As a career military leader, one of my passions was developing the many talented professionals under my command. Experience has taught me that leadership can be the essential element to an organization’s greatest successes or worst failures.

Since taking office in January, I have spent a great deal of time with each division commander learning about his/her personnel and processes. This has given me an opportunity to see where our agency’s strengths and weaknesses are, what processes we should sustain, and what changes need to be made to keep us pushing forward toward an even safer Citrus County.

One thing I’ve discovered is the need to cross train those in management/leadership positions. This will grow each individual’s knowledge base, providing him/her with the ability to contribute to many different areas in the agency, thus ensuring that we don’t have single points of failure.

Another area we should improve upon is developing those who can move into leadership roles through a comprehensive training program and systematic promotional process.

I’m happy to report we’ve already embarked on those journeys. Recently, a few retirements led to promotional opportunities for those in the law enforcement arena. I utilized one of my favorite articles, the “13 Rules of Leadership,” by Colin Powell, to drive the promotional process for backfilling two Captain positions that had become available. The open Captain slots then created the need to backfill Lieutenant and Sergeant positions.

“Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible,” Powell said. I took Powell’s lead by putting our promotional candidates through a much more strenuous promotional process than ever before. Each candidate was not only required to pass...
Here we go again. You knew it was inevitable. It happens every year. What am I referring to? Hurricane season! It’s right around the corner. Additionally, in preparation for this upcoming season, the National Weather Service has designated May 7-13, 2017, as Hurricane Preparedness Week. This is the time to prepare for the potential of a land-falling tropical storm or hurricane. If you remember, the county was hit with two storms in 2016: Tropical Storm Colin and Hurricane Hermine. While we were somewhat affected by Tropical Storm Colin, many on the west side of our county are still dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Hermine.

Hurricane Hermine was a Category 1 hurricane; look at the flooding and the damage it left in its wake. When I became the Emergency Management Director, the topic I spoke most often about was being prepared and not to be complacent. My fear is that we have so many new residents to Citrus County, they don’t remember the name storm of 1993 or the storms of 2004. Also we have not been impacted by a major hurricane in twelve years. People don’t know what to expect because they have never gone through a hurricane or tropical storm. I am also fearful of the “it can’t happen here” attitude. It doesn’t matter if you have two inches of water in your home or two feet of water in your home, water is water. Damage is damage. During Hurricane Hermine, the water was chest deep on US 19 in front of Crystal River City Hall, and it could have been much worse.

The time to prepare for this year’s hurricane season is now. I cannot emphasize that enough. I encourage you to sign up for Alert Citrus, our mass notification service that allows us to alert you to severe weather and warnings or other potential safety hazards or concerns. You may receive alerts through voice, text, or email communication methods. During Hurricane Preparedness Week, we will talk about how to determine your risk, develop an evacuation plan for you and your family, assemble disaster supplies, secure an insurance checkup, strengthen your home, and complete a written hurricane plan.

To further prepare you for the 2017 hurricane season, the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office, Division of Emergency Management will again be hosting our 14th Annual All Hazards Expo at the Crystal River Armory on May 20, 2017 from 9am-1pm. We will have vendors available who can help you prepare your home or other structures for the upcoming season. If you are having a re-entry tag, you can pick one up there. We will also have a static display of some of the equipment that we may utilize during a disaster or all hazard event.

To help prepare you for the 2017 hurricane season, the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office, Division of Emergency Management will again be hosting our 14th Annual All Hazards Expo at the Crystal River Armory on May 20, 2017 from 9am-1pm. We will have vendors available who can help you prepare your home or other structures for the upcoming season. If you are having a re-entry tag, you can pick one up there. We will also have a static display of some of the equipment that we may utilize during a disaster or all hazard event.

The time to prepare for a hurricane season is BEFORE the season begins. Right now is when you have the time and not under duress. For more information, please visit sheriffcitrus.org and click on the Emergency Management tab or weather.gov. Be Alert Citrus!

MESSAGE

A written exam and oral board, but they each had to write a paper about Powell’s leadership article and do a briefing to Command Staff falling within strict parameters.

