Amerson will retire from dedicated service

By Sherry Tucker

He began working in the Calhoun County Sheriff’s Office after graduating in 1975 with a bachelor’s degree in law enforcement from Jacksonville State University. Later he graduated from the Northeast Alabama Police Academy where he was number one in his class. In 1975, Amerson started in the Sheriff’s Office where he spent 13 years working at the jail as a patrol deputy and investigator. From there, in 1988, he was hired as administrator to implement the county’s enhanced 911 system. He hired employees, established policies and oversaw the creation of a new agency. He helped establish a new address system so that officers better locate rural citizens. He helped create the first digital road map for officers and first responders, and he worked to create a 911 address database.

“Impplementing the 911 system was a big task,” said Amerson as he recently sat in his office at 400 West St. in Anniston. It is filled with badges, plaques, and certificates recognizing years of achievement. “The address system was challenging for citizens, but we got cooperation from our citizens.” Amerson ran for the office of sheriff in 1994, and he is now in his sixth term, having won a minimum of 69 percent of the votes in each of the elections.

“There won’t be a seventh,” he said. “I overcame cancer last year, and that got my attention.” He said the time is near to focus on family and “outdoor stuff,” including hunting. He also intends to stay connected to public life.

The biography sheet describing Sheriff Larry Amerson’s 41-year career reveals the heart of a leader. He has served Calhoun County as a native son in the areas of solving crimes, improving safety, protecting citizens, and leading officers, even on a state and national level. He is past president of the National Sheriff’s Association and has served his home county, the state, and the nation well.

CAREER PATH

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The biggest threat is the increase in the threat of litigation. Officers must follow prescribed procedures to avoid litigation. He gave another example of teen misbehavior. For instance, intoxicated teens are returned to their family but decide to slip out of the home and drive, they could hurt someone.

“We could get sued,” said Amerson. Instead, now intoxicated teens must be incarcerated. The increased use of drugs among local citizens has grown. Ninety percent of those who are incarcerated have drug-related problems, according to Amerson, who added that there are many more women who are using drugs and end up in jail.

Also, many individuals have mental illnesses that officers are required to deal with, and often the problem is made worse because of the misuse of drugs and/or alcohol.

HIS FUTURE

Besides slowing down after retirement, Amerson plans to volunteer more on the Public Safety Advisary Council for FireFirst. It is a national broadband network for public safety and involves setting up systems where doctors and nurses can view a scene in crisis and give advice. In addition, Amerson wants to work with the (SAFE/COM) a group working on public safety communications policy development for federal, state and local public safety agencies including information sharing. He will remain on several committees and a board member with the national sheriffs association.

AMERSON’S Legacy

Amerson hopes his staff will grow in professionalism and service. “I hope my legacy is that the Sheriff’s Office will continue to have the kind of officers we have trained here and encouraged,” he said. “I would like for them to be successful and remain in this field where we need people of high caliber.” Any future sheriff will do well to follow Amerson’s example of providing high quality care and service to the people of Calhoun County and beyond.
Chief Darren Britton

What territory do you cover? City of Lineville

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? Recently I was promoted as chief of police. I have been on the force eleven years as an officer with two years in investigations.

Have you received any grants? If so, what? We received grants for bullet proof vests and computers.

Future goals for your department. We want to strengthen the relationship between our community and the police and build on that relationship. In this day and age, this is very important.

Additional comments: I have enjoyed policing. I enjoy the people in this community and don’t want to be anywhere else.

Chief Shane Dunnagan

Future goals for your department. Extend our grant application efforts and update some of the aging department vehicles.

Does your department have a motto? To Protect and Serve.

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year: Officers go to the schools and read to the children at different times throughout the year.

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Chief Joseph Stanford

Future goals for your department. We want to strengthen the relationship between our community and police and build on that relationship. This day and age that is very important.

Additional comments: This is a very important relationship. We want to provide the same service as in the past in protecting and serving our citizens. If given the money, we hope to start a junior police academy, a citizens academy, and work on getting a police liaison who can set up community events, meet with a community advisory board, have Coffee with a Chief program, Coffee with a Cop, and round table discussions. We are using a Force Simulator that allows officers to use scenarios in a virtual training video program. We would like to become a regional training partner with other agencies in our region to help train them using the Force Simulator.

