

January 2011

## A New Year Brings Change

Happy New Year! I hope that you and your family had a safe and meaningful holiday season. My wish is that you stay safe and secure in 2011.

As the Sheriff of Richland County, the beginning of a new year normally brings about some changes in the way we do business. Normally the change is a new law or a new program that we deal with and meeting the new people in charge of that program.

This year, along with a new governor in Madison, I will be working with new sheriff's who were elected for the first time in our neighboring counties of Vernon, Sauk and Crawford Counties. I have always placed a high priority on cooperating and working closely with our neighboring sheriff's and their deputies. A positive note on the change is that Sheriff Spears in Vernon, Sheriff Meister in Sauk and Sheriff McCullick in Crawford are not new to us at the sheriff's department. All three were deputies in their respective department's prior to being elected sheriff. My deputies and I look forward to working with them and helping them in any way we can.

Another change that occurred on January 1 of this year was law enforcement's new relationship with Northwest Connections, a private mental health counseling service contracted by Richland County to offer "after hours" mental health and other emergency intervention services to our citizens.

The goal discussed when this change was made by the county was that Northwest Connections can better provide the after hour emergency intervention services in a more economical way. While local law enforcement still has the major role in responding to the calls for emotional help during these "after hour" calls, we now work with the employees of Northwest Connections to discuss solutions to the problem-not the "on call" county employees who we have worked with for many years. While it will take some time to build the trusted working relationships that is needed to handle these extremely delicate situations my hope is that this new change will work out well for everyone. I know my deputies will do all they can to work cooperatively for the good of our citizens.

The last change that I wanted to highlight has been somewhat controversial within the law enforcement community in Wisconsin. That is the law that now mandates each and every law enforcement agency in the State of Wisconsin to collect and report traffic stop data on EVERY TRAFFIC STOP to the State of Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance.

According to a letter that I received from the Office of Justice Assistance the traffic stop data collection program was created by the State Legislature in response to concerns that a new primary seatbelt enforcement law would unfairly target racial minorities. According to this same letter from OJA, the purpose of the program was to measure whether or not the number of traffic stops and searches conducted by law enforcement officers in the state is disproportionate between whites and non-whites.

Last week I issued a new policy and procedure to my deputies and starting January 1<sup>st</sup> per state law my deputies now collect this data by filling out a form that asks about 30 different questions about their traffic stop. The questions include the time of the stop, where the stop occurred, license plate number, full vehicle description, the number of passengers in the vehicle, the number of non-white passengers in the vehicle, the driver's ethnicity, the reason for the stop, the event outcome and the event duration.

Additional questions are then answered if a search was done during the traffic stop. These questions include whether the entire vehicle was searched, was the driver searched, the basis for the search and what was found if anything during the search. Same questions are asked of each passenger that is searched and the ethnicity of the passenger that was searched.

All this data that is generated by the traffic stop officer is then required to be sent "electronically" to the State of Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance. It is reported that this office will then organize all the data and make a report to the citizens of Wisconsin that is scheduled to be issued in July of 2012.

Now you know why this new law has been a little controversial in law enforcement circles.

There will be other changes in 2011 I am sure, but as always, I know that my department will adapt to any new change and challenge we are presented. Successfully overcoming the challenges is what makes my job interesting and rewarding. Again, here's wishing you a safe and secure 2011!

Sheriff Darrell Berglin