



The Nebraska Sheriff

A Publication of the Nebraska Sheriffs' Association

**2022 NSA
President
Passing of
the Gavel**



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LINCOLN, NE— Nebraska Governor Jim Pillen joined members of law enforcement and representatives with the State Law Enforcement Bargaining Council (SLEBC) in signing a contract agreement that includes a historic pay increase for state troopers. **Story continued on page 7...**

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We will accept articles from law enforcement agencies, their representatives, or related fields to be considered for publication in the magazine.

Photographs of minors must be accompanied by verifiable permission to publish and list their names, whether the photo is emailed or sent through USPS.*

We reserve the right to edit all submissions for content or space.

We apologize for any errors or omissions. Please let us know about them.

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The Nebraska Sheriffs' Association website has all the county sheriffs' contact information, links to dates of special training offered to law enforcement in Nebraska, links to county websites, and much, much more. There are also special businesses that help to sponsor this website with their ads. It pays to be a member.

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We look forward to seeing you in Kearney!

OCTOBER 1-4, 2023

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The **Nebraska**Sheriff

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The Nebraska Sheriffs' Association, established in 1894, is the oldest organization of its kind in the nation.

Mission Statement

To provide continuing education to Sheriffs' Offices, youth, and the public in general.

Nebraska Sheriffs' Association

2022-2023 President
Ed Wemhoff, Platte County

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GOVERNOR PILLEN SIGNS HISTORIC AGREEMENT WITH STATE TROOPERS

LINCOLN, NE – Nebraska Governor Jim Pillen joined members of law enforcement and representatives with the State Law Enforcement Bargaining Council (SLEBC) in signing a contract agreement that includes a historic pay increase for state troopers. Finalization of the agreement comes as the Nebraska State Patrol launches a call for applicants to its upcoming recruit class.

"This new agreement shows the commitment the State of Nebraska has to law enforcement," said Governor Pillen. "I will continue to ensure law enforcement is funded competitively and has the tools needed to keep our state safe."

Provisions of the new contract include:

- Largest pay increase for troopers in 20 years
- Enhanced pay for troopers with specialty assignments
- Incentives to help troopers be better trained and equipped

"This historic agreement not only honors the tremendous work done by our troopers and investigators across Nebraska, but it also positions our agency well to recruit the next generation of troopers to serve Nebraska," said Colonel John Bolduc, superintendent of the Nebraska State Patrol. "For anybody looking for a rewarding career of opportunity, we encourage you to talk a trooper and consider applying to help us patrol The Good Life."



Pictured top above are Governor Jim Pillen; Dan Fiala, President of the State Enforcement Bargaining Council and the State Troopers Association; and Colonel John Bolduc, the Superintendent of the Nebraska State Patrol.



This is a reminder that the Nebraska Sheriff's Association is now a part of the Western States Sheriff's Association. So far the WSSA has provided us with a lot of useful information.

WSSA is a very strong voice for Sheriffs at the national level and offer their assistance at the local level as well.

For more information visit <https://westernsheriffs.org>

MENTAL HEALTH PROS ADD EXPERTISE ON POLICE CALLS

By Mike Konz, Hub Enterprise Editor

KEARNEY – It took a while longer than expected, but the Kearney/Bufalo County mental health co-responder program finally is staffed and doing what it was intended to do.

"It's a change for the better. We have someone who can respond with us and help people who are having a mental crisis," said Buffalo County Sheriff Neil Miller.

He and Kearney Chief of Police Bryan Waugh worked with Beth Baxter at Region III Behavioral Services and Lutheran Family Services in Lincoln to land grants to pay for the co-responder program, which now has a staff of two.

One of those two staffers rides along with police officers or sheriff's deputies to situations in which an individual is experiencing a mental health crisis. The second staffer acts in a support role, finding follow-up help for individuals who may need counseling and medical assistance to function more normally.

"It can be hard. You learn what works for you," said Megan Morris, who has been working several months in the co-responder role.

In addition to bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Texas in Austin, Morris brings to Kearney several years of experience with the Austin Police Department.

Morris said her job in Texas was similar to her new role in Kearney – she assisted with victim services where homicides, suicides, overdoses or domestic violence could be involved.

She said she has been getting her "feet in the water" since mid-December when she arrived in Kearney. She describes her new city as a "sweet, calm town."

Morris said she is grateful for the reception she has received in Kearney, where police officers and sheriff's deputies have been welcoming and respectful.

Miller said Morris brings credibility to her position, and law officers appreciate her advice. Morris said officers and deputies do pretty well in their handling of mental health crises.

Morris' partner, Wendy Space, has a different role to play as the peer support specialist. While Morris is a first responder, Space functions in a follow-up role.

She will offer advice to individuals needing help and arrange attention from mental health professionals for counseling and medical assistance.

The goal is twofold, say Morris and Space. First, they manage the mental health crisis, and then they provide follow-up support so individuals can remain on course to stabilize and improve their mental health. Space brings two kinds of credentials to her work. A resident of Minden, she possesses a bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Space also earned a degree in substance abuse from the school of hard knocks. She said the job description for her position requires that she possesses real world experience with addiction.

Space said she was excited to see the peer support specialist job description because her substance abuse issues actually helped qualify her for the job, along with her experience with agencies and organizations that help people like her.

"After people learn what I have been through, they open up about their mental health issues," Space said. "I try to help them on their journey."

Morris and Space's work is funded by a \$250,000 grant from the federal Department of Justice to the county and city law agencies and another \$50,000 to Region III.

Miller said the grants were awarded in 2022, but implementing the co-responder program was delayed when local organizers found it difficult to hire qualified staffers.

"We had been looking for a long time to find someone who could ride along," Miller said.

