

**CITY OF CYPRESS POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
**PRESS RELEASE**

**Tuesday, November 19, 2009**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Nature of Release:** Members of the Cypress Police Department gather to Remember Fallen Officer  
**Date/Time of Incident:** Nov. 19, 2009 at 12:00 p.m.

**Brief Narrative of Incident:**

On Nov. 19, 2009, at approximately 12:00 p.m., members of the Cypress Police Department took time during their lunch break to remember Sergeant Donald J. Sowma, who was killed in the line of duty on November 19, 1976. Police department members gathered around the Sowma Memorial, which department members built and dedicated on February 19, 2000.

On November 19, 1976, at about 2:33 a.m., the Cypress Police Department received a call from the Well's Fargo alarm company regarding an activation of a silent burglar alarm at the Pomeroy's medical clinic at 5651 Lincoln Ave. Two officers, Agent James Worden and Officer Scott Atkinson, were dispatched to the call. Sergeant Don Sowma, the shift supervisor, responded as well. The other two remaining Cypress units, Officer John Schaefer and Officer Robert Tinnell, also responded to assist with a perimeter around the building.

A check of the exterior of the building and rooftop did not reveal any forced entry. A closer inspection revealed an unlocked window with fresh footprints on the windowsill and interior floor. Through that same window, a crowbar was also observed inside the building.

A search of the doctor's office did not reveal any suspects, so officers proceeded to enter the attached art gallery. Upon opening the door leading into the art gallery, officers heard noises. As Sergeant Don Sowma stepped into the doorway, he was shot once by Bobby Joe Denney, a cowardly criminal that was hiding inside the gallery.

Denney fired a second round as other officers attempted to rescue Sergeant Sowma. Agent Worden exited the building and quickly made his way to another door forcing entry back into another portion of the building. From that location, Agent Worden and assisting officers were able to remove Sergeant Sowma, who was transported to La Palma Hospital. While at the hospital, Sergeant Sowma succumbed to his injuries which were caused by a single, .38 caliber gun shot wound to the chest. Unfortunately, Sergeant Sowma did not have the added protection of a bullet proof vest since this type of protection was uncommon in 1976.

Bobby Joe Denney, who had entered the business through an unlocked window to steal drugs and money, remained barricaded inside the building for the next several hours. He ignored orders to surrender despite tear gas deployment. Later that morning an Anaheim Police Department SWAT entry team breached the building, and after firing one round at the team of officers, Bobby Joe Denney surrendered his .38 revolver and was taken into custody without further incident.

Bobby Joe Denney, a 32-year old drifter who had been living with friends in Hawaiian Gardens, was the son of the Carter County (Oklahoma) Sheriff. At the time of his arrest, Denney was a fugitive and a parole violator from an Oklahoma burglary conviction. During his trial for the murder of Sergeant Sowma, Denney was convicted and sentenced to life. He remains in custody despite several parole attempts.

Sergeant Donald Sowma was the type of individual that could be counted on during any circumstance. He was a great friend, peace officer, and supervisor. Sergeant Sowma's tragic death at age 44 was a loss to those who worked with him, to the community he served, and to his loving family. At the time of his death, Sergeant Sowma was survived by his wife Colleen and their four children: Michael Robert, James Patrick, Donald Jack Jr., and Donna Marie Sowma.

May his memory live on as we vow to never forget Donald Jack Sowma.



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Media inquires should be directed to Sergeant Tom Bruce at (714) 229-6619 or via email at [tbruce@ci.cypress.ca.us](mailto:tbruce@ci.cypress.ca.us). Press releases are distributed via a mass notification email list as well as being posted on our [web site](#). Postings to the web site are sometimes delayed due to weekend or after hour releases. If not already on the email roster, you can register to receive the press releases by going to [Press Release Registration](#). It is the goal of the Cypress Police Department to provide prompt and accurate information to the public via the multitude of media outlets.