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LETTER TO COMMISSION
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TO: Mayor Matti Herrera Bower and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager *JM Gonzalez*

DATE: September 19, 2011

SUBJECT: Miami-Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police August 2011 Officer of the Month - MBPD Detectives Mario Pena and Luis Estopian

This Letter to the Mayor and City Commission is to announce the awarding of the Miami-Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police (MDCACP) August 2011 Officer of the Month Award to MBPD Detectives Mario Pena and Luis Estopian. Detectives Mario Pena and Luis Estopian received this prestigious award for their tireless investigation of the attempted robbery and shooting of NYPD Detective Harold Thomas.

During the early morning hours of July 23, 2011, vacationing NYPD Detective Harold Thomas was returning to his courtyard hotel at 1233 Collins Ave. As Detective Thomas entered the courtyard of the hotel, he was attacked by two individuals who attempted to rob him at gunpoint. Detective Thomas was able to take cover behind a tree and draw his service firearm, exchanging gun shots with these criminals before they fled wounded and empty handed.

Detective Thomas had sustained a serious gunshot wound from the subjects and was laying in the courtyard bleeding profusely on the ground and unconscious. Several reports of gunshots were reported by individuals in the immediate area. Uniform patrol officers arrived quickly and found the injured detective. Detective Thomas was able to give a brief description of the subjects. A BOLO was broadcast within minutes for two black male subjects who fled in a white BMW.

Detectives from the violent crimes/homicide squad responded to the scene and immediately began to interview witnesses and begin the investigation. Detective Mario Pena was designated as the lead investigator and Detective Luis Estopian was the co-lead. Throughout the next five days detectives worked tirelessly in moving this investigation forward. Through the diligent efforts and tenacity of all those involved in this investigation (U.S. Secret Service, BSO's Homicide Squad, Miami-Dade Corrections, NYPD Investigative Personnel, and the MBPD Crime Scene Unit), overwhelming probable cause was developed to arrest Mustafa Lee and Francisco Hernandez. Both were charged with felony murder. Detective Harold Thomas recovered enough from his extensive injuries to speak with Detectives Pena and Estopian in order to provide additional information to solidify the case against these career criminals. Both detectives were relentless in their efforts to apprehend these violent subjects and should be commended for their dogged determination and outstanding efforts in this case.

It is also significant to note that Officers from the Miami Beach Police Department have won the prestigious MDCACP Officer of the Month Award four out of the eight months thus far this year. This is an unprecedented honor and recognition for the MBPD, which speaks volumes about the organization in spite of recent attempts from multiple sources to negatively influence perceptions. The outstanding efforts of the MBPD in this case, especially those of the two detectives receiving the MDCACP award, once again drew widespread accolades including several made through personal phone calls between Chief Noriega and NYPD Police Commissioner, Raymond W. Kelly. The previous winners include:

March 2011 – Sergeant Howard Bennett and Sergeant Ibrahim Garcia
Sergeant Steve Feldman, Officers Robert Chenoweth and Grant Reid
(two separate incidents)

April 2011 – Officer Antonio Ferbeyre

May 2011 – Detective Luis King

Please join me in congratulating Detectives Mario Pena and Luis Estopian as well as the MBPD winners from March, April and May 2011.

JMG:CN:tr