

THE LOWDOWN

“Closing the Gap through Chicken”

Sheriff Charles S. Blackwood

Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin recently suffered a cardiac arrest on the football field. Thousands in the arena and millions of people watching the game televised live saw him collapse. Fortunately, first responders and athletic trainers, who had immediate access to an automated external defibrillator (AED), administered medical attention to Mr. Hamlin. Using their skills and this vital technology, they successfully saved his life.

Approximately 350,000 people suffer out-of-hospital cardiac arrest every year in the United States. A person’s chance of survival decreases by 10% every minute without intervention following cardiac arrest. Away from the resource-rich world of professional football, it takes, on average, seven minutes for a first responder to arrive on scene. When your life hangs in the balance, that is a long gap.

Fewer than 10% of people who have a cardiac arrest in the community survive long enough, as Hamlin did, to later be discharged from the hospital. Sadly, this grim statistic has remained largely unchanged during the last 30 years. I do not believe Mr. Hamlin would have had such a successful outcome if he had to wait seven or more minutes for an AED.

In 2019, I purchased 16 AEDs with the goal of eventually having one in all our patrol vehicles and in each Orange County public school. In ensuing years, I purchased several more. My office now owns 61 of these units. However, in May 2022, I realized our local counterparts in the municipal police departments do not have AEDs in all of their units on patrol. As the chief law enforcement officer in Orange County, I started working to change that.

In partnership with Kaitlin Strauss of the UNC Health Foundation and UNC Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz, we plan to purchase additional AED units, aiming to close the gap between when a cardiac event takes place and when effective, life-saving aid can be delivered. I am grateful they share my vision. Our goal is to bring the total to 110 AEDs in law-enforcement hands throughout Orange County. We also plan to provide an additional 10 units to the South Orange Rescue Squad. At a cost of \$1,500.00 each, achieving our goal is expensive; however, I am laser-focused.

An AED in every patrol vehicle in the county will be a game-changer. With multiple defibrillators in circulation at all times, ready to be deployed through our existing

emergency-service infrastructure, Sheriff's deputies, police officers, and first responders throughout the county will have a greater chance of reaching victims with this critical technology in time to intervene successfully.

To support this very ambitious undertaking, two groups, the Sheriff's Office Citizens' Organization (SOCO) and the Timeless Cruizers Car Club, are busy planning our upcoming Chicken Pickin' fundraiser with members of our Community Service Division. We are excited to resume this tradition after several COVID cancellations. SOCO is a 501(c)(3) organization, able to receive tax-deductible contributions.

Founded many years ago by my predecessor, SOCO has a long history of providing significant funding to our office for special initiatives. For example, SOCO purchases much of the Lifetrack equipment we use to protect vulnerable seniors and others at risk of wandering away from caregivers. SOCO also purchases Officer Down Trauma kits and ballistic vests for our K9s. SOCO members also assist us with our popular Shop with the Sheriff event in December. Although many SOCO members are graduates of our Citizens' Academy, we welcome anyone with an interest in our office and a willingness to help the community.

The Timeless Cruizers Car Club is another valuable community partner. They generously support the fundraiser by donating the chicken. Members of both clubs will assist us on April 19 with our all-hands-on-deck event. We will barbeque chicken and package meals for pick-up in front of our new detention center on Highway 70.

Deputies, members of the office, and volunteers will be in the community selling \$10 tickets through April 7. If you prefer, you can come by the office at 106 E. Margaret Lane in Hillsborough to purchase them. Meals include chicken, green beans, potatoes, and a roll. Order 10 plates or more for your family, neighborhood, or office, and we will provide free delivery on April 19 to anywhere within Orange County or to supportive areas nearby. The Chicken Pickin' is a pre-order only event. We also appreciate tax-deductible donations.

Despite the labor-intensive nature of such an ambitious undertaking, the Chicken Pickin' is always a fun event. Please call Lt. Daniel Roberson at (919) 245-2921 if you would like to buy tickets, donate funds, or volunteer. Help us purchase and circulate more life-saving AED devices throughout Orange County. Let's close the gap!