

Ex-officer wins award for overcoming adversity

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ASHLAND -- When the Theodore Roosevelt Police Award was designed, they could have used the biography of Kevin Gunderson as a model.

Gunderson, 56, was shot in the line of duty more than 32 years ago. The injury left him a paraplegic, but through it all he has prevailed. Earlier this month, he was elected to his 12th term on the Ashland Board of City Commissioners. He once again got more votes than anyone else seeking the office.

The award is given annually to police officers nationwide who have overcome a major physical challenge or handicap, much like the former president did in overcoming illness in his youth before becoming police commissioner in New York City. Gunderson will be presented the award at 1 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 4, by Kentucky Attorney General Jack Conway.

"He never seems to let his physical abilities get in the way," said Mayor Tom Kelley. "He's a go-getter. He has a positive attitude. He finds ways to get things done. I really admire him for who he is and what he has achieved."

Gunderson served about four years as a police officer before he was shot in the neck while assisting Boyd County sheriff's deputies in serving a warrant in Ashland. Following a number of surgeries and an extensive rehabilitation, Gunderson worked as a dispatcher at the 911 dispatching center. He has served 23 years as a city commissioner in Ashland.

In 1996, Gunderson spent three hours with then President Bill Clinton and introduced him to a crowd of some 19,000 in Ashland during a campaign stop.

He also has served several times as acting mayor and on a number of local boards and currently serves as president of the Tri-State Airport Authority.

When former Ashand Police Chief Ron McBride saw the criteria for the award, he knew Gunderson was more than qualified.

"Kevin was a good police officer, and he's also good people," McBride said Friday from his Nicholasville, Ky., home. "If not for his strong survival instinct, he would have died at King's Daughters Medical Center and at Cabell Huntington Hospital. If there's anyone who has not been stopped by adversity, it's Kevin Gunderson. He has persevered. And he has continued to serve."

"Kevin is one of the most courageous human beings I've ever met," he said. "He has never quit."

"I'm very flattered by the award," Gunderson said. "McBride told me about it on the 32nd anniversary of the day I got shot."