He said they will apply for an extension of the grant because of its delayed start. The money is supposed to fund two years of co-responder services in Kearney and Buffalo County.

So far, the co-responder program is doing everything Waugh and Miller hoped it could, Miller said.

The co-responder program is based on the belief that mental health professionals know better how to respond in crises better than most law enforcement officers. In many encounters, the mental health professional can "talkdown" the individual. That makes it possible to get that person where they need to be for help, and it frees police officers and sheriff's deputies to return to patrolling.

In many situations, the mental health professionals are on the scene with the deputy or police officer using their knowledge to safely de-escalate the situation. The mental health professionals can assist in other ways. Following a recent suicide, the professionals assisted first responders and other individuals who were closely associated with the situation, Miller said.

Last year Kearney and Buffalo County were Nebraska's sole non-metro recipients of the DOJ co-responder grants. Since then, Grand Island and Hall County have been funded. "Giving us a resource like this grant makes us feel a lot better about being able to do a good job," Miller said.

According to DOJ, a behavioral health professional is "embedded" at the Kearney/ Buffalo County Law Enforcement Center during peak hours. Professionals are on call the rest of the day to respond as needed.

Continued on page 10.



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Continued from page 10.

Region III Administrator Beth Baxter said co-responders will help defuse potentially explosive situations. With the co-responder program, it's hoped that mental health crises can be addressed and brought under control, freeing deputies and officers to respond to other emergencies.

The Buffalo County Jail has a mental health professional on staff.

Baxter, who has been a behavioral health professional for more than 30 years in Kearney, told the Hub last year that she has observed a growing need for behavioral health services. That was evident after the floods of 2019, when people were traumatized by the flooding and how it radically changed their lives.

Organizations such as Buffalo County Community Partners, South-Central Behavioral Health Services, Jenna's Rae of Hope Foundation and others are rising to the challenge, she said.

Miller said as the co-responder program establishes itself, individuals trapped in a cycle of arrests, incarceration and run-ins with the law will receive help to live more normal lives.

Goals for the co-responder program

- Reduce or eliminate the number of 911 calls that result in repeat encounters with someone with acute behavioral health (mental illness and/or substance use disorder) needs.
- Reduce the number of psychiatric acute hospitalizations and emergency room encounters that occur from unmet behavioral health needs.
- Prevention of unnecessary incarceration and/or Emergency Protective Custody/hospitalization of individuals experiencing a behavioral health disorder.
- Connect community-based behavioral health providers with individuals receiving the co-responder interventions.
- Provide alternate care in the least restrictive environment through a coordinated systemwide approach.
- Provide care coordination as needed. Facilitate the return of law enforcement units to patrol activities.

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE – WILLIAM “BILL” BURGESS

William “Bill” Burgess began his law enforcement career in 1976 and served as both a police officer and chief of police in Sutton, Nebraska.

In 1980, Bill moved to Fillmore County and became a Deputy where he worked under Sheriff Delaney. When Sheriff Delaney decided to resign in 1981, Bill was appointed to Sheriff, which he held until he retired in 2021.

Under Sheriff Burgess' leadership the Fillmore County Sheriff's Office has been able to grow and keep up with the changing times in law enforcement.

Bill served on several committees and organizations including the Community Corrections Council, Fusion Center and MOCIC, which he served on for 12 years.

Bill also served as NSA President in 2010-11. Bill Burgess has contributed greatly to law enforcement and the Nebraska Sheriffs' Association through his many accomplishments, and for these reasons he was nominated for the Nebraska Sheriff's Association Hall of Fame by Polk County Sheriff Dwaine Ladwig.



HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE – JAMES F. “JIM” JANECEK

James F. “Jim” Janecek began his law enforcement career on July 1, 1972, when he followed his father Robert “Bob” Janecek’s law enforcement footsteps.

Bob was a Deputy Sheriff for both Douglas and Sarpy Counties. Jim began at the Fremont Nebraska Police Department and went to the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center graduating from the 11th basic training class on November 3, 1972.

In 1976 Jim moved the family to Bloomfield, Knox County, Nebraska to work for the Bloomfield Police Department. In 1977 Jim and his family moved 14 miles west to Center, Nebraska as a Deputy Sheriff for Knox County Sheriff Herb Thompson and continued as Chief Deputy under Sheriff Wes Eisenbeiss.

In 1994 Jim and his family returned to Bloomfield as Chief of Police.

In 2002 Jim was elected the Knox County Sheriff, which he held until 2010 when he chose not to run for a third term. In 2010 Jim “semi-retired” and to this day works as a Bloomfield Officer in his 50th year as a law enforcement officer, with over 27 years as either a Deputy or a Sheriff.

Jim is nominated for the Nebraska Sheriff’s Association Hall of Fame by Knox County Sheriff Don Henery,

Bloomfield Chief of Police and Knox County Deputy Bryan Ruhr, Verdigre Chief of Police and Knox County Deputy Sheriff Dean Wavrunek, and Knox County Attorney John Thomas.



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CHANGE TO CONCEALED CARRY BILL WINS SUPPORT FROM SOME NEBRASKA LAW ENFORCEMENT

Erin Bamer Mar 1, 2023, Omaha World-Herald

LINCOLN — An amendment to the latest bill allowing Nebraskans to carry concealed handguns without a permit won support from several law enforcement groups, but some prominent police officials remain opposed.

And the bill, Legislative Bill 77, continued to face opposition from lawmakers like State Sen. Jane Raybould of Lincoln, who led a filibuster Wednesday during the first day of debate on the legislation. A vote is not expected until the end of the week at the earliest.



LB 77, introduced by Sen. Tom Brewer of Gordon, would allow Nebraskans 21 and older to carry concealed weapons without a permit.

