

THE LOWDOWN

Sheriff Charles S. Blackwood

December 28, 2022

As regular readers of this column know, I am passionate about my chosen profession. Although many people ask, “Why would anyone want to go into law enforcement?” I think the better question is, “Why would anyone want to do anything else?” I can’t think of another career with such a variety of meaningful ways to serve. I will share my *Year in Review* as a way to illustrate my belief.

In January, we hosted the inaugural Jail Administrators Institute of Leadership. This intensive program covers all aspects of Detention Center administration, one of a Sheriff’s most important and complex duties. Improving day-to-day operations of these facilities impacts the health, safety, and mental well-being of thousands of people across the state.

In February, cadets from our eighth Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) academy graduated and entered the profession. We also enjoyed working with Correction Enterprises as they delivered and installed new furniture, built by prison inmates, for our patrol room. This program benefits the state of North Carolina, offenders who learn valuable job skills, and customers (like us!) who receive quality products and professional design, build, and installation services.

My wife Lisa and I welcomed our second grandson Bryson in March. He and his brother Hunter are unending sources of pride and delight. Meanwhile, deputies partnered with SafeKids and collected more than 90 pounds of expired, unwanted, or unnecessary medications during National Poison Prevention Week. Because young children are often harmed when they consume medications the adults in their lives have forgotten, this partnership is very meaningful to me as we strive to keep kids safe from preventable injuries.

In April, all three of our K9 partnerships successfully recertified through the International Police Working Dog Association, despite a significantly more difficult suspect apprehension evaluation. This accomplishment firmly establishes the credibility of these amazing dogs. Also in April, we booked the first inmate in to our new detention facility, replacing a 97-year-old building. We can now more efficiently serve the safety, security, and human service needs of those placed into our custody. Here’s a random but interesting fact – at lunch today, we prepared food for the 800th time in our new kitchen, and based on our 88-person average daily census, we have now served 70,800 meals!

On May 13, Deputy J. Duncan Nichols posthumously received long-overdue recognition for his 1904 line-of-duty death. Members of my staff accompanied two of Nichols’ great-grandsons to Washington, DC where they viewed the inscription honoring his sacrifice on the National monument to fallen law enforcement officers, and they listened to his name (and 618 others) read aloud at the annual candlelight vigil.

The South Orange Rescue Squad (SORS) celebrated half a century of service in June. I was honored to speak at the celebration; this event carried extra meaning for me. SORS provided emergency care to my now-deceased father on more than one occasion, and I remain grateful for their skill and compassion.

My staff joined scores of law enforcement officers from across the region to witness a Highway Patrol trooper, electrocuted while responding to a tornado call back in May, walk out of the hospital under his own power in July. The strength of the law enforcement bond is why I was so honored when my peers in the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association elected me president at our annual meeting at the end of that month. It is a pleasure to serve with and for them in this role.

Various employees became certified Detention Officers and completed intensive Crisis Intervention Training in August, showcasing our commitment to continued improvement through training and education. We also hosted an appreciation breakfast for bus drivers as the new school year began. This tradition is one my mother started, and after her death earlier this year, it took on even greater significance to me.

In September, we happily resumed our popular Citizens' Academy after a two year COVID-induced hiatus. We also leaned on each other for support after one of our newly retired deputies, and a friend to us all, died by suicide. We are committed to checking in on each other more, and we encourage our community to do the same for their loved ones.

We successfully resolved one of the most high-profile cases of my career in October when we presented to the court the juvenile accused of murdering two teens. I am so proud of our Criminal Investigations Division. They maintain a 100% solved rate on homicides occurring during my tenure.

Though unopposed, winning re-election in November felt great; I never take voter support for granted. Immediately following the elections, we hosted the Sheriff's Leadership Institute (SLI), a training program for newly-elected Sheriffs in the state (33 of 35 attended). We also hosted the graduation for our ninth BLET class. Who knows? Maybe one day, one of our graduates will attend SLI!

December is always busy! We assist many groups with their toy and food distribution efforts, participate in multiple parades, and partner with the schools to fulfill holiday wishes for 25 children at our annual Shop with the Sheriff event, the brightest highlight of our year.

Meaningful work. Variety. Excitement. Camaraderie. Law enforcement is a great profession, and it has been an interesting, rewarding year. Best wishes to you and yours for 2023!