

# CITY OF CORAL GABLES

## - MEMORANDUM -

**TO:** MAJOR THERESA MOLINA  
(AWARDS SELECTION COMMITTEE)

**DATE:** JANUARY 21, 2015

**FROM:** RAYMOND MCCALLA *RM*  
UNIFORM PATROL DIVISION

**SUBJECT:**  
AWARDS/OFFICER OF THE YEAR

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I would like to take the time to nominate Sergeant Vicky Merino for the "Officer of the Year" Award. Sergeant Merino has been assigned to the Bravo shift for the entire year. During 2014, Sergeant Merino has received and been nominated for several awards. She also received a letter of commendation from a citizen who took the time to recognize Sergeant Merino's actions. Some of the awards she has received include Officer of the Month for the month of May 2014, Officer of the Month for the month of November 2014, a Life Saving Award for February 2014 and she was also nominated for a Life Saving award in November 2014 after playing an intricate roll in pulling out a traffic crash victim from a vehicle after it was determined that he was not breathing. Sergeant Merino is not only our leader but she is an excellent example of what qualities an excellent leader should have. She played a significant role in the Bravo Shift during 2014 and continues to play that role now. Sergeant Merino has and continues to serve as our Shift Commander on many occasions, she is also a Field Training Sergeant and for a short time during 2014, she also led a Burglary Task Force that was very successful in the apprehension of some very active burglars in our City.

Sergeant Merino should be recognized for her positive attitude, her work ethics, and her dedication to the Department and to the Community as well as the excellent leadership she demonstrates to all of us (officers). Sergeant Merino is always actively patrolling the City and responding to our (officers) calls to offer assistance and guidance. It is her dedication to the department, community and her career that has led her to the successful apprehension of several subjects. She is always aware of any crime trends occurring in our shift and is always apprised of all active BOLO's issued. Here are some of the cases Sergeant Merino was involved in during 2014.

In January of 2014, Sergeant Merino received a Life Saving Award in conjunction with two other officers. Officer Hammann and Jorva were dispatched to a possible choking or drowning call and as usual, Sergeant Merino who was already patrolling the area responded to assist her officers. Sergeant Merino without delay began to assist Officer Hammann and Jorva with the choking victim. In a stressful situation such as this, Sergeant Merino remained calm and provided crucial instructions and assistance to these officers. The extra assistance "proved to be valuable" and extended the patient's life. She was recognized for her outstanding assistance and lifesaving efforts.

In May of 2014, Sergeant Merino received the "Officer of the Month" Award for her assistance and dedication to a bank robbery case where the subject was arrested within twenty four hours of committing the crime. During the month of May, there were two bank robberies within a week of each other. On the morning of May 12, 2014 at 0942 hours, an emergency call was broadcast regarding a bank robbery that had just occurred at 2555 Ponce De Leon Blvd. Sergeant Merino immediately responded and was the first unit arrival on the scene. She ensured the bank customers and employees were safe and provided a description of the subject who implied he had a bomb. Sergeant Merino participated in the preliminary investigation such as interviewing bank employees and identifying and reviewing video surveillance in the immediate area. It was this crucial information that led to the capture of the subject. Sergeant Merino's investigation revealed that the subject was driving a black Land Rover with a New Jersey plate. It also revealed that the subject had parked in a metered spot and had put a coin in the meter. It was later discovered that the coin was the only coin in the meter and it was impounded for evidence. Sergeant Merino's effort didn't stop there.

The next morning prior to any BOLO's and information being disseminated, she responded to the Strategic Initiative Team's office and briefed members on all the pertinent information she had obtained during her investigation. She provided them with a detailed description of the subject and his vehicle. On the day of the arrest, Sergeant Merino maintained communication with the SIT officers who had potentially located the subject. She immediately responded to the area and assisted the SIT officers by maintaining a safe distance from the subject in her marked police vehicle in case of a potential take down. She advised the SIT officers that the subject they had under surveillance matched the description of the bank robber. At the same time, she coordinated with patrol units and established a loose perimeter in the area. She monitored both radio frequencies and updated patrol units of the subjects location at all times. Shortly thereafter, the subject was apprehended in a nearby car wash and was still in possession of some of the bank's money. It is her direct actions that led to the capture of the subject within twenty four hours.