Brewer has repeatedly pushed similar bills since taking office in 2017. His attempt last year failed in the face of a filibuster. Like last year's bill, LB 77 must see at least eight hours of debate until lawmakers can try for a filibuster-ending cloture motion, which requires 33 votes to pass.

Measures like LB 77 are sometimes called "constitutional carry" in reference to some gun rights advocates' belief that the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives people the right to carry concealed guns without a permit.

Continued on page 16.

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Continued from page 12. Currently in Nebraska, getting a concealed-carry permit requires passing a criminal background check, paying a \$100 fee and taking an eight-to 16-hour gun safety class.

"People should not have to prove that they deserve a right that is guaranteed to them in the Constitution," Brewer said.

Raybould countered by citing late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who said Second Amendment rights are "not unlimited."



LB 77 was the subject of an hours-long public hearing in January, which saw support from Second Amendment proponents, and opposition from Omaha and Lincoln police chiefs, along with the Omaha police union.

Brewer opened debate Wednesday by introducing an amendment that he said gained the support of the Nebraska Sheriffs' Association and the Police Officers' Association of Nebraska, and changed the Omaha police union's position to neutral on the bill.

Omaha Police Chief Todd Schmaderer and Lincoln Police Chief Teresa Ewins remain opposed to LB 77.

Brewer's amendment primarily increases penalties for certain crimes committed while carrying a firearm. He said the intent is to address some of the concerns from law enforcement and clarify that the expanded firearm access is only meant to be for law-abiding citizens.

"Don't do bad things with guns, and bad things won't happen to you," Brewer said.

Under the amendment, an individual would receive an added misdemeanor charge if they carry a firearm while committing certain "dangerous misdemeanors," including domestic assault, shoplifting or stalking. It would also be a felony upon the third offense of an individual failing to notify a law enforcement official that they are carrying a weapon.

The amendment saw widespread support from Republican lawmakers, while registered Democrats in the Legislature were more mixed. Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue said she supported the amendment, while Sen. John Cavanaugh of Omaha argued that it made substantial changes and should be subject to a committee hearing like the main bill.

Aside from the amendment, much of Wednesday's debate focused on the broader aspects of LB 77. Sen. Ben Hansen of Blair called the bill "finely crafted" legislation that has been shaped over the years like a "samurai sword." Other lawmakers argued the bill would help protect Nebraskans' Second Amendment rights and claimed increasing access to guns would help more residents defend themselves and others. But multiple lawmakers argued the opposite, claiming the bill would make Nebraska more dangerous, and said training is necessary to ensure responsible gun ownership. Several opponents cited research linking an increase in gun access to an increase in violent crime.

"This type of gun legislation will ultimately harm our citizens," Raybould said.



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NEBRASKA AUTHORITIES ADDRESS 'SWATTING' CALLS

March 2, 2023 - KSNB Local4

HASTINGS, Neb. (KSNB) - Several false reports of school shootings have been placed to 911 call centers across Nebraska and the country Thursday morning. The Nebraska State Patrol said there is no credible information that any such school shooting has taken place in Nebraska Thursday.

The hoax calls have been placed to schools in Lincoln, Omaha, Hastings, Grand Island Kearney, Columbus, Fremont and Gering Thursday.

NSP along with Gov. Jim Pillen, Nebraska Information Analysis Center, and the Nebraska Department of Education will hold a news conference this afternoon regarding the swatting calls placed to schools.

NSP said there have been distinct similarities in the calls received by schools in other states, such as the use of VOIP technology to mask the caller's identity and location, using or mocking a foreign accent, mispronouncing school or town names, and pretending that they are hiding inside the school themselves.

Earlier this week, the Nebraska Information Analysis Center (NIAC), a division of the Nebraska State Patrol, provided a bulletin to law enforcement agencies across the state and the Nebraska Department of Education regarding a trend of "swatting" calls that had been reported in several other states this year, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Texas, and Vermont. That bulletin advised local agencies to be prepared in the event the calls target Nebraska schools, which is occurring Thursday.

The Nebraska State Patrol is assisting any local law enforcement agencies and school districts that receive these calls. Anyone with information regarding the origin of these calls is urged to call NIAC at 888-580-6422 or submit an online tip at the NIAC Suspicious Activity Report site <https://sars.nebraska.gov>.

LINCOLN

The communications director for Lincoln Public Schools said police did receive a phone call Thursday morning, falsely reporting an emergency at a school in the district.

"Lincoln Police working with our staff were able to quickly determine the call was a hoax and part of a national trend aimed at disrupting the learning environment in our schools," an LPS spokesperson said. "We appreciate the continued collaboration and communication with our law enforcement partners. Earlier this week our security department was already aware of the national trend and working with law enforcement on how to best manage 'swatting' incidents which allowed us to be prepared for today's event. It is important we do not further contribute to the disruption created by these bad actors."

HASTINGS

Hastings High School went into lockdown briefly Thursday morning following their hoax call. Police said the caller claimed they were a teacher hiding in a room and there was an active shooter in the school.

Police said the 911 center was immediately suspicious as the name of the teacher and the room number do not exist.

Continued on next page.

Continued from previous page. As a precaution the school went into lockdown and police were dispatched to the school. Police remained at the school to monitor everyone's safety and answer questions.

GRAND ISLAND

Grand Island Public Schools said they received a phony call regarding a school shooting Thursday morning too.

"Out of due diligence, GIPD responded to our building this morning and informed us of the call and to affirm their support of our safety efforts," a GIPS spokesperson said. "Please know these calls are unsubstantiated and phony. We have been working with the GIPD as they investigate the origin of these calls hitting Midwestern schools. All of our students and staff are safe. No learning has been disrupted and business is operating as usual."

