

Corporal Kimberly Freeman Named 2007 Correctional Officer of the Year

One of the highlights of our Florida Sheriffs Association Mid-Winter conference is meeting FSA's Correctional Officer of the Year. Just like the officers working on patrol and undercover, those who work in our jails and correctional facilities are well aware of the dangers of their work. They never know when they might be called on to save the life of another – or, to defend their own.

Our 2007 Correctional Officer of the Year was faced with such a call. She was placed in a deadly force situation where she had to make a split second decision. Incredibly, she chose to put herself in harm's way to protect a fellow corrections officer.

The incident that led to her nomination occurred on January 17, 2007. Corporal Kimberly Freeman was acting shift sergeant in the 300 pod maximum security housing of the Brevard County Jail. At approximately 4:00 in the afternoon, Corporal Leon Maddox was transferring an inmate to disciplinary confinement because of a rule infraction.

Inmate Mack, who had previously told fellow inmates he "wasn't going back to lockdown," saw an opportunity when Corporal Maddox momentarily turned away. The inmate viciously attacked the officer with an improvised weapon – a sock filled with imitation ivory dominoes. He struck Corporal Maddox in the back of the head, opening a two-inch laceration in his scalp, and knocking him to one knee.

Though bleeding and dazed from the initial blow, Corporal Maddox tried to block two additional blows by the inmate, but was unable to effectively defend himself from the continuing attack.

Recognizing the threat to her fellow Correctional Officer, and seeing that the inmate showed no signs of ending his rampage, Corporal Kimberly Freeman quickly responded. First, she used pepper spray to try to stop Inmate Mack's aggressive behavior. He managed to block the spray's effect by holding bed linens in front of his face.

With no other weapons at her disposal, Corporal Freeman's next move was to step in between Inmate Mack and Corporal Maddox to protect the disoriented officer. She now became the target of the angry inmate's blows – many of which were aimed at her head.

Corporal Freeman did not retreat and used her bare arms to defend both herself and her fellow officer. Her quick thinking and willingness to endure physical

confrontation from an inmate, without giving ground, provided enough time for other officers to assist. The responding officers distracted Inmate Mack and disarmed him using improvised impact weapons, including a broom handle and a chair.

As the reports of this incident noted, it took a great deal of courage for Corporal Freeman to step into the path of this attacker. Her decision was one that few people would consider a viable option.

As one of the officer's who was directly involved with disarming the inmate noted: Confronting an out-of-control person armed with a deadly weapon is always a frightening prospect for any law enforcement officer – even when you know you have a firearm, baton or taser available. So consider that Corporal Kimberly Freeman not only confronted such a person, she did it after seeing him seriously injure a fellow officer. And when her pepper spray didn't work, she deliberately placed herself as a shield to protect her fellow officer. Her actions put her at exceptional risk for her own safety.

The fact that she didn't retreat was also amazing when you consider the force behind the blows to her arms and upper body. The bruises Corporal Freeman received included actual imprints of the imitation ivory dominoes that were stuffed in the sock.

Clearly, Corporal Freeman's actions demonstrated courage and selflessness. She risked her life beyond the call of duty to protect her fellow officer.

And because of her heroic actions, the Florida Sheriffs Association has decided to name Corporal Kimberly Freeman the 2007 Correctional Officer of the Year.

Congratulations, Corporal Freeman.