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She's not a sworn peace officer and she's not a civilian employee at the Burleson Police Department. But the leadership that Vicki McElroy displays with the department's Citizens On Patrol program was so outstanding that it garnered her the 2013 Ofelia Blair Outstanding Character Award.

"I was completely shocked, surprised and extremely honored," McElroy said. "I realize the importance and meaning of this award and am honored that I was chosen. I never dreamed that I would be put in this category."

According to the nomination letter, McElroy's "integrity, humility and passion are her prominent character traits. Her dedication to the success of the police department is immeasurable."

The award winner is the assistant Citizens On Patrol (COPS) coordinator and she is a member of the Burleson Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association. COPS are trained to patrol neighborhoods, parks, and businesses; report suspicious people and vehicles; report traffic hazards; perform traffic control at special events; complete vacation checks and close patrols; co-host community events; educate the community about crime prevention; report City ordinance violations such as junk vehicles, curfew violations, and park violations; and patrol major retail parking lots during the holidays.

McElroy, 58, calls Houston her hometown but she has been a Burleson resident since February 1986. She worked at the old City pool at Chisenhall Park (now Chisenhall Fields) as a lifeguard, assistant pool manager, and pool manager from 1989 to 2009. She attended the Burleson Fire Department's Citizens Fire Academy in 2001 and became a member of CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) through the fire marshal's office.

So why did she decide to volunteer with the police department? When she was working at the City's pool, McElroy wanted to go "behind the scenes" to see how the police department and fire department work. She attended the three academies (including the Citizens Police Academy in 2005 and the Advanced Citizens Police Academy in 2007). The department's Citizens On Patrol program was launched in 2006 and McElroy jumped on board.

“I was in the first group to graduate,” McElroy said. “I became one of the captains and in 2011 I became the assistant coordinator. I really enjoy volunteering with the police department because of the people who work there. Everyone at the police department is very supportive.”

According to the nomination, the award winner volunteers at the police department open house, the DEA’s Drug Take Back Event, parades, football games, the City’s July 4th celebration and more. She also organizes all of the meals that are cooked for the police department during Thanksgiving, Christmas and other holidays, and she keeps a constant supply of bottled drinks available for officers during Texas’ hot summer months.

Burleson isn’t the only department who recognizes McElroy’s dedication. In August 2013, McElroy was awarded the Thomas Windham Citizens On Patrol member of the Year, a state honor presented by the Texas Citizens On Patrol Association. She won the award for the first time in 2011. The honor is named for Windham, who was the police chief in Fort Worth for 15 years before he died in 2000. He hosted the first Citizens on Patrol in Texas.

McElroy is involved in the Burleson’s COPS bike patrol, Citizens Police Academy and the Burleson Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association. She is certified in American Red Cross First Aid, CPR, and as a water safety instructor.

McElroy has two sons who are currently serving in the United States Army. She and her husband Tim have four children – Stacey, Jason, Nicholas and Marc; a 4-year-old granddaughter Emma and a 1-year-old grandson Alex. McElroy also has a younger sister.

The award winner has no intention of stopping now. She said she is “always trying to learn.”