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Public Information Announcement Media/Press Release

To: All media/press outlets and for general dissemination
From: Det. Jennifer L. McFarland
Public Information Officer
CC: File/Sheriff Wayne Rausch
RE: Bravery Citation
Date: 2/3/2005

In the early evening hours of October 10, 2004, Detective Margaret Lehmbecker was off-duty at her home in Moscow. Having heard a crashing noise outside her apartment complex, Det. Lehmbecker walked outside her apartment and saw a minivan parked in the alley behind the complex. A young man got out of the van and told Det. Lehmbecker that a man had stolen a woman's purse. The young man indicated the direction in which the robber had run. Det. Lehmbecker immediately gave chase. After pursuing the robber on foot for about two blocks, Det. Lehmbecker caught up with him. The robber was able to pull away from Det. Lehmbecker, but she caught up with him again after another block. With the assistance of a citizen, Shawn Cothren (who was cited for his bravery by both the Moscow Police Department and the Latah County Sheriff's Office), Det. Lehmbecker stopped the robber and struggled to subdue him. Det. Lehmbecker used her cellular phone to dial 9-1-1 and handed it off to another citizen who was then able to relay pertinent information to the dispatcher as Det. Lehmbecker physically fought the robber on the ground in an attempt to restrain him and keep him from again taking flight. Throughout the incident, Det. Lehmbecker remained courageous, calm, and was acutely aware of ensuring not only her own safety but also that of the citizens who had gathered at the scene. Moscow Police soon arrived and took control of the scene and custody of the robber, who was later identified as John Cody Balka.

Det. Lehmbecker began her career at the Latah County Sheriff's Office in 1991 under Sheriff Ken Buxton's administration. Margaret began as a Detention Deputy and worked her way up through Patrol. She tested for and was appointed to a position in Detectives in October of 2003, where she focuses on crimes committed by and against children (chiefly child abuse and sexual abuse investigations). Originally from Priest River, Idaho, Margaret came to Moscow in 1991 to continue her education at the University of Idaho (she'd previously attended the University of Montana).

Det. Lehmbecker was honored with the "Sheriff's Commendation," a medal for "bravery beyond the call of duty," in early January 2005. Although to some extent law enforcement officers are never expected to be fully "off-duty," Det. Lehmbecker exceeded normal expectations for officers during their "time off." Rather than ignoring the commotion outside her apartment or simply calling 9-1-1, Det. Lehmbecker made a decision to give chase and ultimately apprehend a fleeing felon. Det. Margaret Lehmbecker's actions on 10/10/2005 are exemplary of her dedication to the service of the people of Latah County. And, although her actions clearly represented "bravery beyond the call of duty," Det. Lehmbecker gave no second thought to reacting; she considered the events of that day to be simply a reflection of her love for her profession and of her commitment to protecting the public.