

## 2008 CRIME VICTIM SERVICES AWARD WINNER

### East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, Sheriff's Office



*Sgt. Carolyn Stapleton, Victim Services Coordinator, accepting the 2008 NSA Crime Victim Services Award on behalf of the East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, Sheriff's Office, headed by Sheriff Sid Gautreaux, III. From left to right: John Gillis, Director of the Office for Victims of Crime; Mike Davis, President of Appriss, Inc., sponsor of the award; and Sheriff Craig Webre, 2007-2008 NSA President.*

The East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, Sheriff's Office (EBRSO) is the 2008 recipient of NSA's Crime Victim Services Award. The award, established in 2005 with initial funding support from the Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice, recognizes "outstanding achievement by a Sheriff's Office in support of victims." Appriss, Inc., is now the sponsor of this award, which is administered by the NSA Crime Victim Services Committee, chaired by Sheriff Craig Webre.

The mission of the Crime Victim Services Unit of the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office is to provide a caring and understanding environment where victims can receive assistance. The Unit also maintains a contact list of survivors of homicide victims to insure that survivors never feel forgotten as time passes by. According to Sgt. Carolyn Stapleton, Victim Services Coordinator, "we develop a relationship with our victims and we maintain the relationship until they no longer need us....We practice the concept of compassion, addressing the needs of victims, and practicality." First, you show compassion; then, by listening, you understand the needs; finally, understanding the needs leads you to the practicality of filing crime victim reparation claims and helping with all the other overwhelming events that follow victimization.

Every year, the Sheriff's Office hosts an "Evening of Remembrance" for victims of murder. The ceremony is held during "National Crime Victims Rights Week." It brings together a large cross section of the community who see and hear, through the voices of the survivors of homicide victims, the pain that crime causes everyone. Surviving family members share special memories about their loved ones while photographs of the loved ones are shown on screen. Families experience a clear expression of caring and support from their community while they publicly honor the memory of their loved ones to their fellow residents of the community.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, all those in attendance have the opportunity to meet each other, as well as to ask questions of and obtain information from local officials, law enforcement officers, victim advocates, and other social service providers. This is another important aspect of the Evening of

Remembrance: it educates the community – especially given that the event receives widespread media coverage – about the availability of assistance for crime victims.

The Sheriff's Office has also initiated many other creative projects to focus attention on victim issues and highlight National Crime Victims Rights Week. An art contest is sponsored, the topic of which is "Consequences of Violence," with the winning entry displayed along the interstate highway on a digital billboard. Also, there is "Tune Out the Violence in East Baton Rouge Parish," with local radio stations agreeing to not play any songs containing violent lyrics on the Evening of Remembrance day. And, there are presentations at middle schools where students hear directly from individuals whose loved ones were the victims of gun violence about the impact of that violence on their lives.

Finally, the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office is the recipient of the 2008 NSA Crime Victim Services Award because, in the words of Victim Services Coordinator Stapleton, "Our victims know we will be there for them, in the beginning, the middle and at the end."