

THE LOWDOWN

Sheriff Charles S. Blackwood

Chief Deputy Jamison (Jamie) Sykes will retire at the beginning of May. His departure marks the beginning of an enormous transition; he has served in this role since my first day in office. I felt an emptiness in my stomach when he announced his intention to retire, but that sadness is balanced by the joy and excitement I feel for him. He will retire while he is still young, healthy, and able to enjoy the youth of his children. These are truly blessings, especially given that several studies show a reduced average lifespan for members of the law enforcement profession.

In briefest terms, a Chief Deputy is the highest ranking person member of the office serving under a sheriff. Therefore, Jamie is charged with general management of the sheriff's office. He acts with me, and in support of me, and sometimes in place of me. The role requires friendship, trust, loyalty, judgment, and the absolute ability to know how I would think about an issue or challenge facing us. There is also a difficult to describe human element critical to the role that in many ways is more meaningful than the rank.

I had significant involvement in Jamie's training when he was a young officer. Through the years, I served as his mentor and watched him succeed in nearly every division of this office. I observed his work ethic and witnessed countless examples of his integrity. I gave him advice on building both his house and his family, and I counted on him for the same.

In 2000, I was diagnosed with cancer. When subsequently drafting my will, my wife Lisa and I named Jamie as the guardian of our children. I can't think of another person on this planet I would've trusted more at the time with my family. My kids are grown now, and one has children of her own, so his potential term as guardian has long since expired. Still, if something were to happen to us, I know without a doubt Jamie Sykes is the first person my kids would call.

Although Jamie will always be a part of my life, his retirement certainly represents a loss for our office, and we will face additional transitions over the next several years as other members of my staff retire. As we re-calibrate, I will announce many promotions, each of which will represent fresh energy, new ideas, and a different dynamic.

As I started to consider who would become the next Chief Deputy, I recalled Jamie's early frustrations as he worked to balance the operational side of the agency against the administrative one. Then, as we grew and implemented new programs, the scope

of what he managed and the sheer number of decisions he faced grew exponentially. Meanwhile, the law enforcement profession as a whole experienced an increased demand for service. Across the state, many agencies are dividing the responsibilities of a chief deputy into two positions, and it became clear to me that such an arrangement is the right structure for my office at this time.

As such, I am promoting Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Jones to serve as Chief Deputy for the operational side of the agency. His responsibilities will include the patrol, investigations, and civil divisions. Meanwhile, Major Tina Sykes will become the Chief Deputy responsible for the service side of our office, overseeing records, court security, detention, school resource officers, community outreach, and training and standards. Trust me, there is enough work to keep both of these individuals very busy!

Both Tina and Kevin are products of this agency. I've known them their entire careers, and I've seen them grow and evolve into professional law-enforcement leaders. I have full faith in their ability to fill these new roles in an effective and efficient manner. Moreover, I trust them both completely. I am excited to see them take on new responsibilities, and I look forward to watching them grow.

Luckily, Kevin and Tina will not start from scratch as Jamie did, meaning they can use his performance as a road map as they find their way. They can also lean on each other and collaborate as they navigate new challenges. We will miss Chief Deputy Sykes and his vast institutional knowledge, but we are well-positioned for continued success with these two leaders.

I encourage readers to congratulate Jamie on his well-deserved retirement. His email address is JSykes@orangecountync.gov. Please also join me in congratulating Chief Deputies Tina Sykes and Kevin Jones and wishing them success. Their respective emails are Trimmer@orangecountync.gov and kjones@orangecountync.gov.