



Newport News Sheriff's Office

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Newport News Sheriff's Office Shows It's Teeth

by

Lt. Kathleen Carey, PIO

It was late afternoon, January 22, 2007 Master Deputy Wayne Hill and his narcotics dog Kwade rolled-up on a car at Jefferson Avenue and Bland Boulevard. There were three men in the car and 11 grams of marijuana. It was Deputy Kwade's first bust. He sniffed-out the bad guys only 10-days after being certified for duty.

The arrests made by Deputies Hill and Kwade illustrate the cooperation between the Newport News Sheriff's Office and Newport News Police Department. The Sheriff's Office K-9 Unit was asked to assist with the search of a suspicious vehicle.

The highly trained animals and handlers have become an extra crime prevention measure for the City of Newport News, Virginia.

The Sheriff's Office has dogs trained to alert to narcotics and dogs trained to alert to explosives. They are kept busy responding to incidents when the police department's dogs are busy on other calls. The Virginia State Police have them on their roster to call as needed. The Sheriff's Office K-9 Unit also assists surrounding jurisdictions that do not have canines of their own.

The original reason behind why the city Sheriff's Office established its own K-9 Unit, however, was two fold: rid the jail of illegal drugs and quickly return to the docket when bomb threats interrupt court.

Sheriff Gabe Morgan quickly took action to quell this criminal activity. Only days after Morgan took office in 2006, a trustee and another inmate were prevented from smuggling marijuana into the Newport News City Jail. They were getting help from someone on the outside. Needless to say, the smuggling attempt lead to another arrest and additional charges for the inmates involved.

Controlled substances have even been discovered inside the secured area of the jail: marijuana, heroine, and crack cocaine. The discoveries come as a result of hard work performed by deputies.

Sheriff Gabe Morgan is willing to acknowledge the issue. "I have to believe what we can catch as humans is limited," admitted Sheriff Morgan. "A dog's sense of smell can root out the drugs. The dogs also have a deterrent effect. If they (inmates) know that there are random searches (of the jail), it will eradicate the flow of drugs."

Illegal drugs being smuggled into the jail is a symptom of a much bigger problem. "There is a misconception that a jail is a sterile environment. But when we have a facility that his holding nearly three times its rated capacity, the potential for illegal activity increases exponentially," said Morgan.

Another major challenge is the number of bomb threats that interfere with court business. On average, the courts receive one bomb threat a month. The City of Newport News has the fourth busiest criminal docket in the state of Virginia. They are experiencing an increase in high profile cases. With such a large case load, it is imperative to stay on schedule.

“When you go into a room and you’re cooking bacon and eggs and stuff in the morning, you smell the bacon. It’s the strongest odor. The dog – he smells the eggs, the oil, the dough you use to make the biscuits with. I mean their noses are so sensitive. That is how they can pick-up these odors so good,” explained Trooper Jeff Lovell.

Lovell is a bomb dog trainer for the Virginia State Police (VSP). His description of a dog’s ability to decipher distinctive smells makes clear why dogs make good law enforcement officers.

Deputy Morgan Hanks and his dog Tyson received their training and certification from the VSP. Hanks is excited about the direction the Sheriff’s Office is going with its own K-9 Unit. “If you have a deputy with an explosives dog,” he said, “it cuts down on the response time to get to the courthouse. If you get the dog in there and clear the building, the court cases and proceedings will move along a lot quicker.”

Establishing a K-9 Unit was an aggressive approach to attacking the challenges facing the Newport News Sheriff’s Office. A full service Sheriff’s Office is expected to have canines. However, canines are unique to a city Sheriff’s Office. Also unique was how Sheriff Morgan managed to recruit the dogs.

He got them for FREE. Tyson was a family pet. A Hampton, Virginia family unable to keep him, was looking for a good home for Tyson. Kwade was a gift from the Tempe Police Department in Tempe, Arizona. They gave one of their patrol dogs to the NNSO after learning how the Sheriff’s Office wanted to better serve the citizens of Newport News.

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