

Quarterly Report of the

HIGHLANDS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

INTEGRITY

QUALITY SERVICE

PROFESSIONALISM

Sheriff Susan Benton



VISION

Our vision is a safer Highlands County where citizens and law enforcement are joined together; the rights of all persons are respected; and community values are reflected.

MISSION

The Highlands County Sheriff's Office is committed to protecting life, property, and individual rights while maintaining peace and order.

GOALS

Goal 1:

Create safer neighborhoods by reducing criminal activity and conditions that foster crime and fear within the community.

Goal 2:

Enhance the safety of Highlands County roadways through enforcement and education.

Goal 3:

Assure accountability by effective and efficient use of personnel, equipment, and technology.

Goal 4:

Provide a professional work environment that attracts and retains a diverse group of quality applicants, rewards employee excellence, and promotes leadership through education and training.

Goal 5:

Assure effective Judicial and Detention processes and services.

Volume 3 Issue 4

January 2008 - 1st Qtr

SHERIFF'S OFFICE CONTINUES FOCUS ON OFFICER SAFETY THROUGH ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATION

Nationwide, early estimates of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty show an increase of 30 percent in 2007, compared with 2006. Sheriff Benton states that although this may not be an absolute indicator of what is to come, "I will do what I can, to protect our Deputies that are on the front line of duty." Since their daily responsibilities are laced with danger, it is significant to continually train and properly equip our Deputies. Over the past three years, the Sheriff's Office has updated technology and equipment which include a continual rotation of vehicle and vehicular equipment to assure reliability, outdated personal protection body armor was replaced throughout the agency to improve officer safety. Vehicle tag recognition equipment, forensic video software, advanced weapons, tasers, and in-car computers with printers have been deployed. The SmartCop operating sys-

tem has been installed in all patrol vehicles for rapid retrieval and sharing of information on suspect backgrounds, officer location, and real time law enforcement activity throughout the County. The latest roll out of equipment will take place in January, when each patrol vehicle will be equipped with an in-car camera that will record real time activity in each patrol vehicle. According to Sheriff Benton, we look at this equipment to have a multi-faceted effect. First, and foremost again is officer safety. Secondly, it acts as an independent witness to all activity captured during continuous loops and during activation at a traffic stop or vehicle apprehension. It will help in prosecuting cases, and will deter frivolous or false allegation of behavior on the part of deputies and suspects. Another important feature is that it has the potential to capture evidence and secure it for future use. This

equipment has not only become as common place in law enforcement as it is in convenience stores, banks, and businesses; but also, enables law enforcement to continually solve crimes from footage caught on video. In the event that an officer needs footage uploaded, this can be done immediately by driving to a specified "hot spot" in a secure location where the footage is captured and saved. Sheriff Benton hopes that the presence of this system alone will act as a deterrent to potential danger and harm to our law enforcement officers, and will assist our members in training and policing ourselves. The cameras and servers were purchased with grant funding.



Nationally, in 2007 55% of Law Enforcement Agencies had the in car camera equipment in patrol vehicles compared to only 10% in 2006,- according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Special Victims Unit

In an effort to reaffirm our commitment to protecting children and elders, Highlands County Sheriff's Office has collocated a unit within the Children's Advocacy Center. The unit is working jointly with the Department of Children and Families (DCF); Child Protection Investigators (CPI's) and the Adult Protection Investigators (API's). The first ever joint venture of it's kind within the State allows for oversight from both the civil and criminal components of these often complicated and emotional cases. Agencies working together is less stressful for victims and provides for a comprehensive prosecution where offenders are held accountable and families are protected. Lt. John Chess heads up the Unit consisting of detectives and victim advocates. Our victim advocates will continue to work closely with victims of all crime, and also work with other Law Enforcement agencies in Highlands County upon request. They are the contact for victims to other providers for services and compensations. The Victim Advocate program is fully grant