KEARNEY

Kearney Police said their 911 center received a call at 8:53 a.m. about a shooting at the high school. Kearney Police responded and immediately confirmed there was no shooting or active threat.

"Members of the Kearney Police Department take these calls very seriously along with our partners at Kearney Public Schools," Police Chief Bryan Waugh said. "We will work with our allied agencies and law enforcement partners who also experienced the same type of call today in an attempt to identify those responsible. KPD also communicated with all schools in Kearney to ensure the safety of each school and no additional calls were received. Thank you to everyone who responded and the great work from our Buffalo County Communications professionals."

GERING

Administrators at Gering High School said a Google-generated number called police dispatch to report an emergency at the high school at 8:30 a.m.

Law enforcement was dispatched to the district immediately, and the district crisis plan procedures were put in place. Police performed walk-throughs at all GHS buildings and determined that the call was a hoax.

Although this report was a hoax, all Gering Public Schools will remain in elevated security throughout the remainder of the day.

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NEBRASKA SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS SAY THEIR JOB IS MORE THAN JUST LAW ENFORCEMENT

February 15, 2023

By: Matthew Mittlieder, KLKN

LINCOLN, Neb. (KLKN) – School resource officers are defending their work from critics, saying their job goes beyond criminal justice.

They say they also help teach students and provide counseling, while keeping both students and staff safe.

Officer Sean Kennett, a resource officer at Lux Middle School, said he's always trying to ensure that students are taken care of.



"When you have the officers that are in the schools, and you're working as community-based policing, it helps because you're building those relationships," he said. "Obviously, not everything is gonna deal with the criminal justice system. If they have other issues going on, mental health, or substance abuse issues, we can get those resources out to the community to help them."

He said he's always interacting with students during passing periods and checking in daily to see if any action needs to be taken.

Despite this, some say having law enforcement present in schools doesn't make them any safer, and in fact creates more danger for students.

Continued on page 26.



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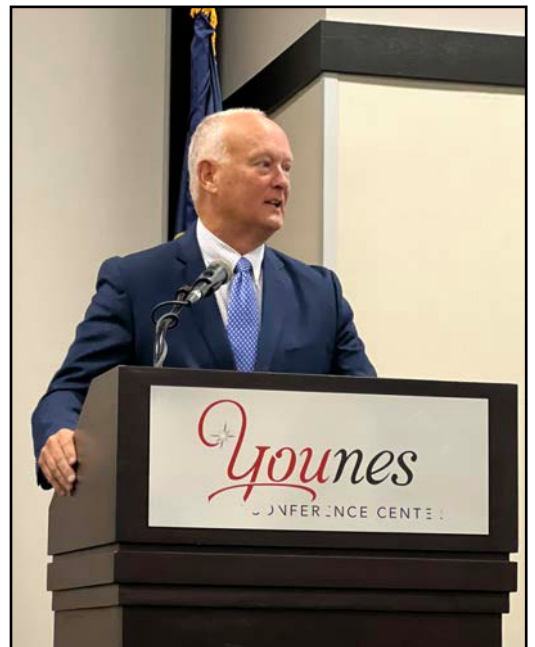
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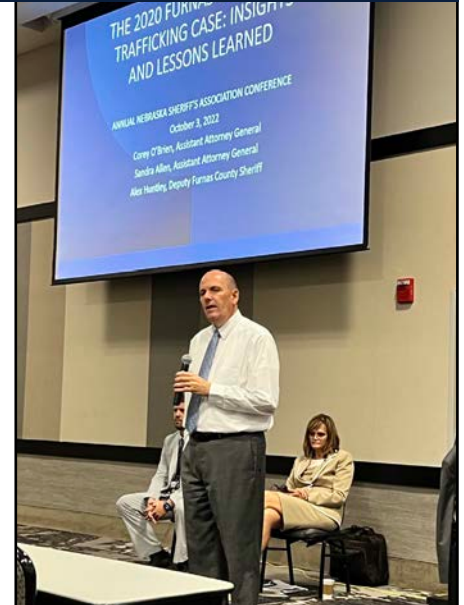
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2022 NEBRASKA SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION & POLICE



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Continued from page 22.

Rose Godinez, senior legal and policy counsel with the American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska, said by eliminating law enforcement in schools, more money and resources could be invested in school counselors and psychologists.

"Our major school districts in Nebraska are investing quite a bit of money into having law enforcement presence in schools," she said. "That only contributes to the funneling of students of color, students with disabilities, into the school-to-prison pipeline."

Godinez said this affects students' mental health and future opportunities, making them less likely to graduate, apply for scholarships and go to college.

One officer with the Hastings Police Department, Brad Cunningham, says it isn't law enforcement that leads to students' struggles, but what goes on at home.



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"I think the SROs prevent that, they have that positive interaction with the students, and they're reaching out and showing them, 'Hey, the cops are not bad; we're here to help you,'" he said.

Cunningham believes that by having more resource officers, schools could better support students while protecting them from harm.

"You can't put a price on your students," he said. "These students are the future of our community. And keeping them safe needs to be a priority in everybody's eyes, in the community's eyes."



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OFFICERS OF THE YEAR & CASE OF THE YEAR

ALEX HUNTLEY, JEFF VAN STELTON, MIKE DOWLING, and LATISHA CONNELLY
STATE of NEBRASKA V WILLIAM QUINN -
FURNAS COUNTY, NEBRASKA

On January 17, 2019, Furnas County Sheriff's Office Sergeant Alex Huntley (Sgt. Huntley) responded to an allegation of what appeared to be a single victim human trafficking matter. During Sgt. Huntley's initial assessment of the victim's disclosure, Sgt. Huntley recognized that there was more to the victim's allegation.

