

Former Downers Grove resident receives conservation award

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DOWNERS GROVE – An Illinois conservation police officer has to face a lot of different situations – everything from checking compliance on boat licenses to tracking down homicide suspects.

A Downers Grove native has been honored for his excellent work in all the job requires.

Steve Vasicek, a Downers Grove South High School graduate who now lives in Jonesboro, was recognized as the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Officer of the Year on July 16 at the department's headquarters in Springfield.

"He's a very caring individual and very professional in his demeanor," said Captain Tim Daiber, who oversees Vasicek's work in region 5 and

recommended him for the award. "He has a true concern not only for the natural resources of the state, but also for the safety and welfare of others."

Conservation officers have full police powers throughout the state of Illinois. Vasicek said he has been on the force for 15 years and had always been drawn to the outdoors and nature.

In fact, the position had been his goal since age 8, he said, leading him to a degree in law enforcement and minor in zoology at Southern Illinois University.

Daiber said the department looks at a number of things when determining who deserves to be the officer of the year: demeanor, activity, cases, off-



Steve Vasicek

hour contributions to the community and quality of work.

He said Vasicek displayed all those qualities, especially noting his love for educating the community and ability to work with those who "aren't happy to see him," such as unlicensed hunters.

"He's very personable to talk to and he gets along with anybody," he said.

In 2014, Vasicek issued 198 written warnings, 134 citations and 23 field reports, according to the department's Facebook page.

He also arrested a suspect who had allegedly committed a robbery and double homicide at a bank in Cairo and a suspect wanted for aggravated battery to a police officer.

He previously has been nominated for the award and received the Mississippi Flyway Waterfowl Officer of

the Year award.

Vasicek said he has come to especially appreciate the preservation and conservation side of his job through the years, saying those that hunt illegally steal from the heritage of the entire state.

His visits to his parents in Downers Grove often reinforces the need to preserve what remains of the natural resources of the state.

He remembers one stretch in particular on 75th Street that used to be the site of a large field filled with wildlife he would drive past every morning on the way to school that has since been paved over.

"All that development, that is the thing that's affected wildlife the most," he said. "As wildlife kind of gets pigeonholed into smaller and smaller spaces, the protection of that wildlife becomes more important."