

“Law Enforcement’s Unsung Heroes”

A couple of weeks ago our sheriff’s department accomplished something very important that didn’t make any headlines or prompt any local discussion in the general public or on the street. Yet the accomplishment was certainly an important step in providing efficient and professional law enforcement services to the citizens of Richland County.

A couple of weeks ago my staff finished updating and training the updates of our jail’s policies and procedures. While we certainly aren’t the only business or organization in Richland County who operate with a set of closely scrutinized standardized policies and procedures I believe I can effectively debate that our jail policies and procedures are examined, scrutinized and dissected by more people on a daily basis than any other in this county.

Working and doing your job within in a county jail takes a special person. This is why I call our jailer/dispatchers “law enforcement’s unsung heroes”. My intent is to highlight the role of a jailer in this column and the law enforcement dispatcher in my next column.

To be a jailer you have to be a very detailed, reliable and patient person. Not everyone can work in a county jail or be a prison guard for that matter. We have had individuals start and end their jailing careers on their first day of work or during their first week of work. It is a very complicated and difficult job requiring a lot of mental discipline.

Being a jailer has certainly changed over the years. The job today is far more detail oriented and technical. There is a lot more observation, tracking, counseling, logging and evaluating of inmates now. When I was a jailer in the 1970’s there were far fewer inmates overall as well as far less drug dependency and certainly less medical and personal issues than what I see today.

It is important that a jailer remain fair and consistent. I believe that our jail staff does a wonderful job with this because they understand an important concept of a county jail. That is, always remember that in most all cases the person you are supervising in a county jail **IS THE SAME PERSON** who will some day also be on the street or in the supermarket greeting you as a respected, thoughtful and understanding person.

I often hear at jail seminars the speakers tell me that the county jail is a reflection of our community that nobody wants to fund, see or hear. They detail and refer to the perils of trying to manage difficult personalities, intoxicated and mentally challenged individuals and bitter and violent human behavior in an enclosed and dangerous environment.

While these issues certainly do exist in a county jail and are included in what makes the job of jailer so difficult, we need to also remember and remind ourselves that the county jail is also a place where good people go to pay for a mistake they've made who get up every day and go to work on Huber to provide for their family. The inmate enrolled in an educational program to obtain their GED or the inmate who finally receives the counseling they have so desperately needed now that they are forced to face their issues. And yes, there are also some inmates who get religion while in the county jail-helping them through a low point in their life.

I believe that our jail staff my "unsung heroes of law enforcement" do a great job in understanding and properly acting upon the vast array of different inmate personalities and "personal issues" that come up within our county jail on a minute-by-minute, hourly, daily and monthly basis with all the inmates. Our detailed jail policies and procedures help them perform these important tasks in an organized and impartial manner. Without these organized and standardized operating procedures their job of jailing would be impossible.

I believe that our jail policies and procedures also focus and reinforce the concept to our jail staff that being understanding and cooperative with the inmates and their families is as important as teaching the inmate the rules of the jail and how to follow a set of rules while they are both inside and outside the jail. We always talk among our jail staff and reinforce the concept during our jail training sessions that it is not the jail's job to punish anyone-that is society's job by making the laws and the penalties and the court's job to determine and impose the penalty if needed.

So to our unsung heroes, our county jail staff of Rita McCarthy, Nettie Collins, Diane Collins, Pat Harwick, Sue Barnes, Chuck Giese, Elizabeth Reddemann, Clay Porter, Toby Johnson, Jennifer Frey, Aaron Wallace and Steve Sanders, I salute you for accomplishing your difficult duties in a highly scrutinized and dangerous environment.