“SARG” COMMUNITY COALITION TO STUDY LOCAL UNDERAGE DRINKING

The Highlands County Community Coalition, under the leadership of the School District, formed in 2003 has always had the same goal; substance abuse reduction. This year, the Sheriff's Office has partnered with the Coalition and will serve as applicant and fiscal agent for funding for this initiative. Sheriff Benton has recruited Debra Lees, who is a retired FBI Agent last assigned out of the Miami field office, to act as Coordinator for the SARG (Substance Abuse Response Guide) grant. Her position is fully funded through the

grant that is passed down through Florida State University. Debra is currently in the planning phase of the problem assessment, which will identify characteristics of the population at risk for substance abuse. Based on past statistics, and the most recent available data on the Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey given bi-annually to middle and high school students in Highlands County, and the state of Florida, it is believed that alcohol is the most commonly used drug by our

local youth. However, with the changing demographics, southern migration and proximity to the larger communities, it is likely that our youth has had an increased exposure to those drugs more commonly seen in these communities. Once the logic model, assessment, and strategic program plan is complete, the coalition will move forward in applying for funding for implementation of a community substance abuse reduction program from the Drug Free Communities Federal Grant source.

OPERATING EFFECTIVELY UNDER FUNDING CONSTRAINTS

While many Florida Counties experienced a sharp increase in costs over the past 10 years in the area of public safety, Highlands County Sheriff's Office, including Detention, has maintained an average increase of 8.6% per year. This is consistent with all other county operations over those same 10 years. Maintaining adequate funding is a difficult feat in itself. It is essential to set priorities for law enforcement; to provide deputies with advanced skills and equipment, to meet community expectation of response and to stay one step ahead of the criminal element. The need for increasingly sophisticated techniques, technology, and

tools is more apparent. The Sheriff's Office working with county officials has made great strides in consolidating services and sharing resources that benefit all of our public safety partners. These efforts have resulted in efficient, cost effective operations for many agencies, and reduction in duplication of services. Sheriff Benton maintains that public safety is "one of local governments must have core services". The delivery of these services must be lead like a well run corporation. Poor public safety can bankrupt a community if

crime and fear of crime run rampant. Law Enforcement officials today must be mindful of the changing financial and demographic conditions within their communities. As we continue to work with residents who direct and identify quality of life needs and set benchmarks of community standards, we commit to maintain those standards. Together we developed a Vision, together we set a Mission, and the members of the Sheriff's Office will work to complete the Goals you, the community identified as important.

QUARTERLY INFORMATION—ADMINISTRATION & COURT SERVICES

New Member Hires:		Court Related Services:	
Civilians	12	Cases In Court	7,861
Sworn	1	Inmates Taken to Court	1,312
Applications Received this Qtr.	67	Arrests by Bailiffs	215
Applications Processed	21	Persons thru Security Station	39,151
Payroll Checks Processed	2,070	Pre-Trial Release Services:	
Payable Checks Processed	868	First Appearance Attendance	583
P-Card Purchases	801	Pre-Trial Release	78
Citizens Fingerprinted	542	Inmates Referred for Treatment	16
Information Services Requests	629	Cost Effectiveness Savings	\$ 73,038

QUARTERLY INFORMATION—LAW ENFORCEMENT

Computer Aided Dispatch	30,782	Calls—Communications	40,776
HCSO	19,241	Crime Scene Lab Cases	132
SPD	5,345	Investigations Assigned	421
LPPD	1,883	Investigations Open	166
FIRE	1,169	Investigations Closed/Inactive	352
EMS	3,130	Special Operations Investigations	100
Offense Reports	3,055	DCF Cases	384
Traffic Citations Issued	1,524	Narcotic Arrests by Task Force	57
K-9 Searches	28	Business Security Surveys	1
Judicial/Civil Process Services:		Neighborhood Watch Presentations	23
Received	3,045	Crime Victims Served	136
Served	3,045	Victim Advocate Services	480
Active	82		

QUARTERLY INFORMATION—DETENTION

Inmates Booked into Jail	1,980	Inmate Farm Eggs Harvested (DZ)	3,545
Inmates Released from Jail	1,826	Alcohol Breath Tests	73
Instructional Program Hours	2,036	Average Daily Population	481
Inmate Transport Miles	34,111	Net Commissary Earnings	\$5,848
Transports to State Prison	90	Medical Fees Charged	\$164,106
Transports to INS	14	Medical Fees Collected	\$16,607
Community Maint. Participants	178	Subsistence Fees Charged	\$73,750
(monthly average participants)		Subsistence Fees Collected	\$20,452
Dollars Saved in Labor	\$90,125	Inmate Per-Diem Charged	\$15,766
Dollars Collected in Fees	\$8,445	Inmate Per-Diem Collected	\$ 9,852
Inmate Meals Served	130,032	Labor Hours by Trusties S/O	25,669
Average Cost per Day	\$2.25	Labor Hours by Trusties	5,307
Inmate Farm Produce (lbs)	3,938	Dollars Saved in Labor	\$206,610