Using sound judgement, Sgt. Huntley assembled a team of experienced investigators to assist in this matter. This team, comprised of Nebraska State Patrol (NSP) Investigators Mike Dowling and Jeff Van Stelton, and NSP Analyst Latisha Connelly, 'peeled back the onion' and, over the course of 20 months, conducted dozens of interviews, hundreds of search warrants, and performed analysis on over one terabyte of data.

This massive collaboration revealed over two decades of child sexual abuse in Furnas County, Nebraska. The investigation that ensued, led by Sgt Huntley, to date has resulted in 20 arrests for violent and or sex related crimes against a child.

The leader of this sex trafficking enterprise was convicted by jury trial in June 2021. Sgt Huntley's efforts also led to the initiation of 3 spin off investigations, one of which has been adjudicated, and that defendant convicted of first-degree sexual assault of a child that occurred between May 2007 – May 2009.

On December 22, 2021, William Quinn was sentenced to 177½ to 304 YEARS in prison by Furnas County District Court Judge James E. Doyle IV. Under state sentencing guidelines, the 57-year-old Quinn must serve at least



Pictured: Jeff Van Stelton, Alex Huntley, Mike Dowling, and Anna Brewer

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half of his minimum sentence before being eligible for parole.

On December 22, 2021, Jacob Kramer, Bucky Weaver, Terry Smith, and Justin Brooks (who were charged with crimes against the victim) were also sentenced by Judge Doyle. These men were all sentenced to five years of probation during which time alcohol and drug consumption is prohibited.

Each man was sentenced to serve 90 days in jail beginning on December 31, 2021, with work release provisions, and assessed a \$1,000 fine. As convicted felons, they are restricted from owning or possessing firearms for life. Bucky Weaver and Terry Smith must register as sex offenders for 25 years and complete a sex offender treatment program.

Carl Kramer, Sr. was also sentenced to five years of probation for two counts of felony child abuse and assessed to pay \$1,000 for each count and serve two consecutive 90-day sentences.

Others were be sentenced in 2022. It is anticipated that there will be more arrests as the investigation continues.

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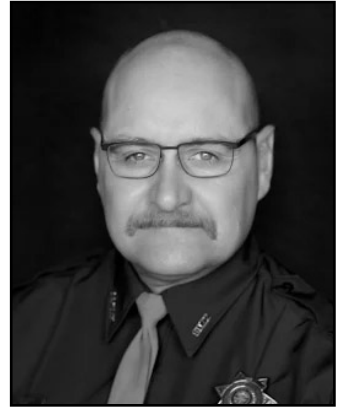
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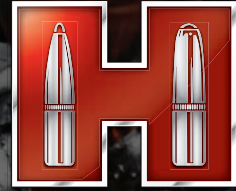


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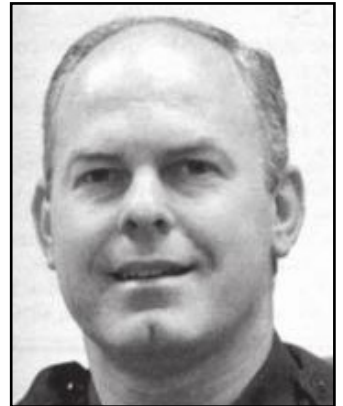
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THE OMBUDSMAN – ENTER THE DARKSIDE – OR SHARED VISION OF EXCELLENCE?

Craig Gottschalk, Assistant Ombudsman, Nebraska Ombudsman Office

I cannot say how many times, as an Officer and/or Administrator, an inmate told me – “I’m going to call the Ombudsman on this”. Truth be known, I had no idea who or what the Ombudsman was during my first months on the floor as a Corrections Officer. I knew though, the Ombudsman and the authority of their office, was a threat inmates threw at you when irritated. It was usually followed up with the, “I’m gonna have your job”!!

Once I became an administrator the role of the Ombudsman was front and center on my desk. I was the liaison – the conduit of information and insight - assisting this Legislative office with their investigation into complaints against my Officers and facility. I knew inmates stretch the truth at times, not quite being completely factual. But the depth to which many allegations dove always surprised me.

The term “Ombudsman” is Swedish in origin and means, in most general terms, representative. An Ombudsman’s duty today is to investigate complaints of governmental agencies and attempt to resolve those claims. Ombudsman efforts can also identify and address systemic challenges within agencies or respond to alleged governmental breaches of personal rights. I served as our facility liaison to the Ombudsman Office and came to know that a strong relationship with the Ombudsman’s Office was one of the top assets our facility could foster. This relationship is a critical tool when Officers and a facility pursue excellence. Too many Sheriffs and Jail Administrators see the Ombudsman as a hammer - identifying what a facility may be doing incorrectly. An Ombudsman review or investigation though, should be viewed as an opportunity for another set of eyes to view and gauge a facility’s expertise with inmate care, security, safety and attention to inmate rights. The Ombudsman office can serve as a quality control audit of operations.

Entering the Darkside

When considering applying to the Ombudsman Office last May, I wondered - what do I bring to the Ombudsman Office? I realized I could bring an outward recognition of trust in the relationship the Ombudsman had developed with the Jails and Prisons of our state. The Ombudsman Office believes this trust is a mutual appreciation for the role each plays ensuring a safe, secure and respectful partnership in Corrections. The Ombudsman can and does, through their investigation, remind and hold the Jails and Prisons accountable to their statutory mission. Several jail administrators and Sheriffs contacted me, when hearing of my move to the Ombudsman post, and asked, “are you going to the darkside?” Their digs, in jest, are a perception some of their counterparts, who do not have that trust, still hold. They find it improbable that someone investigating claims against their Office, Officers or facility has their best interest in mind. Some hate receiving “the call” or “visit” from an Ombudsman investigator. Those officials have yet come to appreciate the role the Ombudsman can play in their day to day operations, if they only allow them to.

