



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

September 28, 2004

BOSTON ICE AGENT TO BE AWARDED “SERVICE TO AMERICA” MEDAL FOR DISMANTLING ORGANIZATION THAT USED INFANTS TO HELP SMUGGLE DRUGS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Partnership for Public Service, a non-profit organization devoted to revitalizing federal service, will today award a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) senior special agent with the “Service to America” medal for his role in dismantling an international drug organization that used rented infants and female couriers to smuggle cocaine into the United States in baby formula cans.

At a reception in Washington, D.C. tonight, Boston ICE senior special agent **Peter Darling** is scheduled to receive the Service to America - Justice and Law Enforcement medal, which recognizes a federal employee for significant contribution to the nation in activities related to justice and law enforcement.

Agent Darling, a native of Newbury, Massachusetts, and a 16-year law enforcement veteran, is one of just eight federal employees to receive a medal from the Partnership for Public Service. Each year, this organization honors the finest achievements of the nation’s public servants.

Darling’s award is the result of his crucial role in “Operation Kids for Cover,” a long-term investigation by ICE, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Chicago. The investigation targeted an international drug organization that used female couriers and “rented” infants to help smuggle cocaine into this country in cans of baby formula.

“This award is really for our team, for the work we accomplished together. I’m proud to work with such a group of dedicated agents, proud to be part of ICE and the Department of Homeland Security, and proud to know that we’re doing our part to make America safer,” Agent Darling said.

“ICE is proud of Agent Darling and the entire investigative team’s work to bring to justice the members of this international crime organization. The Service to America medal presented to him today for Operation Kids for Cover recognizes that effort and is a reflection of the spirit of public service we strive for in the Department of Homeland Security,” said Michael J. Garcia, the Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The investigation established that this organization used 22 infants, eleven of whom were rented from their parents, as decoys to help female couriers smuggle cocaine past border inspectors on commercial flights from Panama to Chicago, New York, and London.

Many of the couriers, several of whom were drug addicts, carried the cans containing formula to feed the infants in the same bag as the identical cans containing liquid cocaine. One of the infants who was rented on six occasions was left with a stranger as the drug-addicted courier attempted to purchase heroin. On another trip, the same infant was abandoned by a drug courier in an empty bathtub because the courier could not tolerate the infant's crying.

To date, Operation Kids for Cover has resulted in 49 convictions. The defendants range from the drug suppliers and the Chicago-based organizers, to the couriers and the parents who rented their infants knowing they were to be used as decoys on drug smuggling trips. The Chicago leader of the conspiracy was convicted after a three week trial and was sentenced in 2003 to life in prison.

Admiral James Loy, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), will present Agent Darling with the award. Two DHS employees will be among the eight award recipients at this year's Service to America Medals Awards Gala.

ICE

ICE, the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, was established to bring a unified focus to the enforcement of U.S. Immigration and Customs laws, with the principal goal of preventing violations by terrorists and other criminals who threaten the nation's security.