It's the most wonderful time of the year. A time in which the holidays allow us to spend time with our families giving thanks for our many blessings as well as giving gifts to those we love. It's a time when seasons change (hopefully, ours will, too) and festivities abound. But let's remember, it's also the perfect time for criminals to wreak havoc on unsuspecting, innocent victims.

Although this issue is packed with safety tips, this holiday season, I'd like to encourage you to do three things to make sure you and yours have the best time ever with family and friends.

First, no matter the temptation, don't drink and drive. Actually, don't text and drive, either. Citrus County traffic crashes have been on the rise in 2017 and are up 5% from last year! Our fatalities are up over 30% from last year, too. If you follow us on Facebook, you can easily see the large number of car crashes that impact traffic flow on a daily basis. Although we don’t control where stop signs or red lights are placed, or even speed limits (all of this is done by the Department of Transportation), we do monitor our roadways constantly and want you to be safe. Remember the mantra “click it or ticket,” too. Seatbelts definitely save lives.

Second, please, please, please do not advertise on social media where you’re headed for Christmas vacation. This gives thieves an easy opportunity to steal your stuff. In case you’re not aware, we do vacation checks for travelers to give you a little more peace of mind when you’re away from home. Simply register on our website under the ‘How do I’ section, or call our Beverly Hills Office at 352-726-3484. Our volunteer staff will take your information and make sure we do an extra patrol in your area. It’s not a guarantee, but you’re certainly doing your part to keep your valuables safe and secure.

See MESSAGE page 2

HOT TOPICS
Criminals Don't Break for the Holidays ... page 2
Sheriff’s Business Roundtable ... page 3
Do You Count? I Do! ... page 3
Home Away From Home Security ... page 3
Don’t Fall Prey to Holiday Scams ... page 4
CCSO Holiday Traditions ... page 4
Finally, ‘tis the season for scammers. Be aware and don’t even answer your phone or door unless you know who’s on the other side. Many of us have caller ID and if you have it, use it. If you don’t recognize the number, don’t answer the phone. If it’s important enough, the caller will leave a message. Also, be cautious of answering your door without asking “who is it,” particularly in odd hours of the night. Although we live in a very safe community, we want to make sure that we don’t give criminals any opportunity to take advantage of us. The only person we want coming into your home unannounced is Santa Claus.

Please know that we will be watching over you reverently throughout the holiday season. If you need us, we’re just a phone call away. And if you have the chance, thank a first responder during these jolly days. They are sacrificing time away from their families to keep all of us safe.

Merry Christmas and God Bless You!

Mike Prendergast
Sheriff

DEPUTY NANCY SUTO
Crime Prevention Coordinator

As Autumn and Winter approach and the weather blows across Florida, the focus often shifts from safety to planning the fun events that fill up the holiday calendar. This time of year however, is the time of year that we all should remain the most alert and cautious.

The criminals in our society don’t take a break for the holidays. If anything, the opportunity for crime increases because attention has shifted away from safety. So how can you remain vigilant when out shopping and preparing for holiday fun without dampening the merriment of the season?

It’s little things that can make a big difference. Things like, looking up when walking and making eye contact with others as you pass. Saying hello to those same people. That simple friendly gesture may thwart an attack, as the risk of possible identification makes prospective attackers uneasy.

Gentlemen, if you carry your wallet in your back pocket, consider putting it in your front pocket as it is less likely to be stolen.

Share the joy of the holidays by shopping with friends and family. Holiday shopping may be enjoyable but not only makes the experience more enjoyable, but there is an increased safety by not being alone, especially after dark.

We don’t need much when shopping. All you need is a form of payment. Ladies, opt for a small across the shoulder bag. Put in it only what is absolutely necessary, and never leave a purse unattended in a shopping cart. Gentlemen, if you carry your wallet in your back pocket, consider putting it in your front pocket as it is less likely to be stolen.

