

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

- MEMORANDUM -

TO: MAJOR THERESA SILVERIO-MOLINA
(AWARDS SELECTION COMMITTEE)

DATE: JULY 31, 2014

FROM: SGT. VICKY MERINO
UNIFORM PATROL DIVISION

SUBJECT:
AWARDS/OFFICER OF THE
MONTH

I would like to take this time to nominate Officer James Molina for Officer of the Month for July 2014. Officer James Molina is deserving of this award for his actions which resulted in the arrest of three subjects that had been targeting our local residents' home, victimizing our citizens over and over again.

On July 28, 2014 "Operation Je Ne Sais Qua" was developed in an attempt to identify and apprehend potential subject(s) that were targeting our local residents. Since June 19, 2014, there have been numerous burglaries in the north end of the City where the subject(s) were making entry into homes by smashing rear windows of the residences, particularly French doors.

On the morning of July 31, 2014, a combination of Uniform Patrol Officers, SIT officers and one SED officer were assigned to patrol two of the zones (zone 5 and zone 7) that had been targeted during the last month. Marked units were deployed in Zone 5 and unmarked units were deployed to zone 7. At approximately 1145 hours, SIT Officer Molina observed a suspicious white van circling the area of the Riviera Country Club (golf course). Officer Molina continued to maintain visual contact on the van and its passengers advising over the radio their location and their actions as they were occurring; allowing units to tactically set up and maintain constant surveillance on the van.

Officer Molina was able to run a check on the tag which revealed that it was not registered to anyone in the area. He immediately noticed and advised that the van did not have any commercial markings making it even more suspicious. At some point, the driver of the van pulled off to the side of the road (1200 Block of Bird Road). At that point, Officer Molina observes two males exit the van and look through the bushes of the Riviera Country Club (golf course). The vehicle remained parked there for approximately five minutes. During this time, Officer Molina was advising officers on the task force of the vans and occupants action keeping everyone informed. The vehicle then drove off but continued to circle the area suspiciously.

The vehicle eventually proceeded to travel west on Mendavia Avenue where it committed a traffic infraction (ran stop sign) giving Officer Molina probable cause to stop the vehicle. Officer Molina's decision not to pull the vehicle over at the time paid off. Eventually the vehicle parked on the swale at the 1300 Block of Mendavia Avenue where it dropped off the two occupants. The male subjects that were dropped off continued to walk north through the golf course. The van proceeded to leave the area where it eventually traveled east on Bird Road. A decision was made by Officer Molina to pull the vehicle over by a marked police car for fear that we would lose the driver and any valuable evidence inside the vehicle. At the same time that this was occurring, unmarked and marked units; both on foot and in vehicles tactically set up surveillance around the golf course never losing sight of the subjects. A perimeter was also established in the immediate area to ensure that no other vehicles possibly involved left the area.

A traffic stop for the infraction committed earlier was conducted at the 600 Block of Bird Road by Officer Coleman and Officer Molina. Upon making contact with the driver, it was clear that his story was not consistent with the events that had occurred earlier (dropping off two subjects) raising Officer Molina's suspicion. The driver could not explain whose vehicle it was and stated that he had dropped off a friend (one person) in the area of Red Road and Bird Road but could not provide an address of where he dropped him off. The driver's phone was ringing constantly as officers spoke with him. Subject Lara was advised not to answer the phone. A verbal consent to search the vehicle was obtained by the driver who had sole control of the vehicle at the time. The search revealed two wallets with Florida Driver License inside them which eventually led to the positive identification of the two males dropped off by the golf course. Subject Lara was detained until further information could be gathered.

During the traffic stop, the units on the perimeter advised that the male subjects who were on the golf course parted ways. Subject Cardoza then proceeded to run for unknown reasons. He was observed placing an unknown object into a large Banyan tree in the middle of the golf course. Subject Cardoza was apprehended after a short foot pursuit. Subject Salas Diaz was taken into custody without incident after attempting to leave the golf course through a back yard. A search of the Banyan Tree revealed a screwdriver and a small sledge hammer commonly used to break into homes and more importantly believed to be the tool used in the recent burglaries. All three subjects were taken to the station for questioning and were eventually charged with "Loitering and Prowling" and "Resist/Obstruction without Violence."

Officer Molina's relentless efforts and keen observation skills paid off that morning. Officer Molina not only apprehended and identified these subjects but prevented another Coral Gables Citizen from being victimized again. Officer Molina is deserving of this award and should be recognized for his outstanding efforts that morning.

It should be noted that the driver of the van is a person of interest in a couple of high profile case including one with the FBI.



Major Raul Pedroso
UPD Commander

8/5/14

Date



Theresa Silverio-Molina, Major
ASC Chairperson

8/7/14

Date