In July of 2014, Sergeant Merino was tasked with leading a group of officers in a Burglary Task Force after numerous burglaries in the north end of the City. Some of the recent burglaries had occurred near the Riviera Country Club (Zone 7). She developed a strategic plan and worked with several officers from different divisions. Two days after the task force was put together an arrest was made. On the morning of July 2014, Sergeant Merino had tasked officers in unmarked vehicles to patrol what is known as "Zone 7." She deployed marked units to "Zone 5" in an attempt to push the potential subjects to the zone which didn't appear to have any officers. The plan worked. At approximately 1145 hours, SIT Officer Molina observed a suspicious van circling the area. The van eventually dropped off two subjects near the Riviera Country Club. Units were tactically set up in the immediate area by Sergeant Merino and the van was subsequently stopped on Bird Road. The subjects that were dropped off were also apprehended shortly but not before taking flight on foot through the golf course. Due to the fact that a perimeter had already been established, the subjects were apprehended. One of the subjects' abandoned a burglary tool on the golf course which is commonly used to commit burglaries. Although Sergeant Merino didn't have any direct connection with the apprehension of the subjects, it is her efforts, dedication and ability to have officers work together that led to the successful conclusion of this case.

On October 8, 2014, Sergeant Merino received a letter of commendation after she went out of her way to assist a citizen whose car had broken down during the evening hours. The citizen expressed her gratitude for Sergeant Merino indicating in her letter that she knew Sergeant Merino had pulled behind her to protect her as she waited for the tow truck despite what Sergeant Merino told her (checking reports). The citizen's gas tank was leaking which caused a heavy fuel spill and fuel odor in the area. The fire department was also called to the scene due to the heavy smell and fuel spill. Sergeant Merino remained on the scene with the elderly female until the tow truck arrived.

In November of 2014, Sergeant Merino received the Officer of the Month Award after the arrest of 6 subjects involved in two different cases. On November 13, 2014, Sergeant Merino was patrolling the residential area when she observed an SUV parked on the north side of Alhambra Circle near Casilla Street. As she drove past the SUV, she observed a male wearing a cap in the driver seat with his head down. She obtained the vehicle's tag number and performed a query on the tag which revealed it was a rental car. Due to the recent information that had been received regarding burglary subjects using rental vehicle, she proceeded to make a U-turn. She located the vehicle which had now stopped on Casilla Avenue and observed two black males exit the vehicle wearing back packs and rapidly walking towards the maintenance crew. Unsure of what crime was about to occur, Sergeant Merino engaged the subjects without hesitation and immediately provided a vehicle description and tag number for the SUV which had now left the area. Upon seeing her, the subjects immediately began to walk away from the maintenance crew but not before being stopped by Sergeant Merino. All three subjects were arrested and charged with Loitering and Prowling and Possession of Counterfeit Goods.

The following day, Sergeant Merino was tasked with being our Shift Commander and running the Burglary Task Force as the Acting Lieutenant. This task obligated her to monitor both channels (Main and Tacops2). A burglary in progress was dispatched at 501 Loretto Avenue. This was the second burglary that morning. During the second burglary, a witness provided a vehicle description and a possible direction of travel. The description provided was that of two black males in a silver vehicle possibly a Mercedes Benz last seen headed towards Riviera Drive. Sergeant Merino proceeded to respond to the burglary and also requested task force units to respond to the area. Sergeant Merino was eastbound on Bird Road approaching Riviera Drive when she observed a Silver unknown vehicle with dark tinted windows. Her instincts directed her to make a U-turn behind the vehicle which increased its speed in an attempt to flee the area of the burglary. The vehicle was involved in a horrific traffic crash and all three black male subjects that were occupying the silver vehicle (Hyundai Genesis) bailed out fleeing on foot. Sergeant Merino was seconds behind the vehicle and was able to observe the subjects fleeing the scene. She provided a detailed description of the subjects and a direction of travel. During this chaotic scene, Sergeant Merino was able to establish a perimeter and render aid to an innocent victim who was trapped inside of his vehicle. All three black male subjects were apprehended; two of them within five minutes of the initial crash. The arrest of these subjects cleared at least three residential burglary cases within the City of Coral Gables. It also led to the recovery of the victims' property that had been taken during the burglaries earlier in the day. Thankfully, the innocent driver who was critically injured is still alive today and recovering at home. Several cases were solved due to the arrest of these subjects. Since the arrest of these subjects, daytime residential burglaries have decreased substantially.

These are just some of the cases where Sergeant Merino has been recognized. Sergeant Merino comes to work day in and day out ready to serve and protect her community. Sergeant Merino is always there for us and we can count on her to guide us on a daily basis. She is a true leader who leads from the front. All of us feel Sergeant Merino is deserving of this award.



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Sergeant Javier Bruzos  
Uniform Patrol Division

1-20-15  
Date



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Major Raul Pedroso  
UPD Commander

1/22/15  
Date



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Theresa Molina, Major  
ASC Chairperson

1/27/15  
Date