Does your department have a motto? Protect and Serve.

Please List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year: We have a back-to-school event with the proceeds of the Talladega Forestry Department in “Get Outdoors Day,” sponsored by “Backyard Day,” sponsored by the Talladega Forestry Department.

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they assist us. In addition, we have statewide jurisdiction because we have campuses in Fort Payne, Heflin, Gadsden, and McClellan.

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors?

Recently we were reaccredited through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. This is a voluntary accreditation we do to make sure our policies are in place and up to date.

Have you received any grants? If so, what?

We most recently received a 100% grant for bullet proof vests.

Future goals for your department.

We have been trying to move the police department forward on different projects with the parking decal system so people don’t have to go to different locations to get them. Students and visitors will be able to login on their cell phone or computer and request decals, pay for them, and then have them mailed. We have partnered with Rydin, a company that has been printing our decals, and now we are moving forward to take advantage of the full system, minus the enforcement. Visitors may register their cars before they come on campus, print out a free permit, and lay it on the dashboard of the rider’s side of the car. Visitors may still come by the police department or the information center, but the new way is more convenient.

Does your department have a motto?

Our motto is See it. Hear it. Report it. We want people to make us aware of a potential problem so that we can address it. We want to make JSU a better place for all.

How many officers are in your force? What territory do you cover?

We have 20 troopers, 3 corporals, and 2 sergeants assigned to this office. We have a captain and lieutenant over us but they also cover the Birmingham Post as well as Jacksonville Post.

What territory do you cover? The Jacksonville Post covers 5 counties to include Calhoun, Talladega, Cleburne, Clay and Randolph.

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? We host one of the biggest events in the state. Twice a year we have the Talladega races, and, over the past several years, we have provided security and traffic controls without any major problems or incidents.

Have you received any grants? ALEA receives several grants from the federal government and those are divided out to each post. An example is speed and DUI enforcement grants.

Future goals for your department. Our goal is to reduce fatalities and injuries from vehicle accidents and to educate the public on the importance of seat belt usage and the dangers of texting and driving.

Does your department have a motto? Courtesy, Service and Protection.

Please List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year.

We support a wide variety of events in our area that includes motorcycle benefit rides, Toys for Tots, and other similar fundraisers.

Additional comments: “I am very proud of the troopers that work here. They endlessly strive to provide better services to our citizens. Thank you for your dedication and service to our community.

Q&A with local law enforcement

Please List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year.

We go to the high schools to teach them about danger. We help many children’s groups. We partner with everyone at JSU and work as closely as we can. Also, we assist with the Calhoun-Cleburne Task Force, and we provide training at the Job Corps in Gadsden.

Additional comments. We are here to make things better for everyone. If you have a problem come in and let us help. We may not be able to fix it, but we know who can. We will help you connect with that person. We have resources that municipalities do not have, such as counselors. Our officers will sometimes stay with people until a counselor arrives.

JACKSONVILLE HIGHWAY PATROL

Post Commander Michael Payne

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What territory do you cover? Our jurisdiction is countywide. If it’s unincorporated and someone calls 911, we respond. There are about 40,000 citizens in unincorporated areas of Calhoun County.

What are their most recent accomplishments and/or honors? We’ve gotten grants for rifles and bulletproof vests for a long time. The last time we got a grant was in 2019. We’re fortunate enough that we’re able to provide the best equipment.

How many officers are in your force? 53 deputies total, broken down into rural patrol, investigations and school resource officers. There’s a total of 120 employees counting correctional, medical, and clerical staff.

Additional comments: Everybody in law enforcement takes it as a great honor to be what they are. They have to go through many tests and it’s not easy to get hired on. Most do it because they believe in what they’re doing. The ones that don’t, they don’t last long. The ones in it are in it because they want to do good. They’re all heroes. They’re my heroes, anyway.

Has anyone in your jurisdiction used an armored tank? One of our biggest problems is we hire bright young people, and those people are rising stars. We provide them excellent training. After two years they normally find places that pay a lot more money. We lost two just recently, and they were minimalists. One went to Oxford, the other went to Hoover. We don’t have a lot of minimalists anymore. You hire somebody and, by law, they stay two years, and they can go other places. Fifty-three deputies sounds like a lot but not really when including school resource and county officers. One of our goals is to try and change the pay scale; it looks pretty good, but it takes a long time to top out. We need more deputies, and we’d like to pay the ones we’ve got a better rate.
Future goals for your department. Obviously we’re always trying to step up patrols and keep burglaries down. We’re trying to keep everybody’s property safe and keep our guys seen in the neighborhoods. We try to keep things under control. I feel like our department has a good relationship with the community, and they work with us well. We want to continue that relationship. We want to take care of the good guys and look up the bad guys.

