

2026 LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS *Nashville, TN* CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW

BY BUCK ROGERS

The NTOA's 43rd Annual Law Enforcement Operations Conference and Trade Show was held Aug. 30 to Sept. 4 in Nashville, TN. Our largest conference to date, the event brought together approximately 2,500 participants, including 1,300 attendees and more than 1,000 industry representatives representing 247 exhibiting companies. Attendees, representing 512 agencies from 49 states and eight countries, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Italy, Latvia, Nigeria and the Czech Republic, joined us for a week of seminars, incident debriefs, and networking with leaders and innovators in the law enforcement community.

One of the largest trade shows in conference history, the event gave members direct access to leading manufacturers, product specialists and industry partners. The NTOA also highlighted its BrainHQ partnership, allowing members to test the program on-site and speak with BrainHQ staff about its application to officer performance.

"The debriefs and seminars reflected the strength and impact of this year's conference program. More than 100 instructors shared hard-earned experience, timely legal and operational updates, emerging policing trends, and lessons from significant incidents nationwide."

Conference welcome and awards

Following touching tributes honoring NTOA founder John Kolman and board member Mike Foreman, Executive Director Thor Eells officially opened the conference Monday morning. The program began with a moment of silence honoring those who have given their lives in service to our country and communities.

The Metropolitan Nashville Police Department was recognized for its dedication and support in helping bring this year's conference to Nashville. The MNPD SWAT team also was honored for an extraordinary milestone — 50 years of dedicated service to the Nashville community.

The annual NTOA Awards recognized outstanding individuals for significant achievements throughout the law enforcement special operations community over the past year. These accomplished and dedicated members contribute to the profession in meaningful ways, and the NTOA was honored to recognize their service, leadership, and impact.

In its third year, the NTOA Hall of Honor paid tribute to extraordinary leaders whose contributions to the tactical profession merit the highest recognition. The 2026 inductees — Jeff Chudwin, Keith Frakes, Paul Howe, Steve Ijames,



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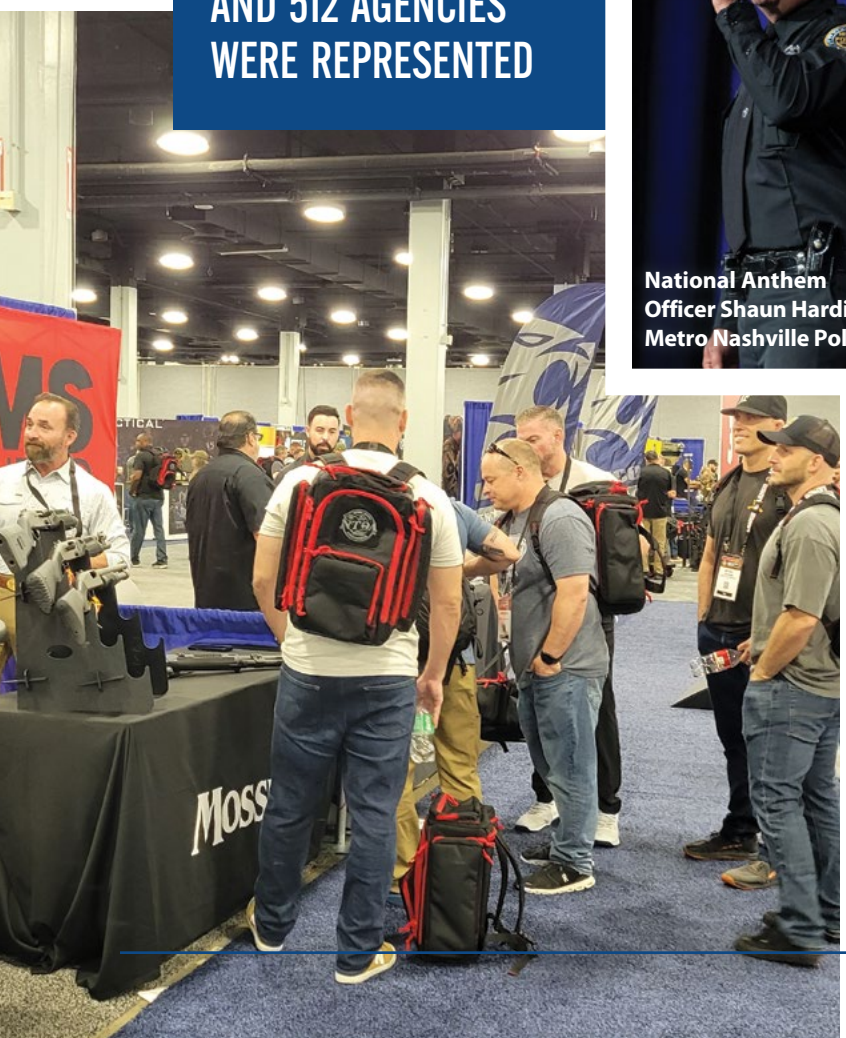
Metro Nashville Police Dept. Honor Guard



National Anthem Officer Shaun Hardin of the Metro Nashville Police Dept.



