Tips for young adults leaving Citrus

Spring is a time when we look forward to more sunshine and can see summer on the horizon – but for high school seniors – it’s a time of reflection and brand new beginnings. Graduation is only days away and for those of us who have been through it - safety is low on the priority list. Not only are they looking forward to “leaving the nest” and “no rules”, but that newfound freedom can be overwhelming.

Meanwhile, parents are wrestling with the fact of their kids leaving home for the first time. It can be downright scary - especially knowing what their kids could encounter outside of our small community. Let’s face it – Citrus County is a very safe and friendly place. Many take for granted how low the crime rate is here. Many enjoy our great parks, bike trails and downtown events, and they never give safety a second thought. Well – that needs to change for students and parents who are getting ready to venture off into a world of new places, new people and potentially dangerous situations.

Here’s what I want to encourage parents to emphasis with their kids as these young adults step out into the world – whether they are heading to college or starting their careers:

GET ORIENTED: Be familiar with your surroundings. Make sure when you get to your new home that you familiarize yourself with where certain places are. Know where the grocery stores, banks, and hospitals are located. Most importantly, where police and fire stations are located. For those living on or near campus – study the campus and neighborhood with respect to routes between your residence and class/activities schedule. Make a mental note of where ‘blue light' or emergency phones are located - almost every college campus has them.

See MESSAGE page 2
MESSAGE from page 1

RUN WITH A PACK: It's best to go to campus events, parties, and unknown areas with a group and leave with that group. In the interim, the group can watch out for its members - especially when alcohol is involved with older students on campus because personalities can change under the influence.

CHOOSE WELL-LIT ATMS AND PARKING LOTS: Making a stop at a cash machine is common for college students, but predators can use ATMs in less-traveled locations as a hunting ground. Dark parking lots are also dangerous spots, but if there are no other options, remember there is safety in numbers and campus security guards will escort a student to a vehicle.

WATCH OUT FOR HALL CRUISERS: A significant amount of on-campus violence comes from "hall cruising." This occurs when innocent-looking predators gain access to a dormitory, residence hall or sorority home with the help of trusting residents and then prowl the halls to check for unlocked doors and victims.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK: Late night trips to the library or social visits are a part of college life, but walking at night is a risk. Remember, campuses are open to outsiders from all directions, and catching a lift 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, be aware of the strangers around you. Criminals in college towns look for the newbies to victimize.

Here’s my 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 and go to parties that they probably shouldn’t attend. 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 observant of their surroundings and preach 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 and your future. Make this new chapter in your life safe and memorable for you and your family.

Yours In Service,
Mike Vershage
Sheriff

TEEN DRIVER CHALLENGE

We are committed to the safety of our community, including our young drivers. In an effort to provide education and training, we offer The Teen Driver Challenge; an effective, free program providing first-hand experience to youth. Students who complete this course will have the knowledge and skills to react accordingly and reduce the chance of traffic crashes. The Teen Driver Challenge is a driving program that covers topics and driving exercises such as vehicle dynamics, liability, evasive maneuvers, and much more.

Our upcoming classes are scheduled for Sat., June 9th and Sat., August 4th from 8:00a.m.- 3:00p.m. The teen is required to have a valid Florida Operators License and drive a car they will be using the majority of the time. (The Sheriff’s Office will not provide cars for this program.) Sign-up forms are available online at www.sheriffcitrus.org or you can contact Deputy Jim McIntyre at (352) 634-4958 to register.

For further information, please contact
the School Resource Officer
at your child’s high school.
LEE ALEXANDER
Senior Services Coordinator

Citrus County has a unique population in that sixty-five percent of our residents are fifty years of age or older. As a result, our population’s median age is 55.4 years. That makes our county the third oldest in the state and fourth oldest in the nation. This creates a need to be cognizant of the needs of our senior population. In order to meet these needs Sheriff Prendergast has given direction to the staff to seek out ways we can better serve this group and help address the issues they face on a daily basis.

One of the greatest issues facing our seniors, not only here in Citrus County but around the world, is the increasing impact of the many forms of Dementia. The definition of dementia is “A chronic, progressive disorder of the mental processes caused by brain disease or injury and marked by memory disorders, perceptual changes, and impaired reasoning.” The most commonly recognized form of dementia is Alzheimer’s disease. Alzheimer’s is the sixth leading cause of death in the U.S. and of the top ten causes of death it is the only one that cannot be slowed, treated, or cured. Estimates show that 1 in 10 individuals over the age of 65 will suffer from some form of dementia. As a result, Sheriff Prendergast has taken the steps to begin the process to coordinate law enforcement handling of situations involving dementia sufferers and their families.

On May 4, 2018, the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office co-sponsored an event with the Alzheimer’s Family Organization (AFO) and Coping with Dementia LLC to bring together the sheriff’s offices of the eight counties covered by the AFO. The purpose of this event was to share the “best” practices used by each jurisdiction and begin looking at how to develop a coordinated response. The event, however, did not stop with just law enforcement agencies. Representatives from Nature Coast EMS, Citrus Memorial and Seven Rivers Hospitals, Citrus County Health Department, and the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office were invited to participate in this one of a kind event.

Two key elements of the one-day summit was the presence of the Virtual Dementia Tour (VDT) presented by Senior Helpers and the Bloodhound demonstration done by Linda Bolea of Find-M-Friends. The VDT experience provides the participant with an inside look at what it is like to suffer from Alzheimer’s. Individuals whom have had the opportunity to step into the shoes of an Alzheimer’s sufferer by taking the tour have come away with a new understanding of what this disease does to those it affects. Linda Bolea demonstrated how to deploy a scent kit and how it integrates with the use of the bloodhounds of Find-M-Friends.

This summit was just the first step in a process to help relieve some of the stress endured by caregivers and sufferers of the disease. Sheriff Prendergast said, “We must put forth every effort to do what we can to address this generational phenomenon.” Each participating agency is a critical part in finding the answers needed to implement a strategy to address this growing impact of dementia. The Citrus County Sheriff’s Office and its partners are committed to succeeding in this effort.

We were proud to host our most recent Awards Ceremony on April 8th, to recognize the extraordinary service of the men and women of our agency. Each award presented embodied the dedication and selfless service of the recipient. We recognize that without their determination, our mission would be impossible. Our vision unachievable and our values meaningless. All of our award recipients made us tremendously proud. Of all the awards we granted, four awards distinctly stand out, four awards that do truly signify excellence.

The Best ‘Of The Year’ award is presented to any employee of the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office who distinguish themselves through continued outstanding, exemplary performance and dedicated service to the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office and citizens of Citrus County. Sheriff Prendergast was honored to announce the agency’s Best ‘Of The Year’ award recipients for 2017:

- **Civilian Employee of the Year**
  - **Sgt. Jason Stockland**
  - Deputy of the Year
  - During the Global Pipeline shooting incident, on February 26, 2017, Sgt. Stockland provided excellent leadership and essential resources to deputies while protecting the citizens of Citrus County from a potentially deadly situation. Without hesitation, he displayed extreme courage, faced imminent danger, and saved the lives of other law enforcement officers by quickly eliminating the threat.

- **Data Specialist Dennis Vitt**
  - Civilian Employee of the Year
  - On August 31, 2017, without hesitation, Dennis Vitt offered immediate assistance during the imminent threat posed by Hurricane Irma. His education, experience, and passion for meteorology allowed us to prepare the citizens of Citrus County for the impact of this monumental and deadly storm. Vitt’s unwavering commitment to our agency, as well as our residents, is invaluable.

- **Communications Supervisor Mike Story**
  - Communications Officer of the Year
  - On August 31, 2017, without hesitation, Mike Story immediately stepped up to the challenge of Communications Manager during the imminent threat posed by Hurricane Irma. He put his dedication, experience, and expertise to work to set up a system allowing information to flow seamlessly amongst all departments. Story worked closely with patrol, fire rescue, and EMS to adequately keep Citrus County informed during this deadly storm.

- **Public Service Officer Program**
  - • Best “Of The Year” Award
  - • Volunteer of the Year
  - • Volunteer Public Service Officer
  - • Volunteer of the Year
  - During 2017, Michael Rush displayed amazing commitment to the mission of the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office and the Public Service Officer Program. His vast volunteer hours Rush spent training, scheduling, instructing, and documenting all the activities of the PSD training course is greatly appreciated. His impeccable performance has resulted in maintaining a highly trained PSD program.

THANK YOU TO THESE OUTSTANDING PROFESSIONALS FOR THEIR SELFLESS SERVICE, DEDICATION, AND COMMITMENT TO OUR AGENCY AND OUR MISSION.

SHERIFF MIKE PRENDERGAST’S 2018 YOUTH SAFETY FAIR!

You heard it right! Sheriff Prendergast is hosting the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office very first Youth Safety Fair. The Youth Safety Fair will replace CCSO’s previous Summer Safety Expo, succeeding the event in more ways than one.

