

# Investigator receives national recognition

By **Bernie Delinski Staff Writer** | **Posted: Monday, January 27, 2014 10:00 pm**

TUSCUMBIA — A Colbert County investigator received a national award Monday for his role in solving an armed bank robbery case and uncovering a federal tax fraud scheme in the process.

Representatives from various agencies presented the Federal Law Enforcement Officer's Association Award to sheriff's Chief Investigator Capt. Tim Vanderford during a ceremony at the Colbert County Courthouse.

James Nolan, president of the Birmingham-based chapter of the association, said Vanderford is the first local investigator to receive the award in at least 14 years.

"You worked hard and deserve it," Colbert Sheriff Ronnie May said in congratulating Vanderford. "It was interesting to watch this case unfold."

Vanderford and the FBI investigated the Dec. 17, 2009, armed robbery of First Southern Bank in Colbert County. That led to the arrest of Tuscumbia resident Rick Walter Denton.

During the course of the investigation, Vanderford discovered a federal tax fraud scheme that was using the stolen identities of inmates to create false tax returns, Nolan said.

Denton was sentenced to nearly six years in prison for the scheme in 2012. A month later, he received a 21 year, 4 month sentence for the bank robbery.

At the time, the prison identity-theft scheme was the largest known to the Internal Revenue Service in Alabama, said IRS Criminal Investigation Special Agent Matt Austin, who nominated Vanderford for the award.

Denton and fellow conspirator Joann Choat were accused of stealing \$148,000 from the IRS while Denton was in prison. Choat was sentenced to 1 year and 1 day in prison, and ordered to pay the IRS \$148,000 in restitution, officials said.

Vanderford said the cases took a great deal of work from many people, and the award is a source of recognition for them, as well.

"This is a great honor," he said. "The case was a corroboration of all of us working together. We just didn't give up. We kept monitoring and building up the case."

In the robbery of the Ford City bank, Denton wore a ski mask and held bank employees at gunpoint. He ordered them to put money in his backpack, according to reports. He also demanded a teller's car and attempted to take the teller hostage, according to testimony at his trial.

As part of his sentence, he was ordered to pay the bank \$7,458 in restitution.

In a release, U.S. Attorney Joyce White Vance commended the efforts of Vanderford, the FBI and IRS.

"Capt. Vanderford's intelligent, professional and dedicated work on the bank robbery and tax fraud investigations is exactly what prosecutors need to win cases," Vance said.

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