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The Pride in the Badge

Police Departments Nationwide Boost Morale with Anniversary/Special Event Badges

Badges to commemorate special events are more popular than ever. Ranging from the anniversary of 9/11 to special events like the Super Bowl or the Presidential election these badges are a sign of pride and honor for each department. However, police anniversary badges are by far the most common.

“Special police badges are a huge trend now; and anniversary badges have really caught on,” said Jimmy Smith, Co-Founder of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Museum Association of Nevada has design seven badges worn by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD). “They boost officer morale and instill a sense of pride throughout the department. Every time you do an anniversary badge there are officers that want to make it the official department badge.”

Such badges are typically worn for a finite period of time – often one year. While some are purchased by the department, many are bought by individual officers in order to ease any burden on the taxpayer. Some play a role in fundraising to assist police officer associations, historical societies, or even for officers injured on duty.

Just as important, anniversary badges enable a department to understand its history, to better appreciate its roots and to take pride in the community. In Las Vegas, for example, a rich history suffered for lack of an official repository. Smith got involved, helping to establish the police museum. It contains hundreds of historically significant badges dating back as far as 1909.

“We displayed our badges and other historical artifacts at a community center for a short time and thousands came through,” said Smith, recently retired as a forensic specialist at LVMPD after 16 years of service and now working as the Chief of the State of Oklahoma Insurance Department’s Anti-Fraud Unit. “The museum has helped our younger officers have a greater appreciation of the organization they are a part of.”

LVMPD issues an anniversary badges every five years. Smith designed the 25th, 30th, 35th, and the 40th which is currently in production. Smith has also created a special 9/11 commemorative edition badge as well as one for the honor guard.

The process began with a rough design created by Smith and approved by the department, which was then passed on to Sun Badge Company of Ontario, CA, that has manufactured all LVMPD badges since 1972. The Design, he said, involved a lot of back and forth. Sun Badge took his initial drawings and then produced a series of renderings until the right one was found.

The badges themselves are die struck from either solid brass or nickel silver alloy due to their durability, polishing qualities and purity. As they aren’t plated, they are not subject to chipping or cracking. Coloring is done using a cloisonné enamel process which utilizes colored glass fired at 1500 degrees F which lasts for years.

“Some other manufacturers use plastic or soft enamel, which does not have the same luster or durability,” said Smith.

Another important factor, he added, is the security of the dies used to manufacture the badges. As Sun Badge makes badges for police departments all over the country including LAPD, Louisville Metro, and Denver PD, those dies are kept in a secure area with tight control maintained over who checks them out and how many are made. Each one is hallmarked so you can tell when it was made. That way, added Smith, you have a safeguard against your badges illegally making it into the market. Due to security issues, Smith said that you can't just call them up and order a badge. He had to produce a letter from the sheriff giving him authorization to design and purchase the badge.

When Smith moved to his new position at the Oklahoma Insurance anti-fraud department, he was surprised at the poor quality of their departmental badge. He decided to design and create a new badge for his department.

"I've been a collector for 40 years and have samples from every badge maker, and nobody makes a departmental badge like Sun," said Smith. "Everywhere we go, people stare at them as it's really official looking; it's the best looking badge I ever made. We get a lot more respect as a result."

Virgil Earp Edition

The City of Colton in Southern California recently celebrated its 125th anniversary. The city's very first marshal was none other than Virgil Earp, one of the Earp brothers of the Shootout at the O.K Corral fame. It made perfect sense, then, for the local police department to create a symbol of its rich heritage.

Bob Drey, a training corporal at the Colton Police Department, spearheaded the creation of the Virgil Earp Badge. He wanted a high-quality item made in the USA. This Colton badge, the third now produced for the department by Sun Badge, also won best badge at the 2012 COPSWEST show.

"More and more agencies are going to an anniversary badge," said Drey. "Ours turned out to be a morale booster for the agency."

He added a postscript for other heading down the same path – make sure you gain all proper approvals before commencing with a badge project. While police department authorizations were fully in place, the City Council wasn't consulted. As a result, the officers were ordered to stop wearing the badges.

“The lesson learned is to make sure that you clear everything first with all concerned,” said Drey. “But we got to wear them for two months. They are a real symbol of pride for the officers, and something that makes you feel proud of the city too.

There are many different reasons why a department might have for celebrating an occasion; commemorating that celebration by creating a badge that an officer can wear has become a very popular option. Not only is the badge a morale booster, but it can also become cherished family heirloom. For more information on the creation of a badge for your department contact Sun Badge Company at (909)930-1444.

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