Metro Nashville Police Dept. Bagpiper





Thor Eells, NTOA Executive Director

and Marcus "Sandy" Wall — all were present to receive this honor. These distinguished individuals have left an indelible mark on the profession, dedicating their lives to advancing the tactical community and elevating the standards of those who serve. Through their leadership and unwavering commitment to excellence, they helped shape the profession we know today. We honor their lives and their service by carrying that legacy forward, embracing the same commitment to professionalism, innovation and excellence that defined their careers. Visit ntoa.org/hall-of-honor to learn more about their contributions through dedications and videos.

On Monday night, attendees enjoyed an unforgettable evening at the annual Welcome Reception, surrounded by lush indoor gardens, winding pathways and cascading waterfalls in the stunning Delta Atrium at the Gaylord Opryland Resort. Point Blank Enterprises and Lenco Armored Vehicles generously co-hosted the event, providing members an opportunity to reconnect, build new relationships, and celebrate the start of the conference week.

Debriefs

One of the conference's most well-attended debriefs examined a Dec. 27, 2022, hostage-rescue response in Georgetown, Texas. Presenter Wyatt Raley walked attendees through the rapidly evolving incident, including the coordination between patrol and SWAT personnel, the difficult decisions made under time pressure, and the lessons that continue to inform hostage-rescue planning, communications, and response integration. At the time, the patrol perimeter team also was serving as the immediate action team, with the understanding that if entry became necessary, officers would collapse the perimeter to assemble enough personnel for the rescue. As tactical officers arrived, teams began preparing for a controlled handoff from patrol to SWAT. Before that handoff could occur, the suspect fired one round inside the residence, followed immediately by a second.

After the gunshots, the assistant team leader gave the rescue call, and patrol officers collapsed the perimeter to support entry. Team snipers, recognizing that the handoff had not yet occurred, left their observation position and moved forward to assist with the rescue effort.

Patrol officers and SWAT members then entered the residence in response to the shots fired. Teams initially believed the victim's last known location was the kitchen; however, she had been moved to a bedroom. Immediately after the shots were fired, a perimeter officer saw the suspect fleeing from the rear of the residence and fired two rounds, both of which missed as the suspect escaped around the house. The suspect fled the scene and was later apprehended outside Houston. The debrief highlighted several important lessons, including command-and-control responsibilities, differing CQB systems between patrol and the tactical unit, and the importance of radio-channel continuity during rapidly evolving hostage-rescue operations.



Hall of Honor Recipients 2026 – (l-r) Jeff Chudwin, Keith Frakes, Steve Ijames, Marcus "Sandy" Wall, Paul Howe

NTOA Awards

John Kolman Award of Excellence:
Brian Willis in recognition of his exceptional leadership, lasting contributions to tactical training and officer safety, and unwavering dedication to the law enforcement profession.



The annual NTOA Awards recognized outstanding individuals for significant achievements throughout the law enforcement special operations community over the past year.



Spirit of the NTOA:
BrainHQ for its outstanding partnership, visionary leadership, and enduring commitment to enhancing officer performance and saving lives.



Unit Citation for Valor: Members of the Central Texas Regional SWAT Team for decisive action, exceptional teamwork and extraordinary courage under life-threatening circumstances.



Unit Citation for Valor: Members of the Lincoln Police Department SWAT Team for conducting a complex hostage-rescue operation under rapidly evolving and dangerous conditions, saving the life of an innocent victim and successfully apprehending a violent offender.

The conference featured more than a dozen major incident debriefs from across the country, giving attendees a firsthand look at critical decision-making, interagency coordination, and lessons learned from complex law enforcement operations. Among the featured presentations were a Lake County, Florida, debrief presented by Ralph McDuffie on an incident in which an officer was killed; a domestic violence homicide and hostage-rescue debrief presented by Travis Gribble; and a multi-agency hostage rescue in Atchison, Kansas, presented by Chris Baes, Ryan Boyer and Brian Johnson.

Thank You



MNPD Chaplain Andrew Ivey



Lt. Joshua Black, Metropolitan Nashville PD (Host Liaison)

The Atchison debrief highlighted the challenges of a rapidly evolving hostage incident that required coordination among the Atchison Police Department, Kansas Highway Patrol and Kansas Bureau of Investigation. Presenters walked attendees through the response, deliberate rescue planning, and decisive actions that led to the safe rescue of the hostage without injury to officers or the victim.

These debriefs were among the week's most meaningful offerings. We recognize the profound impact these incidents have had on the presenters, their agencies and their communities, and we are grateful for their willingness to share hard-earned lessons with fellow officers. Their experiences reflect the value of honest after-action learning and the NTOA's continued commitment to strengthening officer safety, readiness and support across the profession.

