

Focus on Luzerne County

LUZERNE COUNTY

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In January 2007, the Luzerne County Sheriff's Office began providing security services to the Wyoming Area School District. The District encompasses five municipalities in Luzerne County and one Municipality in Wyoming County. All of the District's five educational facilities are contained within Luzerne County. Deputies are assigned to the schools on a rotational basis and the number of deputies on duty in the district differs based on the needs of the schools. Deputies' salaries are paid by the school district, not the county, when assigned to the detail. As of August 15, 2007, the Deputies will also be providing security for the Wyoming Valley West School District.

By the end of 2007, the Sheriff's Office will implement a new computer system, provided by Police Central (out of Atlanta, GA) that will allow better storage and retrieval of data entered in the Sheriff's Office. A great feature of the program is that it cross-checks data, in that if data is entered for a subject it checks all existing data in the system to see if the subject possesses a permit to carry, has active warrants, pending protection order, etc... The software and associated computer hardware were purchased through a \$250,000.00 federal COPS Technology Grant, secured by Sheriff Stankus. Additionally, the grant provided the Office with funding to outfit a mobile office / command post. With this, the deputies will be able to issue juvenile identification cards, and permits to carry on a traveling basis adding convenience to the taxpayer. The grant has been modified to allow for 6 laptop computers to be installed in cars for the deputies' use on the road. These laptops will be equipped with GPS and printers. Deputies will be able to access JNET, AOPC and office files while working in the field.

The Sheriff has continued to support Operation FIST (Fighting the Illegal Sale of Tobacco). In this program, minors (students from the area) are trained and teamed with Deputies to go into tobacco vendors and check for compliance in regard to proper identification of purchasers. If the vendors do not comply with the law both the clerk that sells the tobacco product, and the store owner are cited. This program has been running since 2001. Funding is provided through the numerous tobacco settlements.

On a weekly basis the Sheriff's Office has been conducting Warrant Sweeps, (Luzerne County has over 1000 active warrants). It is coordinated by the Office's Special Investigations Division and Warrants Division. The sweeps have been averaging approximately 3-5 wanted individuals per night. Additionally, with the information gathered from the weekly sweeps a large scale sweep is conducted monthly, with about

15 wanted persons apprehended per night. Just about every sweep conducted has resulted in some type of new charges being filed.

In addition to the Warrant Sweeps, monthly saturation patrols have been conducted in several municipalities within the county. The patrols are coordinated with the local police agencies, and have been met with positive feedback from both the public and local government. During the patrols deputies have been, conducting traffic stops, backing-up the local police, and made several new arrests.

Deputy Safety

Sheriff Stankus is working with Sprint/Nextel on GPS tracking systems for all Sheriff's vehicles. This will be a benefit to officer safety, as the system can be monitored centrally or in the field via laptop and broadband connection. If the vehicle does not move within a set time, a signal is sent and the deputy can be checked on.

A federal grant has been applied for and approved for the purchase of new bullet-proof vests for all Luzerne County Deputies. Within the next two years, the office will upgrade to vests that offer a higher ballistic protection in addition to a stab protection. Deputies will have the option to carry their vests in exterior tactical or concealed carriers.

Training

Firearms qualifications have been expanded to cover two days of live fire training. Over the course of the two days deputies not only qualify on their duty weapon and shotgun, but AR-15 rifles and night fire. There are also numerous practical and tactical drills that all deputies participate in. Because of this advanced training scores have increased throughout the office.

Eight deputies are scheduled for SCUBA Training to augment the all volunteer Sheriff's Dive Team.