The typical Ombudsman office though has no hammer of authority or statutory ability to “make” things happen. An Ombudsman’s strength is finding an avenue to bring parties together, opening portals of communication, identifying the inherent challenges in play and outlining opportunities or strategies to bring opposing parties together to remove barriers and mediate solutions.

The Role

Brad Johnson, Director of Lancaster County Corrections in Lincoln, NE, has a love hate relationship with the Ombudsman Office. Johnson indicates, “I have no issue with the Ombudsman checking into our Officers

or operations, as I believe we will shine. The Ombudsman Office knows the fog an inmate tries to create, masking the reality of our efforts." Johnson adds, "What I do hate is the disparaging picture that is painted by an inmate's allegations and how my Officers can be impacted by those claims".

"The time required to appropriately respond to each inmate claim to the Ombudsman is large", states Lancaster County Corrections Health Services Administrator, Alicia Renville, LPN, BSHA. "We see each complaint though as a teaching moment and an opportunity to recheck the inmate's charts". This belief and value found in two way trust, identifies that both parties recognize they have an ally supporting the work each pursues in a most challenged of situations.

This trust also recognizes that both parties work to ensure the rights, health and security of those inmates supervised is paramount.

Trust brings with it a degree of latitude offered with and during all interactions. The Ombudsman knows the facility is not attempting to hide or manipulate a message and/or data - while the facility believes that the Ombudsman is not pursuing an "I got you moment".

This trust also builds an expectation of accountability. "I expect the Ombudsman to challenge us on policies or procedures that may be a bit off track," Johnson offers. To then address the issues that are derailed and provide timely remedies - by refocusing policies or operational efforts - prevents continual and expanded legal and liability threats.

Renville sees the Ombudsman as another set of eyes watching her Medical team. "We are human and mistakes happen. These investigations cause us to check an inmate's charts again, and again, and concur that the treatment regimen in place is appropriate".

Continued on page 35.

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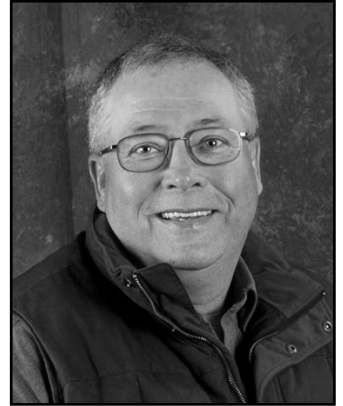
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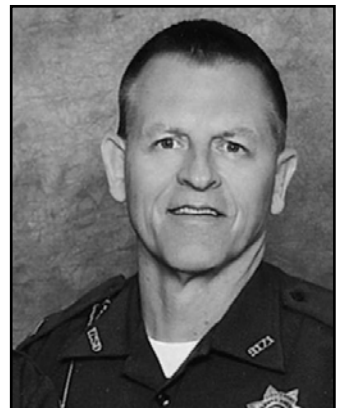
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Continued from page 33.

Lancaster County Corrections Lieutenant, Joe Anderson, sees an Ombudsman complaint a bit differently. Anderson stated, "I've usually known of the inmate's complaint prior to the Ombudsman call as I've already responded to their grievances. It seems as if the inmate tries to find someone new to air their displeasure to after we've already said no."

Anderson added, "When the Ombudsman informs the inmate that we meet or surpass Jail Standards – it's a sign our operation, protocols and policies are spot on."

The trust established supports an honest and immediate recognition of inherent chokepoints occurring in a facility and the systemic errors in operations.

To be excellent, a facility and staff must continually search for and find areas where they fall short and address those challenges readily. A partner will help you find those kinks in the armor and ensure they are buffed out and returned to brilliance. Without that partner shining the light or asking the question – the jail or prison may implement protocols or policies that create an unending series of security, health or safety decisions and efforts that result in a maelstrom of legal and liability threats.

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St. Tammany, Parish Coroner's Office
Chris Knoblauch, F-ABMDI Forensic Death Investigator
Robert J. Sigilitto M.D., Chief Deputy Coroner
Charles A. Preston M.D., Coroner

When the average person is asked what comes to mind when the word "Coroner" is mentioned, the response is almost universally "Death". Determining cause and manner of death, as well as the ultimate certification of the death certificate are the primary responsibilities of the Coroner or Medical Examiner's Office (MEs) in any jurisdiction. Coroners and MEs conduct investigations and inquiries, identify decedents, notify next of kin, arrange autopsies, and work with families and funeral homes to arrange for the disposition of remains on a daily basis.

The terms "Coroner" and "Medical Examiner", are often used interchangeably, but have significant differences depending on which system is recognized by statute in a given state. Generally speaking, a Coroner is an elected position and is not necessarily a physician. The coroner must determine the scope of an autopsy and arrange for a qualified physician to conduct the postmortem examination to determine the cause and manner of death. Individual states may have an ex-officio coroner such as the elected Sheriff in California or a Justice of the Peace in Texas. In contrast, a Medical Examiner, is a qualified physician who is appointed by the governing authority to conduct death investigations and provide forensic autopsies. Mandatory reasons for an autopsy in either a Coroner or Medical Examiners system would involve homicide,



suicide, accident, or a death of a suspicious or undetermined nature that may have legal implications. State statute defines what type of a death investigation system will be utilized: Coroner, Medical Examiner, or combination of both organized by county, region or centralized for the entire state.

In Louisiana each "Parish", a geographic subdivision which is considered a county elsewhere in the United States, has an elected Coroner. In addition to death investigation the Coroner has

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several additional statutory responsibilities. These include emergency mental health commitments, sexual assault examinations, and investigation of all infant deaths.

