As Sheriff, it is my responsibility to ensure that the residents and visitors of Citrus County are provided with the most secure environment possible. Besides the deployment of boots on the ground, this includes the deployment of a host of programs and tools to execute the mission in an efficient and effective manner. Your Sheriff’s Office offers many outstanding programs that we utilize not only to address crime, but other quality of life issues.

The program I would like to highlight in this issue is one that first opened its storefront here in Citrus County in July of 2002. The Seniors vs. Crime (SVC) Project is a joint project between the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office and the Florida Attorney General’s Office. This all-volunteer force of caseworkers focuses on issues of a non-criminal nature covering a wide range of topics. Caseworkers can assist with issues you may have with a contractor, billing issues with a service provider, or answer questions regarding possible scam calls or correspondence you may have received. In addition to their storefront operation, the SVC Office provides informative educational sessions to groups around the county. This aspect helps reduce the number of individuals who may fall prey to the abundance of attacks we all receive on a daily basis by teaching them what to look for and how to react.

Since the program started, this small group of dedicated volunteers has recovered more than $2.7 million for the citizens of Citrus County. This equates to over $73 returned to the community for every hour of volunteer service. Last year alone they recovered in excess of $125,000 and have already surpassed $141,000 this year. All of this is accomplished on an annual operating budget of $695. Nowhere in government, or even the private sector, can you see such a return on investment.

See MESSAGE page 2
Our office here in Citrus County is also unique in the world of Seniors vs. Crime. Our office is the first and only “joint” project in the State. Being a “joint” project also allows for the seamless transition of cases should a report received by SVC be deemed criminal in nature. Adding to its uniqueness is that our office is the second longest serving office in the state, as well as the office with the most operating hours per week.

This combination of successful service with efficient operation is something we strive to emulate throughout the Sheriff’s Office. Thanks to the concerted effort of this fine staff of volunteers, we will soon be announcing the largest case resolution in this region’s history. So please join me in thanking these fine folks for a job well done.

Though SVC has made an immense impact on our community, they are just a portion of the outstanding volunteer program we have at the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office. Because of the deployment of volunteers in almost every section of our agency, the taxpayers of Citrus County have received improved service and a great cost savings. Our volunteer program consists of nearly 800 community residents who volunteer their time to serve their fellow citizens. Due to their commitment, our volunteer program is the fourth largest in the state and the second largest per capita.

Because of the huge successes of our many volunteers, I have set a goal to increase our volunteer staffing to 1,000 before year-end. So help us achieve that goal. Come join the team and help make Citrus County the best place to live in Florida!

Good Luck Students!

~ BUS ROAD RULES ~

STOP WHEN RED LIGHTS FLASH!

MESSAGE from page 1

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Yours in Service,

Mike Prendergast
Sheriff
Scallop Season: Still halfway to go!

For many families, the water is their second home. It’s where they’ve been every weekend since summer began. Now with Scallop season full swing, more and more people are using our waterways, which means there are more and more potential dangers out on the water.

Recently, we sat down with two of our deputies that are constantly on the water – Deputy Thomas Beagan and Deputy David Sidenstucker. They are part of CCSO’s Marine Unit. They are out on the water day in and day out. So far, they do not like what they are seeing. Too many “close calls” and not enough people paying attention.

Both explained some rules of the water that people need to remember. First - For boat operators – Be Respectful! “You’re the captain of your boat, not the rest of them. You’re responsible for your wake. Go slow through narrow channels and if you see a boat being towed, don’t get too close. (Obviously, they are not having a good day already, so don’t make it worse by zooming by on your boat.)”

Beagan says the rules on the water are similar to the rules on the road - Always pass on the left and always check behind you before passing.

With Scallop season, passers-by will see you before you see them. If the water isn’t necessary from CCSO’s Marine Unit says navigating the Scallop Season can be pretty confusing and crowded. “The weather can be pretty unpredictable and treacherous.”

He says boat operators and scallopers can be careless once they get out on the scallop grounds. “Assume all vessels in the scallop ground area are scalloping, even if they do not have a flag up. Do not get up on a plane in the scallop area. It’s just a bad idea all around.”

Beagan wants everyone to remember to not get lost in the act of scalloping. “Try to check every thirty seconds to a minute to see where you are in the water. It doesn’t take but a second to pop your head up and see where you are. That’s the first thing you are allowed to be 300 feet from your boat.”

Mr. Wilkins’ case is not in any way to get on a plane in the scallop area. It’s just a bad idea all around.