Planning where you park. Try to park in a well-lit area close to store entrances. Scanning under your car as you approach it and having keys in-hand so your attention can stay on your surroundings. Using the shopping cart to take packages to your vehicle keeps your hands free. If a shopping cart is not available, limit the number of packages you carry even if it means multiple trips to the car when shopping. Packages should be stowed in the trunk or out of view, if a store has a security guard and you feel uncomfortable, ask that they walk you to your car.

Also try to limit the use of your cell phone, especially texting. Texting while walking not only increases the likelihood of tripping and falling; it removes attention from your surroundings creating a prime opportunity for an alert offender to commit a crime undetected.

Awareness is important to safety. While it is not possible to predict or prevent crime, you can greatly reduce the chances of becoming a victim by removing the opportunity for an offender. Personal safety is important to making holidays a happy, memorable experience. It is little changes in everyday behavior that will serve to keep you safe not only through the holidays, but throughout the new year as well.

Wishing everyone a very safe and joyous holiday season.

Merry Christmas and God Bless You!

Mike Prendergast
Sheriff

Gentlemen, if you carry your wallet in your back pocket, consider putting it in your front pocket as it is less likely to be stolen.
Sheriff Prendergast constantly strives to improve the partnership with, and service to, our community.

As a result, earlier this year a new program was born to assist business owners - The Sheriff's Business Round Table. This is a voluntary program to help foster better working relationships between the Sheriff's Office and our community businesses.

The Sheriff's Business Round Table is a quarterly luncheon meeting held at Withlacoochee Technical College in Inverness and catered by their culinary staff and students.

The meeting is limited to thirty participants and attendees which change for each session. It is an opportunity for business owners to share their ideas and express their concerns directly with Sheriff Prendergast in a relaxed and informal format. The Round Table is an opportunity for businesses to work directly with the Sheriff's Office to help us serve you better.

If you are interested in attending one of our upcoming sessions, please contact: Deputy Nancy Suto nsuto@sheriffcitrus.org

DO YOU COUNT? DO!

Counting. Many people count. We do it every day. However, in what connotation may be the difference. Some may count on others. Others may count their blessings. Still, some may count down to an occasion. Whereas I do it all. The 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season has been one for the ages. As of this writing, fourteen tropical cyclones have formed or developed this season. Ten hurricanes in a row. That has not happened, let me count, in about one hundred years. Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria left a number of cities and one U.S. Territory in total disarray. Homes have been flooded, people are now homeless, businesses destroyed, and people in Puerto Rico are still without power. Forty-seven days, and counting.

Leading up to Hurricane Irma, as it developed, I counted on a number of people, to be there, to fulfil their commitment to the safety and welfare of our community. From the people at the National Hurricane Center to county public works who operated the sandbag sites. From federal authorities in local cities and counties, to those individuals that were going up north to have a white Christmas or just to see friends, or family out of town is part of our landscape. Whether it’s a friend of someone going on vacation a little more enjoyable. Allow us to keep an eye on things while you are away can give you a little peace of mind. Whether it’s a friend of someone going on vacation a little more enjoyable. Allow us to keep an eye on things while you are away can give you a little peace of mind.

Social media is often a topic that many people on vacation forget about and can cause problems. Criminals troll social media sites like Facebook and look for people posting pictures of themselves on vacation. Some people let the criminal know you aren’t home. The normal response I hear is “I’m not worried they don’t know where I live”. If you don’t have the proper privacy settings on your Facebook page chances are they can look through your photos and find a picture of your home that shows your address or some conversation you have had that provides the needed information. Some sophisticated criminals can use the internet to provide them with the information they need. So it is best just to wait until you get home to post your vacation pictures if you wish to do so.

