

# Officer's family remembers 'Superman'

Updated: Thursday, 23 Jul 2009, 10:20 PM MDT  
Published : Thursday, 23 Jul 2009, 10:19 PM MDT

- Reporter: [Michael Herzenberg](#)
- Web Producer: [Bill Diven](#)

RIO RANCHO, N.M. (KRQE) - The wife of a Sandoval County officer killed in the line of duty takes some comfort in knowing her husband ended the run of a man suspected in as many as seven murders.

Tonia Harris also told KRQE News 13 she draws strength from the support of the Rio Rancho police, the Sandoval County Sheriff's Office and the community. And she said she's talking to the news media because she doesn't want to be selfish.

The whole community is mourning the loss, and many people want to know how she's holding up, she said.

Sgt. Joe Harris died July 16 from wounds suffered when a burglary stakeout turned into a gunfight. Burglar Joe Burgess also died in the shootout inside a remote cabin in the Jemez Mountains about 50 miles north of Albuquerque.

During an interview Thursday Tonia Harris sat holding her husband's wedding ring on a necklace. She said the hardest part now is watching their 10-year-old daughter go into her father's closet every night to find one of his shirts to sleep in.

Tonia also has trouble going to sleep.

"I usually call his phone so I can hear his voicemail before I go to sleep so I can just hear his voice," Harris said.

And she misses the sense of protection he brought to their family, she added.

"He was my Superman," she continued. "He protected my, he protected Ali, and to know he's not here is really hard."

There is a fund set up at Bank of America under Joe Harris's name, and Tonia said she'll do something with the money that will honor his memory.

Harris and a second deputy were in an unoccupied cabin as part of an ongoing effort to capture an elusive burglar known as the Cookie Bandit who had plagued area and seasonal residents stealing food and clothing for a decade.

On Thursday investigators revealed that when Burgess broke in, the initial struggle ended with his hands in handcuffs behind his back. However he was able to pull a .357 magnum pistol from his waistband and start firing wildly hitting Harris in the hand and groin.

Burgess then began firing at the second officer but was shot in the head by Harris. The second officer was not injured.

Fingerprints led to Burgess's identity as the man wanted in Canada for the 1972 murders of a young man and woman camped on the west coast of Vancouver Island. His name also surfaced in the 2004 killings of a young couple camped in California, and now Arizona investigators are looking for a link to the 2003 murders of another young couple out camping.

Reports from 1972 described Burgess as a religious zealot who may have been outraged because the couple was engaging in premarital sex.

New Mexico investigators also said Thursday the revolver recovered from Burgess belonged to David Eley who went camping in the Jemez Mountains in 2006 and hasn't been seen since