Seminars

The seminar program offered a wide range of timely and relevant topics for law enforcement leaders and tactical operators. Among this year's new courses was "Detecting a Cunning Opponent," presented by Greg Williams, creator of the U.S. Marine Corps Combat Hunter program, and Brian Marren. The course examined how criminals may disguise their actions and intent while hiding in plain sight and introduced a structured observation model — baseline plus anomaly equals decision — to help officers identify meaningful behavioral and environmental cues. The instructors emphasized the importance of comparing initial information with conditions observed on scene to support sound decision-making, improve officer safety and reduce the likelihood of unnecessary escalation.

Brian King's session focused on accountability, adaptation and continuous improvement in high-risk environments. He challenged tactical leaders to recognize that recurring mistakes, when left unaddressed, create avoidable risk. The presentation offered practical guidance for conducting honest after-action reviews, identifying performance patterns, and turning lessons learned into meaningful changes in training, planning and execution.

Seth Haselhuhn led an engaging new session on mindset, cognitive skills and recognition-primed decision-making. Using practical examples from close-quarters problem-solving, the course challenged participants to assess how quickly they recognize patterns, process information and make decisions under pressure. The session underscored the importance of deliberate cognitive training as part of operational readiness in complex, high-risk environments.

Jon Becker, a longtime contributor to the NTOA mission, presented lessons drawn from his podcast, "The Debrief." The standing-room-only session distilled recurring leadership and team-development themes from seven seasons of conversations with elite operators, commanders and subject-matter experts. Attendees received practical takeaways they could immediately apply to strengthen leadership, culture and team performance.

Thank You!

YOUR SUPPORT FUELS EDUCATION BUILDS CONNECTIONS AND STRENGTHENS THE MISSION.

TO OUR GENEROUS CONFERENCE SPONSORS:



An unforgettable evening at the welcome reception in Gaylord's Beautiful Delta Island!

CONFERENCE SPONSORS:

5.11 Tactical • Condor Outdoor
First Tactical • Lenco Armored Vehicles
Point Blank Enterprises
Tru-Spec Global

RAFFLE PRIZES

Thank you to the many companies who donated prizes to be raffled off at our conference to help raise funds for various scholarships offered by the NTOA.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Through the generosity of our sponsors, we awarded 10 conference scholarships. Thank you to all who applied, and congratulations to our scholarship recipients.

MIDDLE WEST SPIRITS/OLD ELK

Robert Goodale
Davidson County SO (TN)

Blake Powers
Southwestern OSU PD (OK)

Paul Edelman
U.S. Dept. of Commerce (NIST) Police (PA)

Ismael Lopez
Northern Regional PD (PA)

POINT BLANK ENTERPRISES

Mark Villasenor
Carnegie Mellon University PD (PA)

Kenneth Dolan
Pawtucket PD (RI)

Ryan Jordan
Polk County SO (FL)

Thomas Horner
Menifee PD (CA)

ANGEL ARMOR

Christopher Rogers
Port Orange PD (FL)

JOHN KOLMAN TRAINING SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Garrett Rosner
Walton County SO (FL)

Becker also presented "Culture First: 9 Leadership Practices That Build Elite Teams," based on his recently published book, "Culture First." The session provided leaders with a practical framework drawn from research and experience in elite military and law enforcement units. Participants explored how culture, standards and deliberate leadership practices shape high-performing teams and organizations.

The emphasis on leadership reading and professional study echoed a point often attributed to Gen. James Mattis, who warned that leaders too busy to read learn only through their own experience — or through the experiences of those they lead — which is often the hard way. In a profession where poor judgment can carry lasting consequences, learning from others' experiences through books, debriefs and candid professional dialogue remains one of the most valuable ways to strengthen leadership before the next critical incident.

Several Hall of Honor inductees also contributed to the conference seminar program. Paul Howe presented on structure, training and leadership in the post-Global War on Terror era; Keith Frakes offered a historical perspective on explosive breaching; Steve Ijames addressed contemporary tactical issues; and Marcus "Sandy" Wall and Dr. David Klinger presented on avoiding disaster in the tactical environment and beyond. Their continued service to the profession reflects the depth of experience and commitment represented throughout this year's conference.

Together, the debriefs and seminars reflected the strength and impact of this year's conference program. More than 100 instructors shared hard-earned experience, timely legal and operational updates, emerging policing trends, and lessons from significant incidents nationwide. Their willingness to teach, challenge and invest in our members helped sharpen attendees' skills, expand professional understanding, and reinforce the shared commitment to continuous improvement across the tactical community.



Congratulations to the lucky winners of NTOA's first Mystery Box giveaways, each valued at approximately $4,000.



Chris Phillips
Michigan State Police



Matt Ream
Lancaster (OH) PD

Next year's conference will take place Oct. 10 - 15, 2027 at the

Gaylord Rockies Resort and Convention Center in Aurora, Colorado.

Watch ntoa.org for conference updates and online registration information.

AURORA COLORADO

SAVE THE DATE

2027



OCTOBER

10-15, 2027

GAYLORD ROCKIES RESORT
& CONVENTION CENTER

NTOA 2027

LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS
CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW