

New Sheriff learning to balance changes while maintaining staff professionalism

Written by Administrator

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Anyone visiting the Scott County Security Center in downtown Scottsburg knows immediately that changes are being made in the facility.

The smell of fresh paint is faint but persistent.

"We've been doing some painting in the cell areas, as well as repairs to walls," advised Sheriff Dan McClain. Such maintenance was a part of the new administration's initial efforts at the facility that houses both the jail and Sheriff's Department headquarters as was a general clearing out of some stored items considered no longer needed.

Sheriff McClain has his new staff in place: Don Campbell has been promoted to Chief Deputy; Doug Herald is his Jail Commander. Both men have work experience with the Sheriff's Department, having been hired by retired Sheriff John Lizenby. McClain's wife, Wendy, who has an accounting background, has taken over the jail matron duties. Yvonne Dowd is now serving as McClain's administrative assistant.

Two road deputy jobs have been posted by the department because of the resignation of Deputy Mark Hays due to a disability and Campbell's promotion. McClain said he hoped to have applicants undergo required testing in the very near future so that he will be able to hire two deputies by February 1.

The Sheriff said he will also be appointing some people to the department's Merit Board. He will appoint three members to that board, while his merit officers will appoint two to serve.

Officers have already been busy. During the third weekend since the new sheriff took office, deputies discovered a working meth lab south of Austin and made seven arrests based on outstanding warrants. "Deputies have taken all of these changes in stride and are actively working to make our county safer," he advised.

Looking at his jail personnel, Sheriff McClain said the staff "...is very good. They are dedicated individuals and all look forward to seeing more structure in their routines. Their jobs differ day to day and hour to hour, and they've held up well to that stress."

Structure is a necessity, particularly in a jail environment, he went on to explain. A structured environment "...helps inmates cope with the hours they spend here, and it also helps our jailers to do their jobs more easily. This facility is operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Even if the building doesn't look so bad on the outside, it has a lot of wear and tear inside, some caused by prisoners. They have a lot of time on their hands, and some spend that time figuring out how they can disrupt the system we have.

"My priorities deal with anything that will ensure and increase the safety and security of our jailers and inmates. One of our biggest problems in the jail is the lack of adequate video coverage in the cell block areas. Some cameras are just old; others just don't work. We'll have to address this issue with our County Commissioners and Council to correct what we can as quickly as we can," said Sheriff McClain.

One policy he plans to put in place is criminally charging inmates who damage the jail or equipment in the jail. McClain noted, "The inmates will learn that what they do while they are incarcerated has as many consequences as their actions on the outside of these walls. If they do something that causes damage or makes our jailers' work harder or more dangerous, they will be facing more charges in court."

He's also seeking ways to increase income. The cost of lodging those persons convicted of a Class D felony or above and awaiting a placement within the state correctional system can be partially reimbursed by the state. Depending on the type of felony, prisoners may be kept at the

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local facility to serve out their sentences. There is some reimbursement to be obtained there as well.

"We're going to look into both of those and see how successful we can be in getting some of our money back that is spent on keeping such prisoners. Of course, we can also obtain reimbursement for keeping state-level prisoners, but our jail population is normally too high to consider doing that," the department's top official said.

The new sheriff would also like to eventually dedicate one deputy's position to that of canine officer.

A trained officer paired with a dog trained to detect drugs will help local law enforcement agencies and the Indiana State Police with arrests of people involved in the drug trade.

Sheriff reserves are a big part of the local department, McClain acknowledged. "I'd like each of our reserves to attend the training academy. Several larger counties have a system where their reserves get their training on weekends or at night and also get ride-along time with merit officers. I'm also thinking of classifying each reserve. An 'A' will be able to drive our vehicles and do pretty much everything that a merit officer does. That will take a lot of training to reach that grade, but it's an achievable goal," he said.

The former sheriff's establishment of a "Most Wanted" feature on the cable television's community channel and in local newspapers is being continued. "Sometimes people who don't realize there is a warrant for their arrest will contact this department to try to straighten out the problem. Others have seen or read about the charges against someone they know and they call and let us know where we can pick up the individuals. It's a very good tool that allows the community to help our officers," he said.

The department's 24-hour Tip Line, 752-7898, allows individuals to anonymously call and give information about criminal activity. This too was started under John Lizenby, and it's staying as "...another tool in our arsenal," advised McClain.

The Sex Offenders Registry website is being updated. Each person on the registry is being sent a notice advising them to update their contact and location information with the Sheriff's Department.

Anyone can look at the registry by going to the Indiana Sheriffs Association website, clicking on Scott County and then following directions, or going to www.scottcountysheriffdept.com.

Each officer who has been through the Taser course of training is now equipped with the device.

"It's a great tool. Many times, our officers find themselves trying to deal with a 'drunk and disorderly' person who simply isn't going to obey the officer's instructions. A Taser is a less than lethal weapon that can lessen a suspect's resistance. It also helps decrease injuries among our officers and lessens the time they must spend away from their jobs because of these injuries," the sheriff explained.

Training for officers and jail personnel will be emphasized. Jailers have already gone through some training because of the change to a private medical company which is providing medical attention to inmates at a lesser cost. Officers have "active shooter" training scheduled in February, which will teach them ways to deal with an armed person among the public.

Drivers training will be set up through the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy, both locally and at the ILEA's Indianapolis facility.

Visitation with inmates at the local jail may undergo some changes in coming weeks. Sheriff McClain said he will be revamping the local website, www.scottcountysheriffdept.com, to explain commissary accounts for inmates, visitation and procedures.

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The new Sheriff offered the assurance that he will always be able to be contacted by the public through the county's dispatching service.

Looking at the next four years, Sheriff McClain stated, "I'm looking forward to working with our Commissioners and our County Council. I depend on them as much as they depend on me, so good relations are necessary. I feel we've been able to get off to a good start because of the support we've received from the Commissioners and Council."

He added, "I'm really looking forward to serving the public these next four years. It's going to take a lot of work to get the department organized and structured as I want it, so we're asking the public to be patient with us as we restructure and make these changes."

In reviewing his "To Do" list, Sheriff McClain advised, "My big goal is to bring more professionalism back to this office. When you're in trouble or have law enforcement questions, you should be able to turn to your county first for help. Professionalism builds confidence, not only in the officers but also in the public we are serving."