

In last month's edition of *The Lowdown*, I gave an overview of the larger divisions of your Sheriff's Office. This month, I highlight our smaller divisions.

Common law established the duties of the Sheriff; some of these have subsequently been codified in the NC General Statutes. Several of these duties go beyond the responsibilities you may be familiar with from your observation of municipal police departments. Managing the detention center is one such function, and I wrote about it last month. A sheriff must also provide facility services to the courthouses and maintain a civil division.

Deputies who provide services to the courthouse, also known as bailiffs, screen people as they enter the courthouse, confiscating weapons or other contraband. A bailiff announces the entrance of the judge into a courtroom, sets expectations for behavior while court is in session, and enforces courthouse rules. During a jury trial, they ensure jurors are appropriately sequestered and they ensure no unauthorized communication about a trial occurs. Bailiffs also escort inmates to and from court during a trial, preventing escape and protecting the inmate.

The civil process division addresses another unique responsibility of a sheriff, which is to provide timely service of all civil documents. These deputies work with a specialized body of law, serving more than 8000 papers per year. These include magistrate summonses, civil summonses relating to lawsuits (including divorce papers), subpoenas, orders to file inventories, and notices of hearings. For efficiency, deputies mail a notification letter to involved parties, asking them to come to the sheriff's office for service. More than 35% do, saving tax dollars and maintaining some control and privacy while receiving their civil process documents. These deputies also enforce the judgements of a court. For example, if the court orders a summary ejectment (an eviction) and a landlord subsequently follows procedures relating to a waiting period and the filing of a writ, a civil division deputy will remove the occupant and return the premises to the landlord. In civil cases with a money judgement, these deputies attempt collection.

A Sheriff's Office is known as a "law enforcement" agency and, while true, this term is too narrow. We are equally concerned with safety, service, and protection. Our Community Services Division seeks to educate residents on matters of crime prevention, home security, personal safety, and drug abuse prevention. This group assists neighborhoods with Community Watch programs, and it works to improve the lives of people with special safety needs, such as the elderly and those with emotional or intellectual differences. This division works with partner agencies on child safety initiatives, organizes community events such as National Night Out, hosts student groups, and coordinates our popular Citizens' Academy.

Our Crisis Intervention Unit provides services to people in personally traumatic situations, such as sexual assault or domestic violence. Not all law enforcement agencies offer this service, but former Sheriff Lindy Pendergass established such a team in 1993, and I am proud to continue this important program. Our unit includes a sworn officer and a civilian specialist; they provide domestic violence training to community volunteers and law students. Most importantly, they work with the criminal justice system and community agencies to provide coordinated services and emotional support for survivors of intimate violence. They are also available to assist in situations involving trauma to a child.

The Crisis Unit provides procedural information and emotional support to people seeking 50B protective orders, which are often a helpful tool for an individual seeking safety from an abusive partner. Although these are civil court actions, once obtained, violations of a 50B order may result in criminal charges. The Crisis Unit recently helped Orange County become the tenth county in North Carolina to make electronic filing available for ex parte 50B orders.

Two other divisions, operating behind the scenes, are instrumental to our functioning. One is our small but mighty records division, which manages an enormous volume of material, tracks statistics, responds to public records requests, processes pistol purchase and concealed handgun permits, and conducts criminal history checks. The other is our training division, which coordinates the training sworn personnel (deputies and detention officers) must achieve to begin their careers. This division also tracks what each deputy must do to maintain their certifications and helps them attain advanced specialized training.

As always, please let me know what questions you have or what topics you would like me to explore in future editions of *The Lowdown*. Email your thoughts and inquiries to my Public Information Officer at [astemper@orangecountync.gov](mailto:astemper@orangecountync.gov).