Public Safety Highlight

February 4 – 8, 2008

National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week

According to the USDOJ Office on Violence Against Women, 20% of teenage girls and young women have experienced some form of dating violence. Female victims of teen dating violence are also at greater risk for many other issues, such as substance abuse, sexual activity, pregnancy, and suicide.

Teen dating violence includes physical abuse as well as sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse. The potential for violent behavior in an abusive relationship often escalates as the relationship becomes more serious. Victims may remain in abusive relationships for many reasons, including fear of the perpetrator, self-blame, loyalty, love for the perpetrator, social stigma, or lack of understanding. Teen dating violence crosses all gender, racial and socioeconomic lines. Although the dynamics are similar to those for adult domestic violence, teens generally have less experience with relationships, so may be less likely to recognize abuse. Some of the signs of abuse, such as jealousy or possessiveness, may be confused as signs of love. Talk frequently to your teens and let them know love does not have to hurt.



For more information visit:

<http://www.loveisrespect.org>

<http://www.break-the-cycle.org>

<http://www.loveisnotabuse.org>

<http://www.safeyouth.org>

MOCK ACCREDITATION A SUCCESS

A team of assessors from the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation arrived at the Highlands County Sheriff's Office on Wednesday, for a three day "preliminary" examination of the agencies policies, procedures, operations, and support services. This MOCK assessment is in preparation for the Sheriff's Office compliance with nearly 276 standards required to meet professional law enforcement accreditation status. Although this was only the test run of the assessment, the on-site visit measured our preparedness for the actual on site final examination which will occur in April of 2008. The team which was assembled from Florida Sheriff's was comprised of Team Leader Lt. Jerry Rothman, from St. Lucie County, Accreditation Manager, Dianne Hill of Hernando County, and Linda McDaniel, Staff Inspections Coordinator of Seminole County. Although all standards are not mandatory, we have already completed 93% of the 276. Congratulations Sheriff's Office members and Accreditation Team.



The public will be invited to participate and to make comments to the assessment team during the final on site inspection in April.

The Mock Assessment Team Inspects Equipment and Interviews Officers and Employees on Procedures and Protocol.

For more information on Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation visit www.flaccreditation.org



HIGHLANDS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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For Crime Trend information visit- http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/FSAC/Crime_Trends/



CRIME PREVENTION

Happy New Year! Now What ??

Once again, the New Year is upon us! Many of us will make New Year's resolutions – be more organized, improve our appearance, work smarter...the list goes on and on. From a business standpoint, we will probably evaluate the prior year and make changes accordingly to improve profitability and/or efficiency. It's all about change!

From the Sheriff's Office, we would like to challenge each of you to GET INVOLVED in the prevention of crime in your community. Here are a few ways that you can make a difference:

First, become active in Neighborhood Watch. On December 3, 2007, the Annual County-wide meeting of Neighborhood Watch groups was held at the Agri-Civic Center in Sebring and over 100 people were in attendance. Twenty-eight different Neighborhood Watch groups were represented at that meeting to hear presentations by Sheriff Benton, Crime Prevention Sergeant Monica Sauls, Central Dispatch Supervisor Heather Chapel and Crime Prevention Unit members Nell Hays and Paul Hinman. There was a special presentation by Lieutenant Greg Pearlman of the Special Investigations Unit covering identi-

fication of marijuana grow houses. Neighborhood Watch members at the meeting were very complimentary of the education they received. The Sheriff and Command Staff in attendance were impressed by the citizen involvement shown at this function. They also encouraged the Crime Prevention Unit to reach out to all the remaining Neighborhood Watch groups that were not represented and encourage their reactivation. There are approximately 90 groups on the Neighborhood Watch roster in Highlands County. In some of these communities there has been no activity during the past 5 years. To become involved in Neighborhood Watch, first find out if your neighborhood currently has an active Neighborhood Watch group. If so, ask how you can help. If not, why not form one? For more information on how to form a Neighborhood Watch group, contact Crime Prevention Specialist Nell Hays at 385-0024 (Lakeshore Mall Office) and she will work out the details.

