

Contact: Chief Daniel Ward  
Phone: (620) 441-4447  
Fax: (620) 442-1410  
[dward@arkansascityks.gov](mailto:dward@arkansascityks.gov)

Police Department  
City of Arkansas City  
117 W. Central Ave.  
Arkansas City, KS 67005



# News Release

## ACPD Sgt. Mata honored by Optimist Club as Officer of the Year

*Officer selected for exemplary service, especially with crimes against children*

ARKANSAS CITY, Kan. (May 17, 2016) — Arkansas City Police Department Sgt. Eric Mata was named Tuesday night by the Optimists of Arkansas City as winner of the club's Officer of the Year award.

"We are here tonight to honor and recognize the exemplary service of Arkansas City Police Department Sergeant Eric Mata," Optimist Club president Tommy Aguinaga said during the award presentation at Tuesday night's City Commission meeting.

Mata has been employed by ACPD since June 14, 2000. His diverse career has included assignments in the Patrol Division, Investigations Division and Cowley County Drug Task Force.

He also served as the department's first canine handler from 2010 until 2015, conducting community-oriented presentations to highlight the capabilities of the program. Many citizens enjoyed observing the bond between dog and handler.

Mata was nominated in part because is consistently present at work for his normally schedule shift, and he was recognized eight times in 2015 alone for responding to work shifts that were short-staffed.

Mata also takes few, if any, sick days. He prides himself on staying healthy and routinely runs competitive distance races, including half marathons.

Through 2015 and into 2016, Mata has been a first-line supervisor for a day-shift patrol assignment.

Mata is dedicated to learning all he can about the ever-evolving field of law enforcement, and has become a reliable "go-to" training officer for ACPD in critical areas such as use of force and officer safety.

"Above all of these other areas discussed, Sergeant Mata goes well beyond expectations in the area of crimes against children," said ACPD Lt. Eric Burr.

**For immediate release**

*more*

“It only takes a moment talking about victimized children to know he holds a true passion for serving those who cannot protect themselves. His vigilance for protecting children is rarely seen.”

Pamela Mason, a case worker with the Kansas Department for Children and Families, sent the following email regarding Mata’s work in one case:

“Sergeant Mata was crucial in protecting the children in this case. He was responsive, evaluating his work critically, and valuing the perspective of a social worker. Sergeant Mata’s professionalism and respect of families we work with often is a game-changer. I have witnessed that their anxiety is lessened as he is a voice of reason which they often listened to and respected. The professional relationship developed and role modeled is mimicked by the officers under him, and that sets up that partnering relationship that is crucial to the work that law enforcement officers and social workers do in child protective cases.”

### **Astra Abegg investigation**

One of the examples of Mata’s service that was highlighted during Tuesday night’s presentation at City Hall was his work above and beyond the call of duty in the investigation of a child’s death last year.

Sixteen-month-old Astra Abegg was found dead of suspicious circumstances Aug. 18, 2015, after the Arkansas City Fire-EMS Department responded to MeadowWalk Apartments, 925 W. Skyline Road.

Her mother, Lindsey Abegg, 29, pleaded guilty to possession of marijuana and methamphetamine, and also pleaded no contest to aggravated endangerment of a child March 17 in district court.

She was sentenced on April 28 to 18 months of presumptive probation and ordered to pay \$1,138 in miscellaneous court fees, in addition to her court-appointed attorney’s fees.

Lindsey Abegg’s boyfriend, 27-year-old Jacob Brickey, entered a guilty plea to the voluntary manslaughter of Astra Abegg during an appearance March 10 in a plea agreement with the state.

The agreement also included a plea of guilty to the charge of aggravated endangerment of a child.

Brickey was sentenced to a total of 90 months in prison during an appearance in court on April 25.

He will have to pay \$493 in court fees and must register as a violent offender for the next 15 years.

Mata was instrumental in the investigation into Astra Abegg’s death.

“Due to the diligent and thorough nature of the work he performs, and the passion for which he attacks cases involving crimes against children, Sergeant Mata willfully volunteered to become the lead investigator in this case,” Burr wrote in his nomination of Mata to receive the Optimists’ award.

This role required Mata to leave his patrol assignment, assume responsibility for all case follow-up work, and liaise with outside agencies such as the Cowley County Attorney’s Office and the Sedgwick County Forensic Science Center. Mata also spent countless hours preparing this case for prosecution.

“Most notably, however, were not the hours of work Sergeant Mata spent investigating the case, but the relationship he struck with the victim’s family in its aftermath,” Burr wrote.

“Sergeant Mata endeared himself to this family in turmoil and became an advocate for Astra’s grieving relatives, truly making a positive impact in the wake of a horrible tragedy.”

Astra’s great-grandmother, Joy Fry, related there were times she did not think she could have made it through the ordeal without Mata’s support. She submitted a letter on his behalf, detailing his professionalism and the outpouring of support he lent to her, her family, and especially Astra’s brother, Kingston, and sister, Ziah. Fry read the emotional letter Tuesday night to close out the presentation.

