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At the awards ceremony are, from the left, Detectives Ralph Aquino and Robert Jensen, Sgt. John Scrivani, Lt. Louis Fiori and Chief Robert J. Johnston Jr.

Cops honored for Rand arrest

By REGINALD PATRICK
ADVANCE CITY HALL BUREAU

The men who made the arrest in the Jennifer Schweiger case picked up Centurion of the Month awards during a ceremony in Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward's office yesterday.

"They showed sensitivity, a great respect for individual rights and the determination to get the job done," said Robert J. Johnston Jr., chief of operations. "Their true professionalism showed through."

The investigative team also delicately handled "a lot of second-guessing" from police headquarters in Manhattan, Johnston said.

"There were a lot of suggestions coming from this building about what to do," Johnston said. "They were being told: 'Do this or do that.'"

With the operations chief standing by, officials of the Centurion Foundation, a private business group, presented plaques to Lt. Louis Fiori, Sgt. John Scrivani and detectives Ralph Aquino and Robert Jensen of the Staten Island Crimes Against Property Squad.

A \$500 check was also presented to the families of each of the officers. A congratulatory letter from Cardinal John O'Connor was also read by Johnston.

The foundation, a not-for-profit group, supports the Police Department through monthly awards for heroism or top-flight investigative work, according to Larry Loventhal, president. The agency also provides scholarships to individuals in law enforcement, as well as special medals and awards at the Police Department's annual Medals Day.

The investigation leading up to the arrest last summer of Andre Rand, 43, the homeless man charged in the kidnap-murder of Jennifer Schweiger of Westerleigh, a 12-year-old with Down's syndrome, was one of the most involved inquiries in Staten Island history.

The officers honored yesterday recalled the investigation as a good example of how steady, but unglamorous police legwork, which is far different than what usually happens on cop shows, can often pay off.

Fiori, who was assigned to the chief of department's office under Patrick Murphy before heading up the Staten Island unit, said, "This was a case where we were forced to proceed with extreme care."

"There were literally hundreds of interviews," Aquino recalled.

Scrivani said "it was definitely the toughest case I've been involved in."

"We all put in a lot of time on this one," he said.

The squad arrested Rand on Aug. 3. Aquino recalled that officers drove Rand around checking on his alibi and then arrested him on the spot when they determined his story "just didn't add up." At that time Jennifer Schweiger, who had disappeared on July 9, was still officially missing. Rand was later charged with murder when the girl's body was found in a shallow grave on the grounds of Willowbrook a short distance from Rand had been camping.

Rand's lawyer has sought a change in venue for the case, claiming his client can't get a fair trial on Staten Island because of media coverage of the case.