

Spotlight on LAW ENFORCEMENT

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Amerson will retire from dedicated service

By Sherry Tucker



Photo by Stephen Gross / The Anniston Star

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

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.

“Implementing the 911 system was a big task,” said Amerson as he recently sat in his office at 400 West 8th St. in Anniston. It is filled with badges, plaques, and certificates reflecting 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 for him to focus on family and “outdoor stuff,” including hunting. He also intends to stay connected to public life.

BIGGEST THREATS

Thanks to his knowledge of the area and the criminal justice system, Amerson has a grasp of the biggest threats facing the citizens of Northeast Alabama regarding crime.

“The most likely negative thing to happen right now is that our citizens will become the victim of personal, property, or identity theft,” he said. “We are seeing violent crimes, but the majority of them are of a personal nature.”

He says citizens also need to be aware of terrorism because the perpetrators do not always live in New York City or Washington, D.C.

“Now terrorists are being tracked in small communities across our country,” he said.

The young and the old are vulnerable, according to Amerson. Young people get hooked on drugs, a problem that becomes a lifelong issue for them; and senior adults are more likely to become victims of Internet and telephone scams.

“These things frustrate us in local law enforcement,” Amerson said. “These are interstate or international crimes, making them hard to investigate.”

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

Within the next 10 years, Amerson would like to see more recognition of the challenges of finding high-caliber officers.

“Besides regular law enforcement duties and operating a large jail we are also officers of the court,” said Amerson. “If we didn’t provide support for the courts and our civil processes, the justice system would grind to a halt.”

He stressed the need to compensate the officers that carry out their duties to the county and state by providing them with improved retirement, pay, and training.

“We look for a high quality candidate, put them in stressful situations with high risks of danger, give them crazy shift hours, and burden them with stress that they carry home,” said Amerson. “Then we pay them poorly. We lost two officers within the last few weeks to higher-paying law departments.”

CHANGES THROUGHOUT THE DECADES

One of the biggest changes Amerson has seen throughout his career is a change in attitude among some parents. He described a time when officers carried wayward teenagers home to their parents. The teens’ problems were handled with firmness and discipline.

“Now the parent believes a child more than they believe a law enforcement officer,” he said.

Another change 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, if 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 Advisory Council for FirstNet. 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 (SAFECOM,) 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.

Q&A with local law enforcement

MUNFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Jeff Rutledge



How many officers are in your force? One certified and five auxiliary

What territory do you cover? Munford City, North Talladega County

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? Our department is only five years old, and getting it started is our biggest accomplishment. We will be six years old in November.

Have you received any grants? If so, what? We received an Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs grant. We were able to get radar equipment, computers, and a taser. Alabama Specialty Products donated ten thousand dollars to us.

Future goals for your department. We want to add more officers. We have an officer attending the Jefferson County Police Academy who will graduate in April, our first to send there. He is Josh East, and we hope to add more manpower.

Does your department have a motto? Protect and serve.

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. “We have a booth our Annual City-wide Birthday Party and one at the “Get Outdoors Day,” sponsored by the Talladega Forestry Department in May. At Christmas we have the Stuff from Santa event with the proceeds of a craft show in November. We are proactive in the Back-to-School programs. We teach educational programs on safety in the schools, and we have kindergarten students visit us each year. They love the patrol car.”

Additional comments: The relationship between the Police Department and the Munford community is a very good one. I grew up in Munford, went to school here, so I know most of the people in the community. In today’s climate when there is a lot of tension between the community and the Police, especially in the African American community, this simply doesn’t exist in our community. I have just as good of a relationship with the black community as I do the white community. Recently, I’ve had a lot of people in the black community come up to me with hugs and handshakes offering their support and prayers. I also pastor a church in the community, so I think most of the people in our community who know me, know that I am here to help people not just to throw “everybody in jail” and give them a hard time. I like to look at myself and our Police Department as the sheepdog to the community, not an “attack” dog.

LINCOLN CHIEF

Chief Darren Britton



How many officers are in your force? 9 certified including me.

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 for 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.”

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. We helped a hundred and ten families through the Toys for Tots program and taught classes at the schools. We have a new program this year, teaching elementary school about bullying how police are their friends. In the high school we have taught about the dangers of texting and driving and about cyber crimes. We assist our community with the Summer Sizzle events.

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

CITY OF WEDOWEE

Chief Jay Stone



How many officers are in your force? How many officers are in their force? 8 sworn, full-time officers

What territory do you cover? 26 square miles

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? All the Officers recently received hard ballistic armor for use in high-risk situations.

Have they received any grants? If so, what? Both Listed grants came from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant administered through ADECA at different times: \$8, 676 to purchase new radios that are Digital Band capable. \$3, 972.47 to purchase Taser Axon Body Cameras and software.

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.

CITY OF LINEVILLE

Chief Shane Dunnagan



How many officers are in your force? 9 certified including me

What territory do they cover? City of Lineville

What are their most recent accomplishments and/or honors? “I was recently promoted as chief of police. I have been on the force eleven years as an officer, two years in investigations.”

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

Future goals for each one’s 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.”

Please List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. “We helped one hundred ten families through the Toys for Tots program. We teach classes at schools, such as teaching elementary students about bullying and how police officers are friends. We have been to the high school and taught them about the dangers of texting and driving and the dangers of cyber crimes. We assist our community in the Summer Sizzle events.

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

CITY OF ASHLAND

Chief Joseph Stanford



How many officers are in your force? 8 including me

What territory do they cover? Ashland city limits and police jurisdiction

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors?

In the past five or six years ago, we headed up the largest drug roundup that Clay County had ever seen. We worked with Clay Co. Drug task Force 2010-2015 and most recently was able to apprehend a man from Kentucky that drove down to meet a 14-year-old girl, but my investigator was the girl,” and we are going for federal charges.

Have you received any grants? If so, what? Most recently we received a grant from the Homeland Security that allowed us to purchase automatic defibrillators to put in patrol cars and other city buildings. We worked Homeland Security in 2014 to purchase computer equipment. We are currently applying for a community oriented policing service grant through Community Oriented Policing Services, part of the Office of Justice Assistance Program.

Future goals for your department. We are working toward more community involvement and are pushing for a grant to get more community involvement to improve relation. We want to provide the same service as in the past in protecting and servicing 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 head up Trunk or Treat on Halloween. We participate in 5K events. We have officers that go into the schools and do walk-throughs and stay involved with students. We assist with traffic control for fundraisers.

Additional comments: Our officers have been commissioned to protect and serve communities and have sworn to protect and serve. It takes the community to assist the police department to achieve the goals of providing that service and protection.

JSU POLICE FORCE

Chief Shawn Giddy

782-5050



How many officers are in your force? At full staff, we have 14 officers.

What territory do you cover? We cover the Jacksonville State University campus. We assist the Jacksonville Police Department and

Q&A with local law enforcement

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.

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



How many officers are in your force? 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

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**CALHOUN COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**
Sheriff Larry Amerson



Chief Deputy Matthew Wade answered questions:

How many officers are in their 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.

What territory do they 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? The small victories are what I would call accomplishments. We just had a school resource officer leave his school and he found a car that had hit a tree and caught on fire. He dragged the person out of the fire. That person didn't survive, but when you help people, you do something that could change their life for the better. It takes all of us doing good every day.

Have they received any grants? If so, what? We've gotten grants for rifles to provide a long gun to every deputy. Before, most deputies were providing theirs. We had an [armored tank] with no armament on it from the 1033 Program, but it kept people inside safe. Back when Ferguson, Mo., [2014 riots] hit, the president gave out the order that no armored vehicles could be given to sheriff's offices across the nation, so they took that away.

Future goals for your department. One of our biggest problems is we hire bright young people, and these 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 minorities. One went to Oxford, the other went to Hoover. We don't have a lot of minorities apply. 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.

Does your department have a motto? It's an unofficial thing we say to people, "I'm helping people. Who have you helped today?"

Please List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. We're always looking for ways we can help people that we can. We send out two teams of inmates every day to do work for non-profits, painting, trimming hedges, and working in the community garden. The inmates' work offsets food costs. People call us almost daily. We only choose low-risk inmates, and they get more freedom and fresh air. A lot of them, they're proud of what they do.

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.

**TALLADEGA COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**
Sheriff Jimmy Kilgore



Captain Josh Tubbs answered questions

How many officers are in your force? We have 38 deputy sheriffs, and the sheriff.

What territory do you cover? All of Talladega County, anywhere not incorporated. We do the Civil Process, so we actually serve papers in the city and out in the county.

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? Everyone goes through their own specific training. Something Sheriff Kilgore has done is get a departmental website now where people can access the information they need from the department. Our jail and inmate information is on there.

Have you received any grants? We have one in place that reimburses us for bulletproof vests. Those have expiration dates on them and after so long we have to buy new ones. We're fortunate enough that we're able to provide that and keep our officers in good equipment.

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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 lock 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 firearm safety class every quarter.

CLEBURNE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Dennis Green



How many officers are in your force? 19 officers: six deputies and three investigators. I'm hiring one and have room for one more.

What territory do you cover? All of Cleburne County

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? We have drug and safety programs in the schools. We want kids to be aware the dangers of drugs. The synthetic drug they call salvia is a growing problem.

Future goals for your department. We'd like to wipe out all the drugs in this county. I know we can't, but we're working every day to try and reach that goal and to wipe out child abuse, also. We try to make a difference, that's been my goal all along.

Does your department have a motto? Everybody here knows we're here for each other. The last thing I tell my officers every afternoon is to be careful in their job and watch their surroundings, to be sure to go home to their families at the end of the shift.

Please List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. We're involved in senior citizen safety scams. These people call saying you won a million dollars, send three hundred dollars for the processing fee. We try to let it be known not to fall for those scams. You can't trust anything over the phone. In our line of work, if it's not written down, it didn't happen.

RANDOLPH COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff David Cofield



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 overtime.

Future goals for each one's 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 wristbands 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 your 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.

CLAY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Ray Latham



Chief Deputy Henry Lambert answered questions:

How many officers are in your force? 12 officers.

What territory do you cover? All of Clay County.\

What are their most recent accomplishments and/or honors? We assisted in an 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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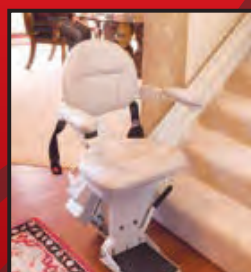
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to purchase new body cameras. The cameras cut down on a lot of citizen complaints when investigators come to take a look at what really happened.

Future goals for each your department. We’ve achieved many goals: new cars for the sheriff’s office, hiring [an officer], and we had a [body armor] vest grant last year. We’ve had a lot of changes over the last five years.

Does your department have a motto? We don’t really have any department sayings. We consider ourselves a family.

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. Officers go into schools to meet the kids.

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.

ANNISTON POLICE
Chief Shane Denham



Justin Sanford, lieutenant with Training and Inspections, answered questions.
How many officers are in your force? We currently have 81 employed.

What territory do you cover? We cover the city limits, and I believe about three miles outside of the city limits, but that may be plus or minus some depending on the boundary.

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors? We’re in the process of obtaining accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. They have a list of standards we have to be in compliance with when they come and do their inspections. It would be like a college diploma, but for police departments.

Have you received any grants? We get the Justice Assistance Grant from the Justice Department. We used it for cars this time, but there are several things we can use it for. We also have a grant for ballistic vests, and a grant called the Community Traffic Safety Program, which is used to help pay for officers specifically focused on traffic safety. An example would be if we had several accidents in one area, we could keep one officer there enforcing laws to cut down or prevent accidents altogether.

Future goals for your department. We’re constantly trying to improve our relationship with the community whenever we get the chance. No specific targets, but an overall reduction of crime and community relationships. We’ve had a lot of positive response from our community.

Please List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. We have a police advisory board where citizens are allowed to come. We have Rocky Hollow meetings for the neighborhood association there. We also do a Junior Police Academy yearly for kids who

are interested in law enforcement. We usually take senior high school students to an abbreviated academy and teach law, report writing, handling firearms, etc. We have officers who coach Little League for 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 a phone call away.

OXFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT
Chief Bill Partridge



How many officers are in your force? 64 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 FOP 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.

JACKSONVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT
Chief T. L. Thompson



How many officers are in your force? 27

What territory do you cover? City limits of Jacksonville, Jacksonville State University and a three-mile radius outside the city except for Anniston and Weaver who cover their own territory

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or achievements? A few years ago Chief Thompson completed 240 hours training for which he received an award. This training gave him a life certification in law enforcement.

Future goals of your department? We are preparing to move into the new public safety

complex very soon, having been in our current headquarters since 1934. The new complex is 63,000 square feet and will house the police office, jail, fire station and the court. FEMA has approved the courtroom portion as a safe house in catastrophic situations. It is located at 911 Public Safety Drive behind the Jacksonville Wal-Mart.

Does your department have a motto? Protect and Serve

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. We sponsor a bass fishing tournament each year for Relay for Life and a cancer drive to collect funds.

Additional comments: We little crime in our area due to the citizen’s desire to keep the area as crime free as possible.

PIEDMONT POLICE DEPARTMENT



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.

Future goals for the department? With the coming elections, we would like to see the budget increased to be able to hire more officers.

Please List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year. We block traffic for and are the lead escort for the annual Christmas parade.

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.

WEAVER POLICE DEPARTMENT
Chief Wayne Bush



How many officers are on your force? We are budgeted for eight officers, but we are currently staffed at seven. We are seeking to fill the vacancy now.

What territory do you cover? We cover the city limits of Weaver and a 1.5-mile radius from the city limits

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or achievements? Although we have not had any recent, formal accomplishments, one of our accomplishments is having the


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dedicated and loyal group of officers that we have. Of the seven officers currently employed here, the combined total years of experience/service is 87 years; and all of the officers are directly connected to the community, a clear accomplishment for an agency our size. We have all been honored by the outpouring of support that has been shown to us by members of our community - since all of the recent, negative media attention of law enforcement. The support that has been shown has helped keep officers motivated, and it has helped to remind all of us why we do this job. In my opinion, the quality of the relationship that we share with the community is our greatest accomplishment so far.

Have you received any grants?

Yes, in 2016, we have ADECA/LETS Equipment Grant (\$9,999), which we have used to upgrade our body cameras and in-car cameras.

Future goals of your department?

I would like to eventually add two, full-time officers to our rank to be able to improve service to the community, improve efficiency, and to improve the overall safety and morale of the officers. However, this is a budget issue that will not likely occur with the city's current income.

Does your department have a motto?

We have a few. The first is the one that most of us veterans inherited upon starting in our law enforcement careers, To Protect and Serve. We also have the motto Honor, Integrity, Service, which is found on our shoulder patches. We also have a more comical motto, We Fix Stupid.

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year.

Our citizens can continue to help us by accepting ownership in the community, by reporting suspicious/criminal activity, and by having an understanding that we can only be effective in our goal of striving for a safer community with their continued involvement and support.

Additional comments:

Unfortunately, our limited manpower prevents us from being as involved with community outreach as we would like to be. However, we take opportunities to interact with the community as often as we can.

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 parameter

What are your most recent accomplishments and/or honors?

The completion of 240 hours of service about seven years ago which gave me certification in law enforcement for life.

Future goals for your department?

To do our best to keep the community safe.

Do you have a motto? Protect and Serve

List the community outreach programs you sponsor each year.

We are limited in our outreach due to limited staff so we don't have any community-sponsored activities but do try to reach out to our citizens.

Additional comments: I work with the best officers and the best people I've ever worked with.

HEFLIN POLICE DEPARTMENT Chief A.J. Benefield



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 and Canada. We seized on 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.

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 yourself 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. Slides, ball cages, and various games are also on hand. We also grow beards each year and pay so much a month for growing them, and we sell tee shirts. All the funds go to the American Cancer Society.

Additional comments: We give a hundred percent and ask citizens to do the same, to be our eyes and ears and report anything that looks out of the ordinary. They are very co-operative with us in this.

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Technology keeps public safer

By Ben Nunnally

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 ankle 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.

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.



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Support groups help officers and the underprivileged

By Ben Nunnally

A number of organizations exist in Alabama to help police officers support and protect each other in times of crisis and to help those in need.

There's the Alabama Peace Officers' Association, the Alabama Sheriffs Association, the Calhoun County Deputy Sheriff's Association (CCDSA), and the Alabama Association of Chiefs of Police. The best known is the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the group that once supported a program in which civilians place decals on their cars to show police solidarity. That program is mostly discontinued.

The nationwide organization of the FOP was formed in 1915 in response to overwhelming work hours that required officers to work as many as 12 hours a day in some communities. As working conditions have improved, the FOP has retained a legislative function, but day-to-day operations are focused on benefitting members directly.

"It's more or less a lobby for us as far as having police officer's rights, labor laws, and protecting each other," said Oxford Lodge President Shawn Gibson, a captain in the Oxford Police Department.

The Oxford FOP lodge is only about a year old, said Gibson, but it supports officers from, Oxford, alongside lodges in Anniston, Talladega, and Gadsden. It's an elective group, and officers pay dues. Officers are not required to be a member.

Those who do join receive various benefits, including disaster-relief funds, legal defense assistance, and a payout to officers' families for accidental death. Through FOP, officers can also receive specialized training and information.

"We've started really getting involved now with officer-crisis training,

dealing with himself, and what he has to do dealing with the public in a critical incident," said Wesley Knapp, president of the Alabama state lodge.

The FOP also donates money for equipment to police agencies. According to Knapp, the state lodge donated \$24,000 so far this year toward the purchase of body armor for departments that cannot afford bulletproof vests.

Much of that money comes from membership dues because the state lodge doesn't hold many fundraisers. There is a movement underway to accept donations from the public. Citizens can join the FOP as an associate member, though both Knapp and Gibson say that practice is generally done by friends and family of officers.

Locally, the Oxford lodge is considering fundraisers, including the sale of signs for citizens' yards that promote support of the local police force. 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.

"It's something we do to try and be a part of our community," said Matthew Wade, chief deputy with that department.

According to Wade, the CCDSA donated \$11,000 to Northeast Alabama United Cerebral Palsy and donated other funds to the Alabama Baptist Children's Home. The FOP shares a similar attitude toward charity, according to Knapp, and donates money to help nearly a dozen charities per year, including veterans' groups and disaster relief. To Knapp, it reflects what he believes is a prevailing attitude among all police.

"All lives matter to a police officer," said Knapp. "Ninety-nine point nine percent of police officers would give their life for anybody in the United States. You don't become a police officer if you're not willing to do that."

Officers often the best citizens

By Betty Wilkinson

Law enforcement officers are citizens, too, only they not only "protect and service," as their motto states, 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 sponsors a turkey fry 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 donates food to these two organizations at no charge. This tradition began in November of 2005; and, according to Deputy Matthew Wade, they are already planning for this year's event. The men and women of this group spend about \$3,000-\$4,000 to fry these turkeys. Until two years ago if individuals wanted a turkey fried, the deputies would do it for them if they supplied the turkey and the oil. However, since 2014 they have asked for a \$15.00 donation. They give away over 80 turkeys each year.

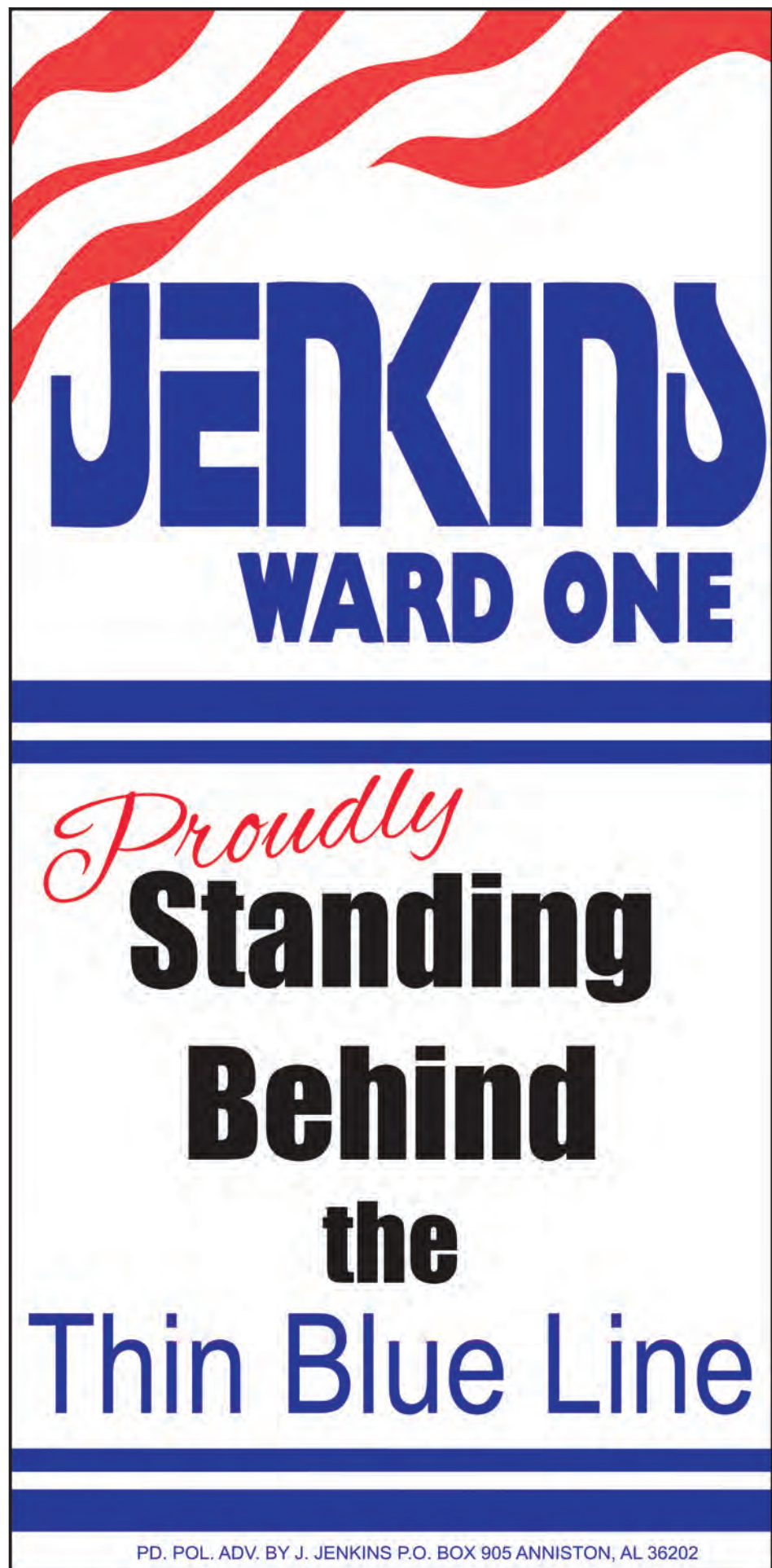
Deputy Wade is now on the board of Cops For A Cause. Last year they

did their first 5K run and raised over \$10,000 for the United Cerebral Palsy Center. Runners pay a small fee but most of the money comes from various community sponsors.

The Oxford Police Department (OPD) participates in several community activities. According to Captain L.G. Owens, they occasionally provide firearms classes. These classes are free, but each person has to provide his/her own gun and ammunition. Officers at OPD participate in Toys for Tots and have free fingerprinting for children. On Halloween, they have handed out candy for the last five years. Officers also ride in parades and provide vehicles for the Oxford High School homecoming parade.

Many of our police departments take an interest in teaching children and teen-agers safety and respect for the law by speaking at schools and church groups. Chief A.J. Benefield of the Heflin Police Department said they go to the schools and mentor students. They help students, including kindergarteners from Head Start, look for positive role models. Also, they go to into the Head Start classrooms to teach the kindergarten students.

Most officers are better-than-average citizen. They often go beyond their duties to be the best citizens among us.



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Captain Nick Bowles balances many roles

By Betty Wilkinson



Photo by Stephen Gross / The Anniston Star

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.

Bowles enjoys his off-time and his career. 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.

In his free time, Bowles likes to play in a band with his friends Dylan Laminack and Alan Kerr. “We were teenagers and the three of us have been playing together ever since.” When the three play rock ‘n roll and blues, they are named the Stone Free band, but when they play bluegrass music, they are named High Cotton. Bowles plays the guitar and sometimes the bass. They play at different area events at no charge because they enjoy performing.

Bowles once took advantage of an opportunity to go to Gettysburg, Va., a key battleground during the Civil War. It is a memory he cherishes. “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.



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