“I am honored to have been asked to write this letter of commendation for Sergeant Eric Mata. I haven’t known Eric for very long, but it hasn’t taken a long time to know he is a police officer of professionalism, concern and love for children,” Fry wrote. “As I have spent time with Eric concerning Astra, I feel that I have also been fortunate enough to have gained a new and wonderful friend.

“He has continued to work for justice for the surviving siblings. His work on this case has been beyond what anyone could have expected. His commitment to bring justice for Astra has not gone unnoticed. Eric has gone beyond with his concern, patience, diligence and love. (It) is appreciated beyond measure.

“Kingston and Ziah love Eric. They feel that from him. They ask about him and want to know when they will get to see him again. He made such an impression on them that they wanted to buy teddy bears for him to carry in his police car for other children. Eric never fails to ask about their well-being. He is concerned about their future.”

### **About the Optimists of Arkansas City**

The local Optimist Club was chartered in 1981 and does much more than just flipping pork burgers at Arkalalah, although that’s probably what people know its members for best.

With their upbeat attitudes, Optimist Club members help to empower young people to be the best they can be. All funds raised — approximately \$20,000 per year — stay in the community to support kids in area programs and events. The Optimists also regularly provide food for community events.

Optimists believe it is important for children to grow up with a strong belief in abiding by the law, respecting law enforcement and doing what they can to maintain peace. One of the ways the club tries to instill these values in the youth of Arkansas City is by honoring a local law enforcement officer each year in conjunction with National Law Enforcement Week.

For the last 20 years, the club has given this award to a police officer or sheriff's deputy in recognition of superior service above and beyond the call of duty.

Additionally, the Optimists count the Arkansas City Police Department as one of their most successful community partners.

They work with the police department to provide child identity kits at events such as the annual Bike Rodeo and the Cowley County Health and Safety Fair. The club also provides food for ACPD's annual DARE Summer Camp and the National Night Out kickoff party.

Anyone interested in joining the club may contact Bob Frazee at [bfrazee@arkansascityks.gov](mailto:bfrazee@arkansascityks.gov) or (620) 441-4454, or Andrew Lawson at [alawson@arkansascityks.gov](mailto:alawson@arkansascityks.gov) or (620) 441-4415.

## **About Optimist International**

Optimist International is a worldwide volunteer organization made up of more than 2,500 local clubs whose members work each day to make the future brighter by bringing out the best in children, in their communities and in themselves.

Optimist Clubs are dedicated to "Bringing Out the Best in Kids" and do their part through community service programs. Since each club is autonomous and run by members in their community, Optimists have the unique flexibility to serve the youth of their area in any way they see fit. Optimist Clubs see a need in their community and react to it.

Optimists conduct 65,000 community service projects each year, spending \$78 million in their communities. Annually, 6 million kids are positively affected by Optimist programs.

For more information about Optimist International's dedication to serving youth, contact the programs department by email at [programs@optimist.org](mailto:programs@optimist.org) or call (800) 500-8130 ext. 235.

**In other business Tuesday, the City Commission:**

- Recognized and congratulated Cowley College sophomore Madeline Pegorsch, Arkansas City's Outstanding Student Award winner for 2015-16. Pegorsch, a Winfield native who works part-time through The Arnold Group as a typist for the Arkansas City Police Department, received a \$1,000 scholarship. She plans to attend the University of Kansas this autumn.
- Witnessed Mayor Duane Oestmann's proclamations of May 15 as Peace Officers Memorial Day, and May 15-21 as both National EMS Week and National Law Enforcement Week, in Arkansas City. The EMS proclamation was accepted by EMS Director Jeri Smith, while the law enforcement proclamations were accepted by Police Chief Dan Ward, Burr, Detective Lt. Jim Holloway, Mata and Sgt. Kevyn Ternes.
- Recognized Arkansas City Middle School seventh-graders Jasmine Wilson and Korbin Wise for participating in City Hall Day on May 10. A total of 11 essay winners participated in the event.
- Unanimously approved the following consent agenda items: approval of the May 3 regular meeting minutes as written; authorization of Oestmann to sign the annual statement of assurance from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism on continuing use of recreational facilities funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund; ratification of Oestmann's appointment of Chris Dancy to the Retired Citizens Advisory Council; ratification of Oestmann's reappointments of Jack Givens and Glen Morrison to the Retired Citizens Advisory Council.
- Voted 4-1 to approve a resolution authorizing the City to enter into a contract with Kuhn Mechanical to replace the clearwell backwash pump at the Water Treatment Facility, for an amount not to exceed \$44,500 and contingent on offering a five-year warranty. Commissioner Dan Jurkovich cast the dissenting vote. A lower bid from Wichita-based JCI was discarded because commissioners found that Kuhn would be able to respond more quickly to problems.
- Unanimously approved a resolution changing a City Commission strategic planning retreat from 9 a.m. June 10 to 12:30 p.m. June 5, at a location to be determined later, to discuss 2017 budgeting priorities.
- Unanimously approved a resolution authorizing the City to enter into a contract agreement with Walters-Morgan Construction, Inc., of Manhattan, for blower and control system improvements at the Wastewater Treatment Facility, for an amount not to exceed \$81,500.

###