I was very pleased with the process as a whole and am proud of those who were promoted into the open positions of Captain, Lieutenant and Sergeant. It will be up to them to lead by example by absorbing and demonstrating Powell’s 13 rules of leadership. Although I can’t share all of them with you here, I will share one of my favorites: “Have a Vision. Be Demanding. Followers need to know where their leaders are taking them and for what purpose. To achieve the purpose, set demanding standards and make sure they are met.”

I live by this creed -- and my employees know it. My vision is for Citrus County to become the safest in our great state. And, with the leaders we are developing here at the Sheriff’s Office, we will accomplish this mission with results that set the standards of excellence.

Yours in Service,

Mike Prendergast
Sheriff
On April 11th, the Citrus County Board of County Commissioners declared a burn ban for Citrus County. The burn ban states:

It is unlawful for any person to set fire to or cause fire to be set to any forest, grassland, wild lands, marshes, vegetation, or land in an urban or rural area including agriculture, silviculture, and pile burning or to build a campfire, bonfire, burn yard trash, household garbage, refuse, or other debris within the unincorporated areas of Citrus County unless authorization is obtained from the department of agriculture, division of forestry. (Sec. 46-74. - Prohibition.) The ban also includes using fireworks, sparklers or flares.

According to Deputy Fire Chief Craig Stevens, the dry conditions we’re experiencing here are fairly normal. “This is the dry part of the season,” he said. “This happens every year after the holidays when we stop getting rain. This creates the dry humidity along with the dry fuel content, like brush and grass, which makes everything relatively flammable.”

That’s why it’s so important that everyone know about the burn ban. Please help us spread the word by telling your neighbors, friends and co-workers. This will help reduce the possibility of lost life and property due to an illegal burn.

The number of brush fires that have occurred in our county this year compared to last year during the same time period is monumental. From January to April of 2016, we’ve had 58 brush fires with 67 acres burned in our community. From January to April 20 of 2017, we’ve had 131 brush fires with 262.08 acres destroyed. That is a huge difference.

Since the burn ban was enacted, we’ve had 48 illegal burns (since April 11). The Sheriff’s Office is responsible for enforcing the burn ban. When someone is burning illegally, law enforcement works alongside with firefighters (who douse the fire) to educate the person about illegal burning and its consequences. Offenders can be cited up to a $500 fine and/ or 60 days in jail.

“We continuously look at the weather conditions, the forecasted rain and the drought index to see if the burn ban needs to continue or if we can remove it,” Chief Stevens said. “The community has been very cooperative and we appreciate the understanding of everyone during this very dry time.”

New Scams made to separate you from your money

The two scams I wish to share this month are relatively new to our area and are very different. They both show the diversity of approaches used by those looking to separate you from your money.

The first one starts with a simple phone call. The caller identifies himself as a delivery driver for some unknown delivery service. He asks if you will be home in about an hour as he has a delivery for you. If you reply affirmative approximately an hour later a delivery person arrives to deliver a bouquet of flowers and a bottle of wine. Prior to departing the delivery person mentions there is a $2.99 certification fee due to there being alcohol delivered. No cash is allowed due to company policy so a credit card or debit card must be scanned for payment. After the transaction is completed, the delivery person says thank you and leaves. A day or so later you are startled to learn that several thousand dollars have been charged on the card you used for payment. Here’s what happened - the “scanner” was a portable skimmer that captured all your data and allowed the bad guy to make a duplicate card. So use extreme caution when dealing with such situations.

The second scam I wish to cover is one that preys on our human instincts. This scam starts with a simple phone call and one question. “Is this Mr. or Mrs. (your last name)?” Our natural response is to say “yes” or some other affirmative response. This is all the caller is looking for in order to complete their scam. This “yes” response is recorded and added to the end of a sales pitch that is used by the scammer to justify why they sent you a bill for a particular product or service that you never requested and most frequently never received. In order to avoid falling for this scam we each must deliberately suppress our instincts. We must program ourselves to respond in a non-affirmative manner. Such a response would be “Who is this?”, or “Who is calling?”, or even “How can I help you?”

Such a response puts the ball back in their court requiring them to create a response. If you get some sort of song and dance response about needing to verify your identity simply hang up. If you receive a call back, and you have an answering machine, let the machine answer and see if they leave a message. If they do not, you have confirmed their suspicions. If they do leave a message explaining who they are then you can decide whether to call them back or not.