The 2018 Youth Safety Fair welcomes all ages of adolescents to partake in a day of fun and safety! Be sure to bring your helmets and bikes to go through our safety inspection. After passing the safety check, riders can test their skills on the obstacle course or ride through Safety Town; an improved town with shops, pedestrians, and road signs used to help riders navigate a realistic atmosphere.

And let’s not forget the prizes! Riders who demonstrate proper cycling etiquette will be eligible to win an amazing prize! Sheriff Prendergast encourages residents in the community to stop in for a free car seat safety check, courtesy of Deputy Michele Tewell, and the Early Learning Coalition. In 2017 alone, Deputy Tewell completed the Early Learning Coalition’s 233 car seat checks, where they found 69% of the child seats were misused. Our certified passenger safety technicians will make sure even the littest ones are safe!

So stop in June 2nd, from 9am-1pm at the Withlacoochee Technical College in Inverness to see what all the fun is about! Spoiler alert, it’s about safety!

2018 YOUTH SAFETY FAIR
Sat., June 2 • 9:00am-1:00pm
Withlacoochee Technical College

Join us for some family fun and learn about:

- Bicycle Safety • Pedestrian Safety • Boating Safety

ACTIVITIES, GIVEAWAYS AND MORE!

Bring your bike & helmet for a safety inspection and then ride into SAFETY TOWN! TEST OUT YOUR SKILLS ON THE OBSTACLE COURSE.

CAR SEAT SAFETY CHECKS WILL ALSO BE AVAILABLE ONSITE.

For More Information Contact Us At (352) 726-4488
If we have learned anything from the 2017 Atlantic Basin Hurricane Season, it is to be prepared for the worst, and then prepare even more. The start of the 2018 Atlantic Basin Hurricane Season is upon us. When I first became the Director of Emergency Management in 2015, we had not experienced a major hurricane event in more than 10 years. I was worried about people having “hurricane amnesia”. Not only that, but many people have moved into our county who had never experienced a hurricane or flooding event. As luck would have it, Tropical Storm Colin, Hurricane Hermine, and Hurricane Matthew put their arms around the state and had a major impact on Citrus County. That was 2016. 2017 brought upon an unprecedented season! Harvey, Irma, Nate, Maria, to name a few, brought their wrath upon the gulf coastal states, Florida, and Puerto Rico, which to this date parts remain without power. Citrus County was spared, by the grace of God. We did not have the destruction and devastation that the Keys encountered. Nor did we experience the shelter needs that Collier and Lee counties had. Or, did we?

In the Emergency Management world, every disaster is local. Meaning, we have to take care of our own, we are responsible for it, we have to plan, prepare, and respond to it. Hurricane Irma was more than twice the size of Hurricane Andrew of ’92. We were lucky in the fact Citrus did not experience the storm surge that was forecasted. However, we did experience mass power outages. Between the three power companies that serve Citrus County, 87,714 customers were without power. Some customers were out for a week. Yes, seven days! We opened eight shelters. We sheltered general citizens, special needs clients and their caretakers, assisted living facilities, and 622 pets! Federal programs initiated included Operation Blue Roof, Temporary Housing Assistance, FEMA Individual Assistance, FEMA Public Assistance, and the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP). The FEMA Individual Assistance program alone paid out approximately 4.4 million dollars to Citrus County. D-SNAP assisted 6,171 people. The Withlacoochee River flooded from Dunnellon to Floral City three weeks after Irma passed through. Yes, we experienced a disaster and it could have been much, 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. Take the proactive measures now to determine your risk of harm, develop an evacuation plan for you and your family and assemble disaster supplies, secure an insurance checkup, strengthen your home, and complete a written hurricane plan. We recommend having enough food, water, and supplies to last seven days without power. Learn what evacuation zone you reside in. If you live in a mandatory evacuation zone, please heed these orders. A shelter should be your last resort. Remember, a shelter is a life boat, not the love boat.

The 2017 Hurricane Season raised the bar. Craig Fugate, former FEMA Director, has said, “We must prepare for the world we live in, not in the world we grew up in.” 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 visit floridadisaster.org. #JustPlanCitrus #BeAlertCitrus

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**.Alert Citrus Registration**

Visit the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office website at www.sheriffcitrus.org. Scroll down and click on the Alert Citrus logo.

Fill in your personal information and click create account. Once completed, you will be added to our Emergency Communications Network to receive alerts for Citrus County.