Does your department have a motto? It’s something the sheriff has always said, “Always do the right thing.”

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. We have three resource officers assigned to county education, and we have one who works strictly for the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind who does a mentoring program with the students there. We have instructors that do active shooter training for schools, churches, and some businesses too. We also do a citizen’s firearms safety class every quarter.

How many officers are in your force? 17 sworn officers.

What territory do you cover? All of Randolph County. The cities have their own police departments.

Have you received any grants? Click it or Ticket and ADECA money for traffic violations.

Future goals for each one of your department. We’re working on getting everybody equipment, including training equipment. We’re doing continuous training with Special Response, to deal with situations like the shooting we had a couple of weeks ago. Protective equipment like kevlar helmets and body armor vests.

Does your department have a motto? Treat people the way you want to be treated.

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. Project Lifesaver is a nationwide organization with GPS for people with Alzheimer’s or kids with autism. We’ve got five or six on them right now. If they get lost and have a band, we’ve got a tracker and can have a helicopter pinpoint them instead of a search party. Yellow Dot was started through the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs. Citizens may get a packet and put a photograph of themselves on it with basic info, doctors, and medical history. If they are in a wreck, responders would see that yellow dot sticker and know to check their glove box. We take part in the Drug Abuse Resistance Program.

Additional comments: Our department is one of the best sheriff’s departments in the area. We try to tell our officers to treat people the way you want to be treated. We make it as professional a department as we can with the funding we get. We live in a great county with great citizens, and we have great support.

How many officers are in your force? 17 sworn officers.

What territory do you cover? All of Clay County.

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? We assisted in one officer-involved shooting situation over in Randolph County in July.

Have you received any grants? We received one a few months ago.

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Police Academy yearly for kids who meet the requirements. We have an outreach program called the Neighborhood Watch where citizens are allowed to participate and learn about the neighborhood they live in. We have a Neighborhood Watch program at Anniston, neighborhood watch programs, and a lot of active shooter presentations for businesses and churches. Our programs fall under the umbrella of policing and public service in general. Whatever the task of the day is, we just try and meet it as best we can.

Additional comments: We appreciate everything the community does for us. If they need anything, we’re on a phone call away.

OXFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT
Chief Bill Partridge

How many officers are in your force? 34 sworn officers
What territory do you cover? 34 square miles
What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? A fully functional SWAT and Hostage rescue team
Do you have any future goals for your department? We are always looking to improve the department.
What is the department motto? Striving for Excellence
List the community outreach programs you sponsor. The OFP Lodge 80, Safe School program at our schools in Oxford.
How can citizens help and support your department? If you see something, say something and follow us on social media.

ANNISTON POLICE
Chief Shane Denham

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. Officers go into schools to meet the kids. We don’t really have any department sayings. We consider ourselves a family.

Additional comments: It’s a great place to live. For what’s going on in our country, we’re very fortunate to live where we live, to patrol and police the county we’re in. We’ve got a couple of small towns, and everywhere has problems. We know the people. Generally we can de-escalate a situation because they know us.

How many officers are in your force? 64 sworn officers
What territory do you cover? 1.5-mile radius from the city limits
What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? Have they received any grants?
How many officers in your force? 12
What territory do they cover? City of Piedmont and a 1.5-mile radius jurisdiction
Have they received any grants? At the beginning of this year, we received an equipment grant for laptop computers.

PIEDMONT POLICE DEPARTMENT
Chief T.L. Thompson

We are always looking to improve the department. What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? We are budgeted for eight sworn officers, but for police departments, we have not had any recent, formal accomplishments, one of our accomplishments is having the future goals for the department? With the ongoing events, we would like to see the budget increased to be able to hire more officers.

Additional comments: The citizens of Piedmont are great about observing their areas and will report anything they see that is out of the ordinary. We are a small force everyone has to work together to get the job done.

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Additional comments: The citizens of Piedmont are great about observing their areas and will report anything they see that is out of the ordinary. We are a small force everyone has to work together to get the job done.
OHATCHEE POLICE
Department Chief Jason Oden

How many officers in their force? Three full time and three part time.

What territory do you cover? Ohatchee city limits plus a 1.5 mile jurisdiction outside the city.

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? We have received a grant for body cameras, within the last two years they have used to upgrade our body cameras and in-car cameras. Equipment Grant ($9,999), which we have used to upgrade our body cameras.

Have you received any grants? Yes, in 2016, we have ADECA/LETS Blue Suede Shoes. I portrayed Elvis). The Police Department’s website singing Blue Suede Shoes. I portrayed Elvis.

Do you have any future goals for your department? Our goal is for all of our citizens to get to know us and gain our trust. We are accomplishing this goal and have a good relationship with their citizens.

What is the department motto? We don’t have a motto per say, but we have a quote on the bathroom mirrors in the department which reads, “Ask youself what kind of police department would our police department be if everyone in this police department had a work ethic and attitude like mine?” They are facing themselves in the mirror while reading it.

List the community outreach programs you sponsor. We sponsor a national night out for youth every other year and serve hot dogs and hamburgers. Bands and church praise teams are invited to share their talents. Slide, ball cages, and various games are also on hand. We also grow beards each year and pay so much, the citizens but mainly because our jurisdiction is in the path of I-20. On a lighter note: We also won a trophy at the Heflin High School Talent Show. Be sure and check out their performance on the Heflin Police Department’s website singing Blue Suede Shoes (I portrayed Elvis).

How many officers are in your force? 15

What territory do you cover? City of Heflin and a 1.5 mile jurisdiction outside the city.

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or awards? K-9 officer Danny Turner and I traveled to Reno, Nevada, to accept an award from the National Drug Interdiction for the largest cocaine seizure in the United States. City we seized an average of 15 pounds a week. It isn’t because of criminal activity from the citizens but mainly because our jurisdiction is in the path of I-20. On a lighter note: We also won a trophy at the Heflin High School Talent Show. Be sure and check out their performance on the Heflin Police Department’s website singing Blue Suede Shoes (I portrayed Elvis).

Have you received any grants? Within the last two years they received a grant for body cameras, new tasers and in-car computers.

Do you have any future goals for your department? Our goal is for all of our citizens to get to know us and gain our trust. We are accomplishing this goal and have a good relationship with their citizens.

Additional comments: I work with the best officers and the best people I’ve ever worked with.
Modern police work is more technologically complex than ever before, and local officers say that is good.

Technology is making accountability, transparency, and communication easier for law enforcement agencies. Body cameras worn by officers solve disputes without anyone setting foot in court. Databases of warrants, crime reports, and a suspect’s information keep officers in the loop no matter where they are. Even social media is becoming a major policing tool.

“It has helped operations tremendously regarding intel and receiving info from the public,” said Oxford Chief of Police Bill Partridge about the department’s Facebook page. “We couldn’t imagine going back to a non-social-media environment.”

The department posts images of wanted criminals, suspects captured on camera, and other crime updates to Facebook daily. More than 19,000 followers see those posts. It frequently pays off, according to Partridge, such as solving the identity of two men who robbed Quick Meds Express Pharmacy in late 2015. An anonymous Facebook user contacted the department, and arrests were made.

Other departments use monitoring to help keep citizens safe. Several counties in Northeast Alabama participate in Project Lifesaver, a nationwide monitoring program that tracks adults with Alzheimer’s disease, children, and others who are vulnerable to disappearing. If a client is reported missing, police can track anklet bands and armbands that emit GPS signals. Missing parties are found faster without spending the money and time a search party requires.

Monitoring also comes into play with Talladega County’s “Safe Exchange Zones,” public places recorded on video 24 hours a day. Captain Josh Tubbs said that the sites are useful for Craigslist sales between strangers who want to feel secure or for couples who share child custody but prefer to meet in public to drop off their children. “You come to that area and it’s on video and you can feel a lot safer,” said Tubbs.