As always, if you have any questions give our office a call at 352-249-9139 or stop by and see us at 4093 N. Lecanto Hwy in Beverly Hills. Our office hours are Monday through Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

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LORA PECKAM
Animal Control Supervisor

Do you love animals? Are you looking for something important and meaningful to be a part of? If so, the Citrus County Animal Control is looking for you. The Animal Control Unit receives an average of 1100 calls monthly, or 36 calls per day. With only 2-3 officers on duty at any given time, keeping up with the high call volume can be challenging. Since the creation of our Volunteer Unit, many of the daily calls are handled by volunteers who receive 25 and 30 years of service, 30 of them achieved 10 years, 11 achieved 15 years, 6 volunteers reached 20 years of service. We also had volunteers receive their 25 and 30 years of service pins, when they retired. Other major accomplishments that were recognized was the amount of hours that some of the individual volunteers had donated. Our agency had 36 volunteers donate over 500 hours last year. The Animal Control Unit has 500-5000 hours received a Presidential Service Award Pin to wear on their uniform. We recognized 15 individuals who achieved the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award. Those individuals were recognized for donating more than 4,000 hours in a lifetime with our agency.

With our Volunteer Unit, we have 8-10 volunteers at a given time, and 2-3 officers on duty. The volunteers are part of the community and are familiar with the people and places in our county. They are more likely to be able to provide detailed information and directions, and catching a lift can take from predator waiting to pounce. And for the young adults – PLEASE don’t jeopardize your safety. Make this new chapter in your life safe & memorable for you and your family.

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With our Volunteer Unit, we have 8-10 volunteers at a given time, and 2-3 officers on duty. The volunteers are part of the community and are familiar with the people and places in our county. They are more likely to be able to provide detailed information and directions, and catching a lift can take from predator waiting to pounce. And for the young adults – PLEASE don’t jeopardize your safety. Make this new chapter in your life safe & memorable for you and your family.

When working with the volunteers, it is important to keep safety at the top of their list. Volunteers typically respond to basic calls like stray cats confined in traps that need to be transported to the shelter. They also handle banking complaints, do well being checks, patrol for lost or stolen dogs and cats, both of which can be dangerous situations. They are open to outsiders from all walks of life, but walking at night is a risk. Remember, campus is open to outsiders from all directions. If you find a lost pet, a bike can take you past a predator waiting to pounce. Remember if you are in a new town, it is filled with strangers. Be aware when you and your new ‘roomie’ go to Wal-Mart or Target for your matching bedding and stuff, and be aware of the strangers around you. Criminals in college towns look for the newbies to victimize.

Here’s our challenge – and it’s twofold. First for parents. Understand that your child is going to stay out later than he or she is used to. Your kids are going to parties that they probably shouldn’t attend. You are more than likely going to mess up in some way or another. Please talk with your kids and let them know that you want them to meet new people and explore new experiences, while always keeping safety at the top of their list. Tell them to ALWAYS be aware of their surroundings and prepare for the importance of personal safety practices.

And for the young adults – PLEASE make smart decisions. Think before you act. DON’T take risks that could jeopardize your safety. Make this new chapter in your life safe & memorable for you and your family.

Pride in our Volunteers!

DEPUTY ANDY MCEWEN
Volunteer Coordinator

Volunteers have been an integral part of this agency since 1977. Volunteers donate over 15,000 hours of their time to serving the community. In 2016, we recognized over 70 volunteers and their service to the community. Their contribution to this agency is immense. In recognition of their dedication, we held our annual Volunteer Appreciation Banquet. Throughout the year, we always try to show appreciation to the men and women who volunteer their time to our agency. This event is an opportunity for the entire Sheriff’s Office to recognize the good work being done by our volunteers.

This year we recognized several significant achievements that our volunteers have accomplished. We had 52 volunteers achieve 5 years of service, 30 of them achieved 10 years, 11 achieved 15 years, 6 volunteers reached 20 years of service. We also had volunteers receive their 25 and 30 years of service pins, when they retired. Other major accomplishments that were recognized was the amount of hours that some of the individual volunteers had donated. Our agency had 36 volunteers donate over 500 hours last year. The Animal Control Unit has 500-5000 hours received a Presidential Service Award Pin to wear on their uniform. We recognized 15 individuals who achieved the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award. Those individuals were recognized for donating more than 4,000 hours in a lifetime with our agency.