

THE LOWDOWN

Sheriff Charles S. Blackwood

Law enforcement agencies operate on federal, state, and local levels of government. They also operate in specialty areas, as is the case with park rangers; Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms agents; and officers with the Transportation Security Administration. All are important, but the law enforcement officials most people see in their day-to-day lives are deputy sheriffs and police officers.

I am frequently asked to explain the difference. Both prevent crime; enforce traffic laws; serve warrants; investigate and solve crimes; provide safety and crowd management at large events; and assist other emergency agencies such as fire and rescue departments. A sheriff has additional duties, including the operation of the county detention center; the protection of the courthouses and the people involved with the proceedings therein, the issuing of pistol purchase and concealed carry permits; and the service of civil processes.

As the sheriff, I am elected to my office and I have jurisdiction throughout the county. In contrast, a police chief is hired by a city or town manager or elected board and his or her jurisdiction is effectively the area within the municipal boundaries.

As a matter of practice, unless I am asked to assist a municipal agency, I confine my traditional law enforcement activities to the unincorporated areas of the county while performing my additional duties throughout.

In this edition of *The Lowdown*, I want to talk about Community Oriented Policing, although for obvious reasons, I wish it were called Community Oriented Law Enforcement – it would be much more inclusive that way! This method of service delivery focuses on reducing crime and disorder by building relationships, increasing trust, creating partnerships, and working with a community to solve problems.

Since I took office in 2014, my deputies and I have been working to serve in a manner consistent with this philosophy. I often quote Sir Robert Peel who established the first modern police force in London in 1829; it became the model for other countries as they developed their own law enforcement agencies. All “Peelian” principles reflect the idea that officers assume their duties with the implicit consent of those they police. My favorite principle includes the line, “The police are the public and the public are the police.” Peel notes officers are the only members of the public who give full-time attention to “duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.”

To me, this is the heart of Community Oriented Law Enforcement – deputies dedicating themselves professionally to the responsibilities we all share. I want to give you a recent example.

This June, off-duty Sergeant D.R. Jones heard a boom in the early hours of the morning and left his home to investigate, wearing gym shorts and a T-shirt. He wondered if a neighbor with substance abuse struggles and a recent DWI may have been involved in an accident on a nearby curve in the road. Instead, he discovered a garage fully engulfed in flames. He called for fire units and parked his car out of the path the drivers would need to approach the scene. Knowing an elderly woman lived in the house next to the garage, he attempted to rouse her, repeatedly shouting “Sheriff’s Office.”

His shouts did not bring the woman to the door. He broke a window, entered the house, found the woman, and escorted her out. A car parked just outside the home was on fire, and the fire was spreading toward the house and other vehicles. He asked the woman whether her husband was in the home; she said she wasn’t sure. Jones placed her in his car and reentered the home. Once back inside; he remembered hearing the man died recently and realized the woman was disoriented by the stress of the situation. Jones returned outside, helped direct incoming fire units, and then waited with the woman until a family member arrived.

This one incident provides powerful testimony to the value of law enforcement officers living in the communities they are sworn to protect. For Jones, his efforts were both personal and professional. He went out to check the safety of his own community and he managed the dangerous situation he found using his professional training. On that night, Jones was both the police and the public, and he saved a life wearing gym shorts.

“The police are the public.” In other words, I am one of you. “The public are the police.” You are part of us. There are community welfare duties incumbent on everyone. Please do your part – contact me. Tell me what you expect from YOUR sheriff’s office. It is my honor to work with you to build trust, create partnerships, and solve problems in our community.