

Feds Honor Plainfield Police Chief Gillens Named 2007 Officer of the Year

By ALEX TIEGEN, Valley News Staff Writer

For Gordon Gillens, chief of the Plainfield Police Department, 2007 was the year of the tax protestors.

The campaign of resistance of Ed and Elaine Brown, who holed up together in their Plainfield home for almost nine months to defy charges stemming from their refusal to pay federal income taxes, consumed much of Gillens' life.

Gillens was honored earlier this month for his work with U.S. marshals on the Brown case. The director of the U.S. Marshals Service, John F. Clark, named Gillens the Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

Indeed, it was some year. In the face of threats to his safety, Gillens started wearing a firearm while off-duty. Brown had said his supporters would take vengeance on Gillens and others if anything happened to his wife or himself.

Gillens, who helped U.S. marshals as they attempted to arrest the couple, worried for his three stepchildren and four grandchildren, who live in Plainfield.

He was cautious when doing everyday activities, such as maintaining the lawn or retrieving the newspaper, and celebrations were kept low-key.

"I really can't remember doing much for birthdays, anniversaries," he said.

Gillens said he was both honored and humbled at receiving the award, presented at a ceremony in Arlington, Va.

An administrator, he felt his achievements paled in comparison with those of other honorees, such as Katelyn Carney, a Virginia Tech student who helped blockade a classroom door to keep out the student who shot her, her classmates and himself at the school last April.

In Plainfield, while the marshals attempted to extricate the Browns, who are now serving time in separate federal prisons for tax-related convictions, Gillens was responsible for protecting his fellow residents. Ed Brown took refuge in his home in January 2007 and he was joined by his wife the following month. They were arrested Oct. 4.

In the meantime, Gillens and his officers patrolled the town, helped with checkpoints and

roadblocks, and helped plan for evacuation in case residents faced danger during the standoff.

He also supported the marshals, allowing them to use the police station and the department's equipment. "It was an extraordinary example of leadership," said Stephen Monier, U.S. marshal for the district of New Hampshire, said of Gillens' cooperation.

Communications between the town police and the marshals were limited at first, but things changed after a contingent of law enforcement officials, including SWAT teams, crept up on the Brown home on the morning of June 7. Monier denied it was a raid, but a deputy marshal has since testified that it was indeed an attempt to arrest the Browns. At the trial of three Brown supporters earlier this month, the marshal said the attempt was spoiled by one of the Browns' supporters, Daniel Riley, who blundered into some officers while walking the Browns' dog.

That morning, Gillens learned of the operation from calls to him and the town manager. Callers wanted to know what was going on, and Gillens had no answer. He said the incident made his department look foolish.

After that, communications with the marshals improved, Gillens said.

One early-morning arrest in January 2007, before Ed Brown was joined by his wife, gave Gillens an indication of how complicated the case might become. A Brown supporter from Michigan was knocking on a neighbor's door and appeared to be under the influence of alcohol or some other drug.

Alone after midnight, Gillens managed to arrest the man, who was armed with a handgun, without anyone being harmed.

Supporters who came to town to help the Browns were a concern for Gillens. He was especially troubled by the arrival of Randy Weaver, who was involved in a controversial conflict with federal law enforcement that ended in the death of family members and a deputy marshal in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, in 1992. Weaver spoke in support of

the Browns, and Gillens was worried about the impact of Weaver's notoriety.

Gillens also felt the pressure of keeping the conflict from ending in violence, an outcome Ed Brown had threatened many times.

"I didn't want to see the Browns become martyrs," he said.

Paula Wehde, who lives near the Brown home on Center of Town road with her husband and children, said Gillens did an "exemplary" job of protecting the residents. She said he would give them updates at roadblocks and helped them feel safe.

Even after marshals infiltrated the home and arrested the Browns, Gillens was still on guard for

trouble from the Browns' supporters, wary of strange vehicles coming through the area. Since then, however, a sense of normalcy has returned to the town.

Gillens said his award was a result of not only his work but the work of his team. He said he was also grateful for the help from residents living near the Browns.

"I think they were extremely understanding," Gillens said. "Probably more understanding than I would have been."

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