

## **THE LOWDOWN**

Sheriff Charles S. Blackwood

Earlier this week, the 100 sheriffs of our state elected and installed me as the president of the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association (NCSA). Serving as the president of this group is a high honor and a tremendous responsibility, which I am only able to accept with the support of my family and my team here at the office.

The Association's mission is to protect, promote, preserve, and enhance the Office of Sheriff in North Carolina through education, training, and legislative initiatives that increase public safety and protect the rights of the residents of North Carolina.

The office of sheriff has a history over 1200 years old, dating back to the Middle Ages. The role grew and changed over the centuries, and English settlers "imported" a version of the position to the New World as they sought personal freedom alongside the rule of law. The first American counties were established in Virginia; one of these counties elected a sheriff in 1651, before the United States was even an independent nation. Today, with few exceptions, a sheriff is an elected official serving as the chief law-enforcement officer for his or her county. Although a police chief has similar duties within a municipality, a sheriff typically has additional responsibilities such as providing for the security of the courthouses, processing civil paperwork, assisting people with pistol purchase and concealed weapon permits, and maintaining a detention facility and providing for the needs of those confined therein.

This is the NCSA's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and we have accomplished a great deal. I am proud to lead us into a second century of service. As society continues to change, we must constantly adapt to the needs of our communities. Our organization works closely with the National Association of Chiefs of Police and the National Sheriffs' Association to explore best practices and solutions for the problems and opportunities of modern life.

As president, I will serve as the face of the NCSA. Through it, I will speak to state and national media outlets about the Association's position on topics of interest, and I will represent our group during times of loss. I also represent the NCSA at the meetings of many groups, such as the National Sheriffs' Association, the State Bureau of Investigation, the NC General Assembly, and the North Carolina Victims' Assistance Network. I make appointments within the Association, including to the Auditing, Training, and Legislative committees, and to external groups such as the

Domestic Preparedness and Readiness Committee, the NC Fully Autonomous Vehicle Committee, and the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative.

It's extremely important that I get this presidency right. For the next year, not only will I be making decisions based on the goals and values of Orange County voters, I will also be discussing statewide issues such as mental health, immigration, gun violence, and the legalization of marijuana with 99 other sheriffs. Other sheriffs serve communities with different priorities and viewpoints regarding these critically important and incredibly complex topics. We will wrestle with our differences and arrive at a policy position that we feel is the best path forward for the entire state. We will then discuss the Association's recommendation with our legislative delegations, letting them know if the NCSA opposes, supports, or takes no position on the issue at hand.

Let me give you an example. As a group, Orange County voters favor the legalization of marijuana more than voters in conservative counties do. As an association, the NCSA recently supported legislation regarding legalizing medical marijuana for use at home. Voters in some counties might be disappointed by this; voters in other counties might feel we did not go far enough. The reality is many hands touch a bill as it moves along the path to becoming a state law. As a body of law-enforcement leaders, we must advocate for what is in the overall best interests of the state, and we are more influential when we speak with one voice. Our opinions and perspectives as law-enforcement leaders are vital to helping ensure that any laws passed in the State Legislature are manageable, fair, and do not create problems that will be detrimental to our communities.

It is a considerable honor to be elected as the Sheriff of a county, and I am so pleased my fellow sheriffs trust me to lead our Association. I promise to do my best with these dual responsibilities. I remain grateful to the voters for their confidence in me, and to my team for joining me in service to this community.