

Press Republican - Corrections team honored in Albany for manhunt

By JOE LoTEMPLIO

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PLATTSBURGH — Assemblywoman Janet Duprey honored leaders of the Corrections Emergency Response Team in Albany this week for their heroic efforts during last year's manhunt for two murderers who escaped from Clinton Correctional Facility.

To thunderous applause, Duprey (R-Peru) introduced 20 CERT leaders on the floor of the State Assembly in recognition of their tenacious efforts during the 23-day search last June.

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TOUGH CONDITIONS

"These CERT leaders and the members of their teams from across New York undertook the exhausting and arduous task of searching for two escaped inmates, working 16-to-24-hour shifts in some of the North Country's most difficult terrain," she said in a statement.

"Throughout the 23-day search, these CERT members endured hot, humid and often torrential rainy conditions, contended with blackflies and ticks, and traversed through swamps, often without radio communication with other law-enforcement personnel.

"After a few hours of rest on cots, they were ready to start all over again."

MAJOR ROLE

Inmates Richard Matt and David Sweat broke out of the Dannemora prison on June 6 after cutting holes in the back of their cells and making their way through pipes and out a manhole.

They were waiting for a ride from prison tailor shop supervisor Joyce Mitchell, who had smuggled hacksaw blades into the prison to aid in the escape. When Mitchell did not show, the two convicted murderers set out on foot.

Law enforcement personnel searched Dannemora and the surrounding area intensely over the next two weeks. Lines of CERT officers could be seen hacking their way through wooded areas around the clock every day.

The search eventually shifted to Franklin County, where it ended when Matt was shot and killed and Sweat was shot and captured.

LOCAL SUPPORT

Duprey, a member of the Assembly Committee on Correction, said the search was difficult for CERT members, who never knew if Matt and Sweat would be behind the next tree.

She said the support of locals was most helpful in their efforts.

"I'm proud of my constituents who provided home-cooked meals, boot dryers and warmers, socks, toiletry supplies and anything else needed to acknowledge the courage of CERT until their job was successfully completed and the North Country, as well as the rest of New York state, neighboring states and Canada, were safe."

Attending the recognition ceremony in Albany on Monday to show their support for CERT members were Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Central Office administrators, including Acting Commissioner Anthony Annucci and Deputy Commissioners Daniel Martuscello and Joseph Bellnier.

CERT Col. Dennis Bradford was also honored by Duprey for his leadership as director of CERT.

In addition, all 20 correctional facility superintendents traveled to Albany to show their pride in the performance of the CERT members.

New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association union leaders were present, as well.

Duprey told the Press-Republican she doesn't ever remember a standing ovation like the one the CERT officers received at the Assembly on Monday.

She said it was amazing that the search ended the way it did.

"The efforts of these meritorious correctional officers who volunteered to join CERT were instrumental in the successful conclusion of this search without injury or death to any law enforcement personnel or civilians."