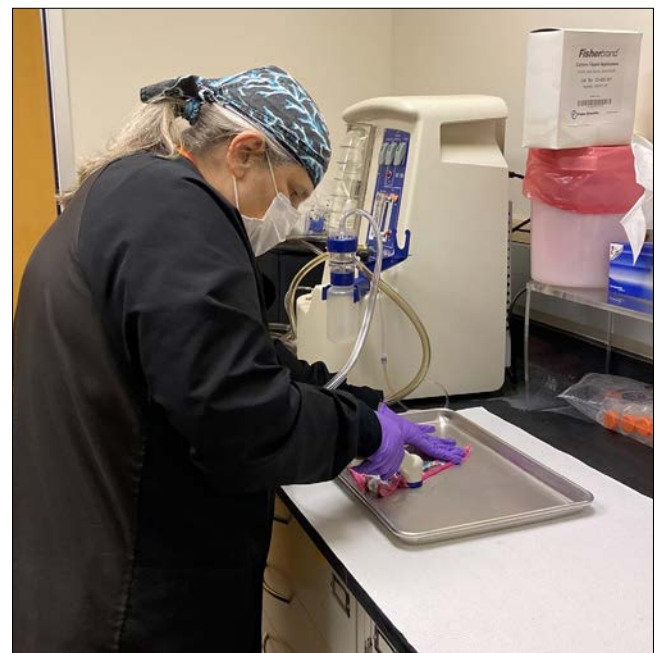
In St. Tammany Parish, Dr. Charles Preston has structured his agency to not only meet these statutory responsibilities, but to provide the community with valuable extraordinary service which includes advanced scientific capabilities and lifesaving initiatives that support local law enforcement partners and protect the residents of the community overall.

Forensic and Death Investigations

Located just north of New Orleans on the Northshore of Lake Ponchartrain, St. Tammany Parish has a population of nearly 270,000 residents. The office has one full time Forensic Pathologist and conducts 260 autopsies per year. The coroner is part of the Judicial Branch of Government and is funded by an annual ad-valorem tax. The agency works closely with all law enforcement agencies throughout the parish. Ten full time forensic death investigators provide around the clock coverage and take reports related to approximately 3000 total deaths per year. They are also cross trained to take affidavits for mental health commitments and to assist in postmortem examinations. All full and part time investigators must be certified by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators within one year of employment. The office has established a Family Case Coordinator position who is the central contact to distribute case information to family members and help them navigate the process surrounding a Coroner's certification of death.

DNA LAB

St. Tammany Parish has the only coroner based in house DNA Lab in Louisiana. Because of an severe statewide shortage of DNA facilities, most labs have a significant backlog of cases and consequently only process samples from violent crimes. In contrast, the St. Tammany Parish DNA lab functions exclusively for the coroner's office and law enforcement agencies inside St. Tammany. Consequently, the STPCO DNA lab does not have a backlog of cases and can turn around preliminary results for law enforcement agencies in about 72 hours. In addition, the lab routinely tests evidence from non-violent property crimes. This has led to a number of cases in which evidence from a property crime has led to the identification of more serious offenders through testing and the investigative efforts of the law enforcement community. The lab has produced numerous successful identification cases in recent years including a partial skeleton which had remained unidentified for over thirty three years. This year the STPCO DNA lab acquired and validated new and emerging DNA extraction technology in the form of an M-VAC DNA Collection System. This system utilizes advanced technology in collecting and concentrating DNA evidence onto a filter that is particularly valuable when processing small amounts of evidence from larger items that are typically difficult to process for touch/contact DNA.



Emergency Mental Health Services

The STPCO has a huge mental health presence in the community. Louisiana Coroners have the statutory responsibility to issue Orders for Protective Custody (OPC) in cases where someone is a danger to themselves, a danger to others, or is gravely disabled (including disability due to substance abuse issues) and are unwilling to seek voluntary treatment. This order, issued by the coroner, allows Law Enforcement Officers to take that individual into protective custody and deliver them to a medical facility for evaluation by a physician. If the physician finds cause, he or she will issue a Physicians Emergency Certificate for up to 72 hours of confinement and treatment. Psychiatrists, who are sworn Deputy Coroners, follow-up on these cases and may issue a Coroners Certificate for an additional 12 days of treatment if warranted. The STPCO employs a Mental Health Outreach Specialist who follows up on each case to help patients and families locate resources and wrap around services to help them with long term mental health issues. Dr. Preston has also partnered with the Florida Parishes Human Services Authority and the National Alliance for Mental Illness to sponsor a support group for families and friends of individuals who died as the result of substance abuse. The STPCO also partners with St. Tammany Outreach for the Prevention of Suicide (STOPS) who provides "Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide" program otherwise known as the LOSS Team, to help loved ones of those who die of suicide in the aftermath of the event.

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners

The STPCO employs two full time Registered Nurses who are certified as Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE). These nurses are specially trained and certified to conduct examinations, collect evidence, offer counseling, and serve as expert witnesses in court. STPCO SANE nurses provide services to 5 parishes as part of the state's regional plan taking the service to the survivor at one of twelve different hospitals in a five parish region. The nurses are currently certified to provide services on adults, adolescents and pediatrics responding to over 150 cases annually.

Chaplain Corps

In 2016 Dr. Preston recruited an all-volunteer Chaplain Corps to assist investigators in serving grieving family members by providing spiritual support in times of crisis. The corps is made of over 35 chaplains from different denominations in the community and is an all-volunteer service. They operate 24/7/365 and provide services to staff and first responders who are not immune to the tragedies they may encounter on a daily basis.



