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**MDEA’s Special Agent Chris Gardner receives ATF Director’s Award**

At the 21st Annual ATF Awards Ceremony last week in Washington D.C., the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives honored Maine Drug Enforcement Special Agent Chris Gardner, posthumously, for his work on a federal firearms and drug investigation dubbed “Operation Blood Red”.

Each year one case is selected from all cases investigated by ATF across the country to receive the **Director’s Award**. In the ceremony attended by Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Acting Director Thomas Brandon noted that “Operation Blood Red” involved the arrest and prosecution of members and associates of a very violent New Haven, Connecticut street gang, “The Red Side Guerilla Brims”. The gang had been involved in acts of violence, including murder, firearms trafficking and drug trafficking in New Haven, CT. and Bangor, ME. The operation netted approximately 32 arrests between Maine and Connecticut, including 7 for homicide. The arrests included one of the gang’s leaders, who pleaded guilty to charges stemming from his illegal conduct in Maine and Connecticut, including several homicides.

The illegal activity charged, stemmed from the sale of heroin and crack cocaine, along with the illegal acquisition of firearms, both through “straw” purchases made from a Bangor area gun dealer and those which were traded for drugs. The firearms were then transported out of state and used by gang members in felony crimes in New Haven and elsewhere. All of the indictments resulted in convictions. Honored with Gardner for his exceptional work was an Assistant U.S. Attorney from the District of Maine (Bangor), several ATF agents, members of the New Haven Police Department’s Violent Crimes Task Force, along with three Assistant U.S. Attorneys from the District of Connecticut.

Special Agent Gardner died suddenly last November as a direct result of complications from surgery to repair an injury he suffered in the line of duty. Gardner, a 27 year veteran Detective Sergeant with the University of Maine Police Dept. in Orono, had been on assignment with the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency for 10 years prior to his death. He was 47.