Healthcare Regional Medical Center. A second passenger, a 17-year-old boy from the Vineland area, also was flown by helicopter to Cooper Hospital, police said.

The driver of the stolen minivan twice filled up its gas tank at different convenience stores in the Vineland area, driving off without paying both times. Employees got the license number and a description of the van, which they gave to police.

Officers spotted the stolen van, and the driver fled police at a high rate of speed. Officers called off the pursuit before the van crashed into a utility pole.

Reading police said the minivan was stolen from the 700 block of Mulberry Street, where it had been left running outside of a house. Witnesses reported seeing four men get in the minivan and steal it. An investigation into the theft continues.

*Reading Eagle*

### Mom won't let carjacker get away

She suffered minor injuries and her daughter was not hurt, police said — The mother was hanging halfway out of the driver's side door, holding onto the gear shift, as a carjacker took off with her 10-year-old daughter inside.

The 29-year-old woman had stopped at a Hess Express gas station on the 2900 block of Veterans Highway in Bristol Township about 9:36 pm, Sunday, and when she got out of her car, the man jumped in and shut the door, police said. The woman, whom police didn't identify, opened the door and jumped across the lap of the man who was in the driver's seat and grabbed the gear shift on the console, they said.

The man took off with the woman hanging on, police said. They said he drove over a curb and struck a light pole and a small tree on Veterans Highway, then jumped out of the car and took off on foot toward I-95.

The carjacker, a 32-year-old man from Trenton, was arrested 16 minutes later in the area of the Keystone Industrial Park. He is now in Bucks County prison on felony charges of kidnapping, robbery and theft, along with related offenses. He was arraigned and sent to county prison in lieu of \$100,000 bail.

The woman suffered minor injuries to her ankle and one of her hands. The little girl, who had been in the front passenger seat, was uninjured, police said.

*Bucks County Courier Times*

### Teen stole car as girl, 6, slept in back

An eastern PA teen is facing charges he stole a car while a 6-year-old girl slept in the back seat. The unidentified 16-year-old boy was charged with stealing a car and sparking a frantic 90-minute search.

Police say the teen jumped into a car a man had parked outside a grocery store. Authorities say the man didn't want to wake his daughter, so he parked in front of the Allentown store with the engine and air conditioning running. The car was found a few blocks away after a search involving dozens of officers.

Police did not identify the suspect because of his age. He faces charges including theft and interfering with the custody of a child.

*The Daily Item*

