

From the Office of the Sheriff: Patrol Division – The point of the Spear.

In a continuing effort to provide insight into the Sheriff's Dept. this column will focus on the Patrol Division. Often referred as the front line, the Patrol Division is the most visible of all the divisions. Each of the 30 patrolman traverses the county, seldom casually as they are usually responding to a call for service. Logging a million miles per year, often at high speeds, in the worst of weather, 24 hrs a day, seven days a week, every day of the year, and may I say, virtually accident free(except for a few deer hits). Dedicated professionals who are the first responder for every call, barking dog, theft, suicide, sexual assault, murder, or traffic crash, they will be the first you see.

Most of you see the patrolman as your driving, the white squads generating the unconscious response to immediately depress your brake pedal. The primary goal for the Patrol Division is to ensure the safe travel of the motoring public. Should you push the limits or violate those laws, it will generate a traffic stop, which will produce either a stern warning (verbal or written) or a citation, often determined by your attitude and previous driving record. We have no quotas. Traffic stops, citations and warnings are strictly discretionary. My only guidance has been a sound ratio of 5:1 warnings to citations.

Over the past seven years we have made a concerted effort to enhance our ability to keep families safe as they drive in the county. We have reduced the area for which each patrolman works each day providing a more active focus on all areas of the county. We have transformed the basic squad car into a mobile office. Laptops and printers, enhanced electronics, GPS and video systems are now standard equipment. These initiatives have increased efficiency, productivity and the safety of the patrolman.

How do we gauge success? I use one metric – traffic fatalities. No, we may not be in a position to fully prevent them, but we surely can influence how many we have. We do this by conducting aggressive patrols, increase our visibility, zero tolerance stance with drunk drivers, community education, and other proactive enforcement efforts. From 2000 – '02 we averaged 22 traffic fatalities a year, suffering 29 alone in 2002. From 2003 – '08, we averaged 17 fatalities per year, a vast improvement. In 2004 we had just 12, the lowest in the current decade. I believe that we are influencing these numbers through our focused, concerted patrol efforts.

Traffic safety may be the major responsibility for the Patrol Division but we ask them for much more. Overnight building checks, emergency blood runs and vital organ transport are a few of the more unique responsibilities. Snowmobile, ATV, boat, and bicycle enforcement efforts fall within this division as well. Whether on snowmobile patrolling county trails or teaching boat safety, we have greatly expanded our reach into the community, creating alliances of both mutual support and effort. Additionally, we have greatly enhanced our specialty teams such as the Crash Investigation Team, which is available to all county agencies at no cost.

We have also changed the management structure in the division. The division is headed by a Captain, three Lieutenants and six Sergeants. The seriousness and pace of this division requires a span of control that is conducive to the operation as well as provide flexibility and we have done that.

On the National War College front I am knee deep into studying the U.S Constitution, Declaration of Independence and how Congress and the federal court system work. I have reached the half way point with just 151 coffee filters to go. Thanks for listening, tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us