

"A Different Look"

July 2011

Recently, I was asked by a citizen who the new deputy in the neighborhood was, "I've never seen them before", he said. I explained who the new officer was and explained the changes in personnel we have had at the sheriff's department this past year. Now that most of the personnel changes have been made it's a good time to look back and share why the changes were necessary and look forward to the future.

My long experience at the sheriff's department has shown that about every 10 years or so we have deputies who retire as a "group." This happens because in the 1970's and again in 1981 and 1982 the county hired a "group" of deputies all about the same age. The 1970's change I believe could have been due to the disbanding of the county highway traffic patrol and going with a combined sheriff's department with the highway traffic patrol duties included. The group hiring in the early 1980's was due to Richland County building a new jail at that time that is now our current jail.

I've also noticed that replacing deputies usually takes place over a 1-2 year span allowing little disruption to operations while the new person is hired and trained and realistically ready to handle their new duties and responsibilities of being a road patrol deputy sheriff.

This past year however we have experienced a greater number of changes within the department due to two deputies leaving for what they felt were better opportunities as well as the retirements. Between May and October 2010 we had the two deputies leave for a different job and two retire. In April of 2011 we had a third retire and in November we will have a fourth deputy retire. These changes mean that we have replaced 6 of our 13 road patrol deputy positions with newly trained people. In addition when the changes are finished, we will have started 6 new employees in the jailer/dispatcher part of our organization. Switching out nearly half of your veteran road patrol staff and adding 6 new jailer/dispatchers in such a short period of time certainly impacts the daily operations of a sheriff's department our size.

The impact of these changes continues to present a tremendous challenge to my command staff supervisors, first line supervisors (Sergeants) and the veteran deputies in the department. During this time we have tried to minimize overtime, stay within our budget and ensure that there is proper road patrol coverage throughout the county and staffing in our jail/dispatch area. **It wasn't easy!** It required the willingness of **all our staff personnel** to step up fill in and train these people and work extra hours if needed. Replacing veteran experience lost is always a slow and steady process.

As new deputies are hired and existing deputies are promoted a lot of new training is required. Much of the training certainly falls under the category of "on the job" or "in-house" training however there is some training that is also "state mandated" at a location outside of Richland County where "State of Wisconsin certification" is required. This mandatory training is only available at a Wisconsin technical college or State of Wisconsin, Department of Justice Training and Standards approved police or jail academy.

The cascade of changes for this round is almost complete. The newest group of jailer/dispatchers and road patrol deputies are finalizing the "in house" portion of their training and will soon be ready to take on the responsibilities of their new positions. When this occurs, we will finally be back to "full strength" allowed by our county ordinance. Knowing this, I am hearing word of another possible retirement on road patrol at the end of the year. So it certainly is an ongoing process.

All Sheriff's will agree that hiring or promoting the right person for a position within their organization is one of the most important responsibilities they have. They also now that choosing incorrectly can impact a sheriff and the sheriff's department for many years. I have taken this responsibility very seriously and I am very excited about all our new deputies and the promotions we have made. While they may be short on experience they are certainly well qualified, smart and ambitious to do a great job in the future.

So you can see why I have such mixed emotions as my veteran deputies move on to what they feel are greener pastures or the well deserved time of retirement in their life. On one hand I will miss the dedication and experience of our veteran deputies and I will always be grateful for their contributions to making our department so successful but at the same time I am so excited about our new "group" of deputies who have been hired or promoted. They are a very talented group. Given a little time and experience they too will contribute greatly to the future success we will enjoy for years to come.

So, when you see that "new" deputy who is on road patrol in your neighborhood or the new deputy helping you at the dispatch window or on the telephone, take the time to introduce yourself and find out who they are. By doing this, I guarantee that you will soon realize that nothing really has changed at the sheriff's department -we just have a "different look."

Continue to have a great and safe summer!

Sheriff Darrell Berglin