The intent of following Mr. Wilkins’ case is not in any way to make the same mistake he had. But rather to chronicle the process and costs associated with this DUI.

The list below shows the costs associated with this DUI:

- Bond: $500
- Tow/Storage: $270
- Court Costs and fines: $1,158
- DUI school and associated costs: $468
- Random alcohol and drug screen: $375
- Drug/Alcohol evaluation and treatment: $600 total
- 10 day vehicle impound: $2,400 annually
- Over $2,200 annually

The sheriff's deputy is trying to educate the public about what really happens after a DUI arrest. We thought this was a great suggestion and I called Mr. Wilkins. He agreed to talk to us about what happened and what he thought about his mistake - which is the size of a football field. Yes, but remember, it’s very hard for boaters to get to scapocers because of the age of their boats, and too many boats are impatient and eager to get their scallops. “Be familiar with your tide charts. Take changes to increase your distance from your boat if you are not paying attention.”

When we asked what’s one thing that sometimes gets overlooked by boaters on the water? Beagan doesn’t hesitate to answer: “The weather. It’s cornical sometimes to watch scalloper frantically get out of the water all of the sudden and watch boats rushing to get to shore when a storm is coming in. I knew it was coming, was so tired to watch the weather reports and don’t wait till the last minute to go out on the water. We’re in Florida. It is no secret it rains almost every afternoon. If there is one thing these two know about – it’s ramp rage. Beagan says boat ramps are worse than parking lots. “Ramp rage is real. It’s nothing I’ve ever seen. The number one thing I want to get across to boaters is to prepare before pulling up to the ramp and launching your vessel. Don’t be packing up your hull or collecting everything in your car to put it in the boat at the ramp. Get ready to go. Other people are waiting to put their boats head up and make it to the ramp.”

“Please be courteous. Don’t get so angry that you embarrass yourself and most of all – your family.”

We hope some of these tips help you and your family have a better time on the water – Deputy Thomas Beagan – “Have Fun!”

A Cop Or A Cab . . . The Cost of a DUI

DEPUTY NANCY SUTO
Crime Prevention Coordinator

On May 20, 2017 an unfortunate event occurred. An impaired driver, Paul Wilkins, struck two Sheriff’s Office vehicles during an attempted traffic stop at 7:20 PM. Mr. Wilkins had already received 12 months of probation and the ability to terminate after 6 months if all conditions are satisfied. He must pay all court costs and fines. Also included is a six-month suspension of his driver’s license, attendance of DUI school, drug and alcohol evaluation and treatment. He also has to submit to random alcohol and drug screens. Anyone use of alcohol or bar activity will violate his probation. He is also required to have his vehicle impounded for a period of ten days.

This is what has happened thus far:

On the night of the incident, Mr. Wilkins spent the night in jail. An overnight stay is required on all DUI arrests. He slept on a steel bed with no mattress before bonding out the next morning, which cost him $500. Having no transportation, he walked most of the ten plus miles to his home before getting a ride.

Mr. Wilkins needed to get his vehicle back. The total cost for the initial towing, storage and tow to the impound lot from his home was $270. He had discontinued collision insurance because of the age of the vehicle, so repairs are at his expense. Mr. Wilkins lost his only set of keys on the night of the incident and has to have made more. With no keys, the vehicle cannot start so the extent of the damage is unknown. With no transportation or license, Mr. Wilkins has had to rely exclusively on friends for day-to-day travel and to make it to his court appearances.

Mr. Wilkins appeared in court on July 13th and entered a plea of no contest and was found guilty of driving under the influence. With no prior since 1987, the guilty verdict carried twelve months of probation and a six-month suspension of his driver’s license, attendance of DUI school, drug and alcohol evaluation and treatment. He also has to submit to random alcohol and drug screens. Any use of alcohol or bar activity will violate his probation. He is also required to have his vehicle impounded for a period of ten days.

I spoke with Mr. Wilkins after his court appearance and he stressed to me how grateful he is that no one was hurt that night. He told me that he thinks about what could have happened every day and stated how he never expected to go to jail. He also assured me that he had already received his message; that his mistake cost many people’s lives. "Please be courteous. Don’t get so angry that you embarrass yourself and most of all – your family."

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We especially want to thank Fire Rescue Chief Jim Goodworth for his 34 plus years of significant contributions to public safety in our community and to his last six years with our agency. Thank you for your steadfast dedication to our organization and your community. You will be missed!