Second, the Seniors and Law Enforcement Together (S.A.L.T.) group is always in need of volunteers. S.A.L.T. operates under the umbrella of Triad, which is a cooperative consisting of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the International Associations of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National Sheriff's Association (NSA). The S.A.L.T. Council works together with local law enforcement and community service organizations to help reduce crimes against the elderly. The S.A.L.T. Council meets the second Friday of every month at the Florida Hospital Home Care Services Office (4005 Sun 'N Lake Blvd., Sebring) at 10:00AM. Some activities that S.A.L.T. volunteers participate in are health fairs, home improvement projects and wellness checks. For more information on S.A.L.T., call Chairperson Nicole Montoya-Bragg at 385-7058.



The New Year is a great time to decide to make a difference in your community. We hope you will take the time to make this commitment!



Spring Lake Neighborhood Watch Chair, Von and Ann Steinlage provided this special cake for the enjoyment of attendees of the annual meeting.



Highlands County Neighborhood Watch meeting attendees rise for the Pledge of Allegiance during the annual meeting at the Agri-Civic Center, Sebring.

KEEPING HIGHLANDS COUNTY'S NEIGHBORHOODS SAFE



♦ Vehicle Burglaries Still A Challenge

The burglary of vehicles in residential neighborhoods in Highlands County continues to be a problem. In most of these cases the cars targeted have been parked in driveways of homes and **there has been no sign of forced entry to the vehicle.** This leads deputies to believe the perpetrators may have simply been on a "fishing expedition." Not to be confused with "pfishing" which is a term that refers to personal information scams on the internet, this mode of operation relates to car burglary and consists of the criminal(s) simply wandering through the neighborhood and trying car doors at random.

There are two basic concepts to keep in mind regarding your vehicle when it is parked in the driveway of your home. The first and most important thing to remember is to remove any valuable items from your vehicle when you go into your home. Please do not leave your wallet, purse, personal identification, credit cards, cash, cell phone, CD player, satellite radio or similar items in your vehicle. These objects are much sought after by the criminal element and simply removing this temptation may keep you from being a victim.

Second, **lock your vehicle!** If the thief must break glass to gain entry to your car, there is the potential that someone will hear the break in and notice the crime in progress. While this is no guarantee that your car will not be burglarized, it becomes a less desirable target, therefore minimizing your chances of being victimized. Taking these two simple steps can reduce the chance that you will be a victim of vehicle burglary. In addition, simply turning on porch or exterior lights may reduce your chance of becoming a victim of this type of theft. Research indicates that proper lighting is one of the biggest deterrents to crime. If your home is not equipped with exterior lighting, a small investment in some security lighting, possibly even motion activated, would be advisable.

Citizens are also urged to call law enforcement if they observe anything out of the ordinary in their neighborhood. Please give us a call at 402-7200 if you observe anyone unusual in your area. We would much rather check these folks out and have it be nothing than to work several burglaries later. Thanks!



♦ Crime Prevention Programs Available

The Crime Prevention Unit routinely presents programs on various topics relating to keeping the citizens of our community safe. Topics include but are not limited to the following: Identity Theft, Frauds and Scams, Prescription and Over the Counter Drug Abuse Prevention, Live Safe (Child Abduction Prevention for Adults), Internet Safety – Protecting Yourself and Your Children From Predators, Protecting Your Identity on the Internet, Basic Crime Prevention, Personal Safety and Residential Security. There are also topics relating to the business community such as Shoplifting Prevention, Bank Robbery Prevention and Commercial Security.

Crime Prevention Specialists are available any day and time but are scheduled by appointment so please call as soon as possible to reserve your date. If needed, presentations are also available in Spanish. To schedule a speaker, simply call the Highlands County Sheriff's Office Community Service Center at 385-0024. We look forward to hearing from you!