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Spotlight on LAW ENFORCEMENT

Spotlight on of Cops For A Cause. Last year they over 80 turkeys each year. However, since 2014 they have asked the deputies would do it for them if individuals wanted a turkey fried, spend about $3,000-$4,000 to fry the turkey. The men and women of this group already planning for this year's event. To Deputy Matthew Wade, they are not only "protect and serve," as their motto, but also they place their lives on the line and are committed to helping their communities.

For instance, the Calhoun County Deputy Sheriff’s Department sponsored a turkey by every year around Thanksgiving. Proceeds are donated to various organizations such as the Alabama Baptist Children’s Home and Second Chance. The sheriff’s office also feeds donations to the Alabama United Cerebral Palsy Center. Runners pay a small fee for their 5K run and raise over $10,000 for the United Cerebral Palsy Center. Other groups with missions similar to the FOP’s, such as the CCDSA, hold events like a holiday turkey fry to raise funds for charitable purposes.

“We’ve started really getting involved now with officer-crisis training. Most officers are better-than-average citizens, but also they place their lives on the line and are committed to helping their communities. For instance, the Calhoun County Deputy Sheriff’s Department sponsored a turkey by every year around Thanksgiving. Proceeds are donated to various organizations such as the Alabama Baptist Children’s Home and Second Chance. The sheriff’s office also feeds donations to the Alabama United Cerebral Palsy Center. Runners pay a small fee for their 5K run and raise over $10,000 for the United Cerebral Palsy Center. Other groups with missions similar to the FOP’s, such as the CCDSA, hold events like a holiday turkey fry to raise funds for charitable purposes.

“We’ve started really getting involved now with officer-crisis training. Most officers are better-than-average citizens, but also they place their lives on the line and are committed to helping their communities.
Captain Nick Bowles balances many roles

Anniston Policeman Captain Bowles is a busy man whose pursuits as a young man have stayed true. He has wanted to become a policeman from his youth, and he plays in a band with the same friends he had back then.

Throughout his 40 years, Bowles has added a few additional roles. Also he is a father, a husband, a councilman for the City of Weaver, and a history buff with a special interest in the Civil War.

Concerning being a police officer he said, “I do like to help people, but I just wanted to be a policeman.” He and a friend wanted to be in law enforcement all through their junior and senior years at Cleburne County High School. After graduation, they approached the Cleburne County sheriff and learned that they had to be 19 years old. At age 18, a year seemed like forever, so both pursued other occupations. Bowles worked in construction, in a foundry, and doing other blue-collar jobs.

However, he did not forget his desire to be a policeman. “It felt like a calling,” he said. His epiphany came one day when he was welding a door. Across from him was an older man who had been doing the same job with the same pay since his twenties. Bowles decided that day to at least try to become a police officer.

At age 24, he applied in several different cities for a position as an officer and was hired in Anniston. He went through 13 weeks of training at Jacksonville State University’s Northeast Alabama Law Enforcement Academy. After graduating from there, he spent his first 11 weeks riding in an Anniston policeman’s patrol car every day with a field training officer.

Later, Bowles became an investigator for five years in Anniston, working mostly on white-collar crimes which he said gave him a whole new perspective on police work.

Bowles now feels that he has his “thumb on the pulse” of the police department. He has held the following positions: sergeant, lieutenant, and, as of April, captain. He is in charge of the uniformed officers division and the SWAT team. He has earned several inner-office citations, as well as an award from the Fraternal Order of Police.

Bowles, a Kansas native, has been married to his wife Shelly for five years. He has a son, 17, and an 11-year-old daughter.

Bowles took on his role as a councilman in 2015 when Weaver Mayor Wayne Willis contacted him and asked if he would be interested in the position. He felt prepared because he had been president of the FOP and had observed how they ran things and spent their money.

“(Being a councilman) has been an eye-opening experience,” Bowles said. “It takes everyone working together like ‘cogs in a machine’ to get the job done and to help our constituents.” His skills when working with others have been helpful to Bowles on both the police force and the council.

“[Being a councilman] has been an eye-opening experience,” Bowles said. “To stand on the ground where the actual battle was fought was an exacting experience,” he said. He added that the first police chief of Anniston, George T. Anderson, was a Confederate General.

Bowles likes to help others, evidenced by his many roles. In his role as an officer, he likes that every day is different. He said he strives for truth and honesty in everything he does.

Photo by Stephen Gross / The Anniston Star

Spotlight on LAW ENFORCEMENT
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