

DRONERESPONDERS Names Greg Whiting 2026 Recipient of Eric Talley Public Safety UAS Excellence Award

Texas Military Department aviation leader honored for building a mission-ready UAS program grounded in safety and coordination

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, September 2, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [DRONERESPONDERS](#) today announced Greg Whiting as the 2026 recipient of the Eric Talley Public Safety [UAS](#) Excellence Award. Whiting directs the Texas Military Department's Technology Integration Cell and manages its small unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) program. The award recognizes his visionary leadership, aviation professionalism and sustained commitment to using UAS technology to protect responders and the communities they serve.



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*Chief Charles Werner (ret.),
Director, DRONERESPONDERS*

DRONERESPONDERS presented the award during the opening keynote at Commercial UAV Expo at Caesars Forum in Las Vegas.

For nearly four years, Whiting has led the Texas Military Department's effort to build a full-time public safety [drone](#) program supporting border security. According to Texas Military Department program data, the program's 82 full-time pilots have completed 97,344 sorties and logged 29,081 flight hours across public safety, disaster response and border security missions.

The results show how aerial intelligence can improve situational awareness, guide resources and

strengthen operations in demanding environments.

In addition to managing the Texas Military Department's UAS program, Whiting serves as Chief of Operations for the Texas Air Operations Center, where he oversees the strategic coordination and deployment of aviation assets during disaster response operations across Texas.

In this role, he helps integrate manned and unmanned aircraft resources to support emergency management efforts, enhance situational awareness and ensure timely aerial support for communities affected by hurricanes, wildfires, floods and other large-scale incidents. His leadership has played a critical role in strengthening Texas' ability to leverage aviation resources in complex and rapidly evolving emergency situations.



Previous award recipient Sgt. J. Matt Rowland (Retired), 2026 Recipient Greg Whiting & DRONERESPONDERS Deputy Director, Jason Day

"The Eric Talley Award recognizes leaders who do more than adopt new technology," said Chief Charles Werner (ret.), director of DRONERESPONDERS. "Greg Whiting has built a disciplined public safety aviation enterprise at extraordinary scale. His program strengthens responders on the ground and carries forward Eric's legacy of courage, professionalism and selfless service."

A retired Texas Air National Guard officer and former F-16 pilot, Whiting has successfully applied decades of military aviation experience to advance the safe and effective integration of unmanned aircraft into complex public safety missions.

Whiting has guided the rapid growth of the program while maintaining an unwavering commitment to aviation safety, establishing one of the nation's most comprehensive Safety Management Systems for a public safety UAS operation. This achievement reflects the strong culture of safety he has fostered through rigorous training, disciplined risk management, accountability and continuous improvement.

He also created an intensive three-week training course that draws on expertise from the Texas Department of Public Safety, local fire departments and the military. The collaborative model prepares pilots for law enforcement, emergency response, military and interagency missions. It also builds the shared standards and interoperability that complex incidents demand.

Whiting and his team have worked with federal, state and local partners. Federal partners include the U.S. Department of War, U.S. Border Patrol, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Coast Guard. State partners include the Texas Department of Public Safety and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The team also works with local fire departments. That coordination helps personnel, aircraft, technology and information operate as one system during complex missions.

That model faced a demanding test during the catastrophic July 2025 floods in the Kerrville area. In the Texas Air Operations Center, Whiting oversaw the strategic coordination of manned and unmanned aircraft in difficult operating conditions. The response required meticulous airspace deconfliction, disciplined risk management and deep interagency trust. His leadership enabled UAS teams to provide critical situational awareness while operating safely alongside other aviation assets. Their work helped responders extend their reach, reduce risk and direct limited resources where they were needed most.

"Greg has shown that scale and safety are not competing goals," said Christopher Todd, executive director of AIRT, the official home of DRONERESPONDERS. "By building strong training, airspace coordination and interagency trust, he has created a powerful model for integrating manned and unmanned aviation when lives are on the line."

The Eric Talley Public Safety UAS Excellence Award honors individuals and teams who advance the responsible use of UAS across public safety. Recipients demonstrate innovation, professionalism and measurable impact in law enforcement, the fire service, emergency management and related disciplines.

This year's award is proudly supported by Axon, Esri, Pilot Institute and 2D Dummies, whose generosity helps DRONERESPONDERS carry forward Eric Talley's legacy and recognize the leaders advancing public safety aviation in his name.

DRONERESPONDERS named the award for Boulder Police Officer Eric Talley, who was killed in the line of duty in 2021 while responding to an active shooter incident. Talley was building BPD's public safety drone program to help create safer operating environments for police officers. His teammates conducted UAS operations during the immense chaos at the scene of his death when it was presumed a second shooter was on the loose. DRONERESPONDERS posthumously presented Talley with the inaugural award, which his teammates accepted on his behalf. The award challenges recipients to carry forward his legacy of leadership, integrity, courage and selfless service.

About DRONERESPONDERS

DRONERESPONDERS is the world's leading nonprofit program supporting public safety agencies and emergency services organizations using unmanned aircraft systems, counter-UAS and advanced aviation technologies for life-safety missions. The program provides training, data-driven insights, operational best practices and collaboration opportunities for first responders

implementing drone technology in emergency response, law enforcement, fire service, search and rescue and disaster operations. Learn more at droneresponders.org.

About AIRT

AIRT, Inc., is the leading 501(c)3 non-profit organization advancing the use of Drones For Good® and AAM For GoodSM for public safety and emergencies. AIRT offers a range of educational programming, training events and mission-critical initiatives that help people prepare for, respond to and recover from complex emergencies and major disasters. AIRT is the official home of the DRONERESPONDERS® program advancing public safety UAS, cUAS and Advanced Air Mobility.

For more information, visit <http://airt.ngo>

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