So if you wish to have your home checked while you are away give us a call at 352-746-3484, or visit our website at www.sheriffcitrus.org and provide the necessary information at least seven days prior to departure. Allowing us to keep an eye on things while you are away can give you a little added comfort and help make your vacation a little more enjoyable.
Lee Alexander/Senior Services Coordinator:

With the holiday season fast approaching retail sales, both in-store and online, will begin to rise. As a result, so will the effort put forth by scammers to part you from your money. So, we must take precautions to help avoid falling prey to the many scams that will come our way this holiday season. For this article, I will focus on making purchases online. There are steps you can take to limit your exposure when buying online. As I have said many times before, a little due diligence or prevention can go a long way to protecting ourselves. A simple step is to use familiar sites that you have used safely before. This practice allows you to make purchase comfortably without too many concerns and make the buying experience more enjoyable. Anytime you make an online purchase, even with a familiar site, make sure the web address is using SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) encryption. The URL for the site should begin with HTTPS:// and an icon of a locked padlock will appear. Now there are other things to look out for when making purchases online. NO legitimate online seller will ask for your social security number and the only time you should be asked for your birthday is if you are purchasing an item that has an age restriction. But how and where we buy items online are at the only ways we can protect ourselves. Make sure to monitor your account statements for any unauthorized charges. Having effective and up to date virus protection is a must for any online activity, not just buying. A key factor to protecting yourself when using an online account to make purchases, is to ensure that you are using a strong password. There are many methods you can use to select a strong password, but make sure you use one you can remember and use it regularly in developing all your passwords. An often forgotten step is to “stay at home.” In other words don’t make online purchases using a public WiFi system that can leave you susceptible to hacking. In addition, make sure you have your home WIFI system in a secure setting to avoid external access to your system. Now in this age of technology our computer is not the only area of concern. Statistics show that over 25% of us use our smartphones for making online purchases. This can be a very risky proposition if you don’t take some precautions. First of all, just like I mentioned above, don’t use a public WiFi system when making online purchase through the web. If you are going to use your phone for purchases use an established application from a reputable retailer. The way you are not transmitting your personal data as it is already stored on their system. But you must still ensure you are using a very strong password to gain access to the application. So in the end taking some simple precautions can make your holiday buying a much more enjoyable experience.

Daniel Neufeld/Law Enforcement:

As a result, so will the effort put forth by scammers to part you from your money. So, we must take precautions to help avoid falling prey to the many scams that will come our way this holiday season. For this article, I will focus on making purchases online. There are steps you can take to limit your exposure when buying online. As I have said many times before, a little due diligence or prevention can go a long way to protecting ourselves. A simple step is to use familiar sites that you have used safely before. This practice allows you to make purchase comfortably without too many concerns and make the buying experience more enjoyable. Anytime you make an online purchase, even with a familiar site, make sure the web address is using SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) encryption. The URL for the site should begin with HTTPS:// and an icon of a locked padlock will appear. Now there are other things to look out for when making purchases online. NO legitimate online seller will ask for your social security number and the only time you should be asked for your birthday is if you are purchasing an item that has an age restriction. But how and where we buy items online are at the only ways we can protect ourselves. Make sure to monitor your account statements for any unauthorized charges. Having effective and up to date virus protection is a must for any online activity, not just buying. A key factor to protecting yourself when using an online account to make purchases, is to ensure that you are using a strong password. There are many methods you can use to select a strong password, but make sure you use one you can remember and use it regularly in developing all your passwords. An often forgotten step is to “stay at home.” In other words don’t make online purchases using a public WiFi system that can leave you susceptible to hacking. In addition, make sure you have your home WIFI system in a secure setting to avoid external access to your system. Now in this age of technology our computer is not the only area of concern. Statistics show that over 25% of us use our smartphones for making online purchases. This can be a very risky proposition if you don’t take some precautions. First of all, just like I mentioned above, don’t use a public WiFi system when making online purchase through the web. If you are going to use your phone for purchases use an established application from a reputable retailer. The way you are not transmitting your personal data as it is already stored on their system. But you must still ensure you are using a very strong password to gain access to the application. So in the end taking some simple precautions can make your holiday buying a much more enjoyable experience.