

# Engraver turns firearms into fine art for Plano police's 50th

Gun design depicts Plano badges, motto

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These guns are standard issue for the Plano Police Department, but they'll never be used in the line of duty.

Instead, they'll be on display as works of art.

In honor of the department's 50th anniversary, Sam Shortes of Highland Village has designed commemorative guns bearing an engraving of the department's oldest badge, as well as the current badge and patch intertwined with intricate scrollwork.

The guns also bear the department's motto: "Professionalism, integrity, progress."

"It's really a celebration of the institution," said Mr. Shortes, who began this project like he begins every one – by researching history.

Mr. Shortes learned of the city's first fallen officer, Green Rye, who was shot and killed in 1920 when he interrupted a bank robbery.

And the proceeds from the auction of one of Mr. Shortes' guns will be donated to the family of Plano's second fallen officer, Dayle "Wes" Hardy, who was killed in a motorcycle accident in July.

"We're doing everything we can do to help Wes' family out, and that's all a part of it," said police Detective Chris Pyryt, vice president of the Plano Police Association.

The proof weapon – the first engraved gun that others will be patterned after – will be raffled off as well, with proceeds benefiting the association's Christmas Cops program.

Mr. Shortes' respect for law enforcement led him to keep track of the anniversaries of police departments. He worked with Detective Pyryt and other members of the Plano Police Association for six months to coordinate the project.

"I do it because I enjoy doing it, and I think it's important," said Mr. Shortes.

Mr. Shortes began his career at Texas Instruments and developed his etching process using knowledge he picked up as a research engineer. His process, he said, is a modernization of the one used by Rembrandt in the 1600s.

"Even though we use modern materials, it still takes an artist to produce this," he said.

He started working with knives for Smith and Wesson in 1975 and went on to design pieces for President Ronald Reagan, John Wayne and law enforcement agencies across the country.

When Mr. Shortes retired, he sold his company to people he worked with in South Dakota. Eight years later, he came out of retirement to take on a project involving Texas' historic courthouses.

"This stuff is like a disease," he said. "You can't ever get rid of it."

After Mr. Shortes researches the subject of his engraving, he creates a large, detailed drawing of the etching. He then sends the design to the factory in South Dakota with directions for producing the piece.

Various people work on the product under microscopes to create the engraving, and the piece is sent back and forth until Mr. Shortes is happy with the result, a combination of art, science and history.

While Mr. Shortes has built a career using guns and knives, he considers his products works of art rather than weapons.

"It really transcends being a firearm," he said.

Mr. Shortes plans to sell the Plano Police Department's commemorative guns to police officers. Guns will be engraved as they are ordered, but only 50 will be made, one for each year of the department's existence.