

1994

Patrolman Leonard F. Nosse Jr
Patrolman Thomas D. Schmidt
Dispatcher Sandra M. Zalar

Wickliffe Police Department

We send our kids to school. They'll be safe there. After all, they are our most precious commodity. Nothing can happen at school, can it? They'll learn there, but sometimes they learn things that we would rather that they never learn. Things like the smell of gunpowder, what terror feels like, what death looks like. And that, what happens only in other places, can happen here, even in Wickliffe, Ohio.

It did happen in Wickliffe, when on November 7, 1994, a man walked into Wickliffe Middle School carrying a shotgun. Dispatcher Sandra Zalar took the call, and immediately had all of her dispatching skills stretched to the limit. Within 14 seconds, recognizing the gravity of the situation, Zalar had patrol cars enroute.

During the next three minutes, sheer terror reigned at the school. Gunshots were blasted as students and staff ran for safety. Numerous calls were placed to 911, and were handled by Zalar. The school custodian, Peter Christopher, was fatally hit. Two teachers were wounded as was Patrolman Thomas Schmidt, who was one of the first responders.

Officer Nosse, was actually kneeling next to the wounded Schmidt, when he fired his service revolver and finally stopped the gunman. The gunman was charged with aggravated murder and was committed to a state mental institution. The response of these three members of the Wickliffe Police Department undoubtedly saved the lives of many others in the school.

Police Chief James Fox stressed the importance of police officer not becoming complacent in their jobs. Even in the suburbs, and officer's life can change in an instant, so they must be prepared at all times.

Nosse, Schmidt, and Zalar were honored by the Lake County Blue Coats and awarded the prestigious Jorge Medina Award, at their banquet on February 1, 1995. Dispatcher Zalar became the first civilian dispatcher up to this date, to ever receive the prestigious award.