Life Safety Initiatives

Dr. Preston believes the Coroner has a moral, ethical, and professional responsibility to preserve life and prevent deaths. In 2020 he began STPCO's Life Safety Initiative whereby the office addresses preventable deaths through public education programs. The flagship program for the office is the national Cribs for Kids® Safe Sleep Initiative. In 2020 the office partnered with the Southwest Louisiana Safe Sleep Task Force and the Calcasieu Parish Coroner's Office to provide safe sleep education to new and expectant mothers and their families. At the end of the hour-long presentation each mother is provided with a Graco® portable crib which provides the infant with a safe sleep platform. To date the program has distributed nearly 200 cribs in the community and educated thousands of caregivers in the science of safe sleep. Funds to purchase cribs are provided through the generosity of businesses, organizations, and individuals in the community.

In Addition to the cribs program the office also offers education and public outreach on the following topics:

- Firearm storage safety in partnership with Project Childsafe™ including the distribution of gun locks.
- Fentanyl and Opioid Abuse Education including distribution of Naloxone (Narcan®) and Fentanyl detection strips as well as commercial medication disposal bags.
- Carbon Monoxide Safety

- Swimming Pool Safety
- Shaken Baby Syndrome/ Abusive Head Trauma
- STOP THE BLEED program.

Community Service

The Community Outreach Division participates in partnerships with countless civic organizations, agencies, and other non-profits in the community. Several agency employees volunteer as board members for outside non-governmental agencies. In the spring, the agency sponsors a " Special Needs EXPO" where over 40 vendors gather who provide services, resources, and quality of life enhancing activities to our special needs population. In the fall an "Veterans Expo" is hosted using the same model to honor the veterans in and around our community. Both events are enhanced with food, entertainment, and activities for the groups. The STPCO media room is open to any outside public or non-profit agency who needs it for meetings, workshops, or classes. The STPCO education department continues to host outside subject matter experts and classes to train with our partners in law enforcement and death investigations community. STPCO has a facility emotional support dog who interacts with victims of child abuse, special needs individuals and outside agencies. "Big Lou" is registered with Pet Partners and AAAIP with four handlers who operate as a team. They visit facilities and outreach events providing comfort and good will in the community.

Interagency Service

As St. Tammany Parish does not employ a Physician as a Public Health Officer, the Coroner serves in that role as the de-facto Parish medical expert. In support of that role, the STPCO provides public education, produces PSA's on health and safety related issues, and supports vaccine programs. Dr. Preston further serves as the Medical Director for multiple parish fire-based EMS services who provide first responder and advanced life support services in the community.

Veteran's Services

STPCO is committed to our veterans and grateful for their service to our country. In addition to the previously mentioned Veterans EXPO, STPCO partners with numerous veterans' organizations such as the Louisiana Department of Veteran's Affairs, American Legion, and VFW. All veteran's remains are covered with an American flag from the time they are taken into the coroner's care until their final disposition. Each family of a veteran is provided with special brochure outlining benefit veterans are entitled to at the time of death. The office has a special partnership with the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery every year laying wreaths at the cemetery as part of the Wreaths Across America program.

The St. Tammany Parish Coroner's Office strives every day to provide the best in forensic services by pursuing the most current in emerging science and technology possible. We are honored to provide these services to the dedicated men, women, and leaders of our law enforcement community at no cost and to provide value added service and be a valued part of the community we serve. Instead of just "Death" it is hoped that the community sees the Coroner's Office as always pursuing emerging Science, providing exceptional public Service and delivering both with a great deal of Compassion to those served.



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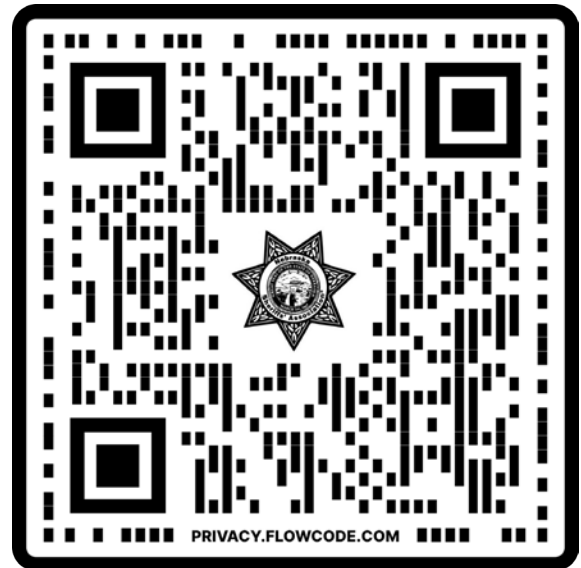
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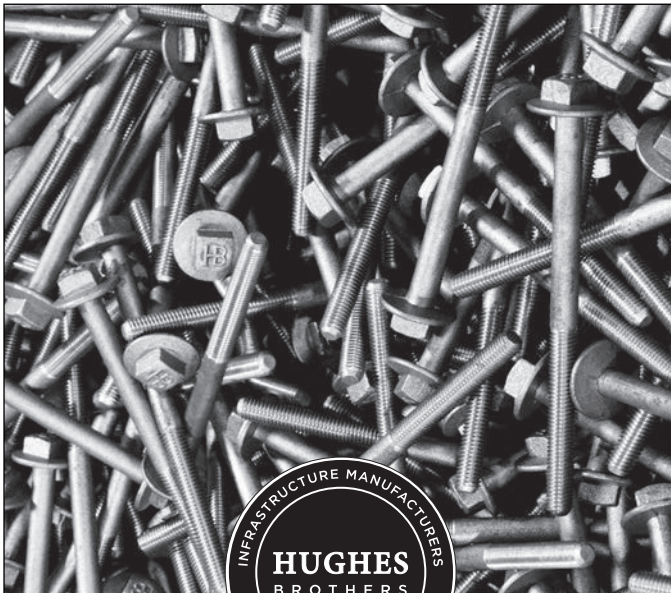


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