



Newport News Sheriff's Office

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U.S. Army and Newport News Sheriff's Office
Partner on Mutual Recruiting Effort

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With a stroke of his pen, Sheriff Gabe Morgan joined forces with the United States Army in a new recruitment approach. Morgan and Major David Jones, Executive Officer U.S. Army Beckley Battalion, each signed a pact that entered them into a mutual agreement to raise troops – whether those troops are soldiers or deputies.

The Army calls the strategic program PaYS, or Partnership for Youth Services. They seek partners from a cross section of national corporations and public sector agencies. The Newport News Sheriff's Office is the first law enforcement agency in the Hampton Roads region of the state to enlist. PaYS is a cooperative agreement that makes perfect sense to Sheriff Morgan, "This is definitely a part of our multi-faceted approach to recruitment. Veterans present some of the best qualities that make them well suited for our type of work. It makes sense that we'd try and recruit as many as we can from that group."

The PaYS program was developed to help the U.S. Army attract, train and deploy talented young people who want to serve their country but who also want to help secure their future success once their Army service is complete. Employers like the sheriff's office agree to consider qualified soldiers for positions in their organizations. Soldiers leaving the Army are given priority consideration in the employment process. However, under the terms of the PaYS agreement, the sheriff's office reserves the right to determine whether to ultimately hire the individual.

What it does for the Newport News Sheriff's Office is supply men and women of good character and strong work ethics as potential new hires. These are people who are disciplined, mature, and well trained. "They recognize the importance of orders and following orders. They have worked with a multitude of people from different backgrounds. They are familiar with diversity," said Morgan. Their military background automatically makes them good candidates as future deputy sheriffs.

As evidenced by the agreement with the U.S. Army, the Newport News Sheriff's Office has stepped-up its game to attract highly qualified personnel. The strategy is working. When Gabe Morgan took office in 2006, the department had thirty-seven (37) deputy vacancies. Now the organization is fully staffed. "That doesn't mean we stop actively processing applications and interviewing new candidates," said Recruitment and Retention Manager Sgt. Chanelle Zanders.

By attrition and the nature of the industry, the office anticipates turnover. People retire. People resign. People move. People accept positions elsewhere. Etc. Therefore, the sheriff's office is in a perpetual hiring process.

Making the matter more challenging, the Newport News Sheriff's Office needed personnel to staff its jail annex. The new facility, scheduled to open in November, is the result of years of effort to ease overcrowding in the city's downtown jail. The city jail opened in 1976 with a rated capacity of 248. Over time, that number rose as high as 725. Renovations at the former juvenile detention will give the sheriff's office more bed space.

A carefully orchestrated dance had to be timed just right. "We had to get a class of recruits into the final academy of the year. And they needed to graduate in time for the opening of the annex," explained Sheriff Morgan. "We couldn't hire too soon because it was at the end of the fiscal year. The money wasn't there."

Morgan said Sgt. Zanders and the entire professional standards team made it seem effortless. Together they met the recruitment goal. The largest class in at least ten years started the academy on July 24th and completed their training on October 16th. Complimenting his staff on a job well done, the Sheriff said, "They did a yeoman's job in threading that needle. And that's what it was. There were time constraints and fiscal restraints. But they got it done."

The shock and awe of orientation day was underway with the first commands of head instructor, Master Sergeant Jonathan Woodruff. "Pick your feet up. Pick 'em up!" he hollered. Twenty-six Newport News Sheriff's Office recruits were introduced to their new career field with a barrage of calisthenics and taunts from the trainers. Those taunts, however, are not designed to defeat the recruits. Instead, they are designed to strengthen them. "If you can't get your feet up on jumping jacks, what are you gonna do with an inmate?" Woodruff quips. "What you're feeling, you need to fight through it! You need to dig down deep somewhere and fight through this workout."

Over the course of the academy, these future deputies were taught lessons of survival, performance, practical skills, and academics. Some of the 26 recruits are veterans of one branch of military service or another. They have already experienced boot camp. They have already experienced life and death situations. They understand what it is to be a team member, a concept reinforced at the corrections academy.

In addition to PaYS and on-going application reviews, the Newport News Sheriff's Office has added another new tool to its arsenal for attracting potential candidates.

A 2008 Dodge Charger is the agency's mobile billboard. Its paint scheme is a real eye grabber. "I can't drive anywhere without people noticing it and asking me how they can join the department," said Zanders smiling. "When we pull up to a red light, they'll roll their windows down. When I drive down the street, they slow down to look."

The real trick seems to be to keeping traffic moving, especially on the interstate. "Yeah," Zanders laughs. "I don't mind other drivers slowing down on city streets. That's good for safety. But when they start to slow to a crawl on the interstate, that can be dangerous. But that's what their doing. People really like this car."

People like the car. Applicants like the organization. Soldiers being honorably discharged from the Army like the prospect of working for Sheriff Gabe Morgan. Overall, the recruitment strategies are working. There is a bright future for the Newport News Sheriff's Office.

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