

Citizens Volunteers Patrol our Streets and Neighborhoods

By Sheriff Terry Maketa

In today's economic times, we are all very watchful of our dollars and some of us are living on limited resources and have to find ways to stretch our dollar even more. We, in the Sheriff's Office, are feeling the same monetary effects of today's economy. We are also facing growing citizen demands and have witnessed our Calls for Service increase by 68% in the past ten years. This workload is straining the same number of responders we had in 1989. To offset the increasing demands of our growing community, we have reached out to our citizens for volunteerism. Today, we have amassed nearly 500 volunteers within our Office and every one of them provides us, and this community, an invaluable service. In 2008, we estimate our volunteers donated nearly 68,000 hours of work, saving the Sheriff's Office an estimated \$1.5 million dollars.

I am very pleased to introduce a new volunteer opportunity. On February 3, 2009, a new group of volunteers completed the second of a three-phase endeavor with the El Paso County Sheriff's Office known as the Sheriff's Citizen Patrol. Nineteen (19) enthusiastic volunteers are involved in this new program and we hope to see it grow. I am very excited about this new project and eager to see these individuals complete their training and begin assisting our office in the delivery of patrol services to the citizens of this community.

This is not a new concept; it began with a casual conversation, about three years ago, with a fellow sheriff during a conference in Florida. Following that conversation, I continued to pursue the idea in hopes of bringing a similar program here to El Paso County. After a few years of ongoing budget struggles, it became clear to me that I had to better utilize the resources I available to me. One way was to expand the current use of volunteers in the Patrol function. One of the hurdles to overcome was funding. Although the time donated is a tremendous savings, there still exists financial support for things like vehicle maintenance, radios, uniforms, fuel and other operational expenditures. This challenge was overcome with the new detention contract we signed in late 2008, with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE). With this contract in place, I am able to generate the funding needed to support a citizen patrol concept. I felt this was the opportune time to start the program; in hopes it would lighten the heavy burden my deputies face on a daily basis. These volunteers will not respond to, or investigate criminal activity, but engage in other activities associated with patrol functions. In other words, they will respond to calls for service, which are more along the lines of quality of life issues that do not require the specialized training and certification of a Deputy Sheriff.

Many of the tasks our Citizens Patrol will address directly relate to concerns expressed by citizens and feedback from patrol deputies. The duties will include parking complaints, crime prevention activities, updating business contact information, vacation checks on homes, standing by for tow truck responses for impounded vehicles, assisting with passive traffic control, assisting with traffic control at accident scenes, and responding to

business alarm for initial survey and assessment. They will also enforce handicapped parking requirements, senior citizen checks, animal and noise complaints and most importantly, provide a visible presence in our community and neighborhoods. I anticipate their duties will expand into new areas as this program evolves. All of these measures will save time for our patrol deputies and provide them more opportunity to respond to more serious crimes.

The training our volunteers receive is two fold; the first step is attending our Sheriff's Office Citizen's Academy and the second is a forty five (45) hour training program followed by a thirty (30) hour field-training program. During their instruction, they will complete courses such as, but not limited to, Law Enforcement Ethics, Colorado Revised Statutes, Radio Communications, Traffic Direction and Speed Monitoring, Personal Safety, Crime Prevention, and Anti-Biased Policing. The field training will pick up the classroom instruction and allow the members to use their new knowledge and put it to use with the guidance of patrol deputies.

Following one week of service, our citizens patrol members have demonstrated the value of their service. In their first week, they logged 120 hours of service, responded to 66 parking complaints, 4 traffic control calls, 13 motorists assists, one impound, one animal complaint, four calls for service and three criminal case reports. This work was generated by only a handful of the 19 volunteers that have completed their field training.

One of the keys to the success of this program is citizen support. These volunteers, ranging in age from 28 to 78, will be donating their time to make our community safer. They will not receive the same level of training as a uniformed Deputy Sheriff but will be operating vehicles similarly marked as our patrol cars, however, the volunteers will wear a maroon jacket and shirt marked as "Sheriff's Volunteer" and tan pants. They will not be armed, nor will they be wearing the same protective/safety equipment as our sworn deputies.

These dedicated volunteers will serve this community well, so long as this community supports and embraces their efforts. We are very anxious to watch this program grow and excited about the opportunities that will benefit our citizens, as well as, the quality of life we enjoy in El Paso County. If you see one of these volunteers, please join me in thanking them for their time and dedication.

I look forward to the future successes of this program and the numerous benefits it will provide to my staff and our great community. If you are interested in more information about the Sheriff's Office Citizen's Academy and the Sheriff's Citizen Patrol please visit us online at our website, <http://shr.elpasoco.com>.