

The Lowdown

Sheriff C.S. Blackwood

Woody Durham used to say, “Go where you go and do what you do.” I love this phrase and use it often. We “go” in lots of directions and we “do” lots of things as we collectively carry out the mission of the Orange County Sheriff’s Office.

As professionals dedicated to safety and service, our work is essential. We are used to working during snow storms and hurricanes, missing holidays with our families, and pulling extra hours in times of local emergency. Although we recently altered some of the ways we “go where we go and do what we do,” COVID-19 did not necessitate radical change to service delivery for our road deputies and our detention officers. And it didn’t take COVID-19 for people to recognize or appreciate the service we provide. A quick glance through our Facebook feed reveals numerous examples of the kind and generous ways this community has long shown its appreciation for us.

These are anxious, troubling times. That said, I have enjoyed seeing people recognize that heroes are everywhere, not just in police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks. Take the medical profession, for example. Doctors and nurses always go where they go and do what they do, but suddenly we are noticing them because they are going and doing in unimaginable conditions. There are too many sick people, there is not enough personal protective equipment, there is significant concern about bringing the virus home to family members, and co-workers becoming infected. But still they press on. Additionally, many of us have a new appreciation for the heroics of the behind-the-scenes workers in the medical matrix. Respiratory therapists, intake workers, certified nursing assistants, environmental staff, lab technicians, 911 dispatchers, phlebotomists, and more are among the many professionals whose service to the rest of us is now in the spotlight. These professionals also continue to go where they go and do what they do; it just took COVID-19 for us to be aware of their everyday heroics.

We are also more aware of the critical roles that exist all along the food chain. When emergency orders required the closing of restaurants and bars, government officials simultaneously assured us grocery stores would remain open. We suddenly realized cashiers are on the front lines. Not only do they interact with dozens of potentially infected people every hour, they work well within the six feet prescribed by physical distance guidelines, and they engage in hand-to-hand financial transactions. As we noticed them, we also began to recognize the essential service of the employees stocking shelves, the drivers transporting food, the farmers growing crops, and the people serving in processing plants of all types. These people also go where they go and do what they do. Like law enforcement, they are doing what they’ve always done;

but unlike law enforcement, it took this crisis for people to notice and for people to appreciate.

There are others - teachers and delivery drivers are obvious examples. And most of us seeking to entertain ourselves are turning to the work of artists: poets, authors, filmmakers, and musicians. It is impossible to quantify their contributions to society - and to our ability to tolerate this time in history.

Speaking of musicians, I want to close with something singer/songwriter James Taylor said in a Master Class interview with Oprah Winfrey. "You actually have to really defend your time in order to have a long thought." Taylor, of course, was talking about the process of songwriting, but his words struck me deeply. The long thought is what allows us to see the people and professions that have been hiding in plain sight. They have been going where they go and doing what they do all along, but we have been too busy to recognize how critical they are.

I am realizing that while we are sheltering from this virus, we are also being sheltered from the extremely high level of distraction in the modern world. We are able to have the long thought.

I certainly miss my old way of life, and I will be glad to have it back. I think interaction with others is to a human what water and light are to a plant. But this time isn't all bad. Today before noon, I had six conversations at the office that were real, and deep, and different from the interactions I was having pre-pandemic. We suddenly have more time to listen and reflect. There is something to be said for slow, simple, and rich. In other words, there is something to be said for the beauty of the long thought – the recognition that heroes are everywhere, going where they go, and doing what they do.

Stay safe. Wash your hands. Be good to one another, and call us if you need us.

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