



THE

SHERIFF'S POST

FOURTH QUARTER 2023



THERAPY K-9s MAKE PAWS-ITIVE IMPACT

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

BACKING THE BLUE WITH PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT
LICENSE PLATE READERS ALERT INVESTIGATORS
CELEBRATE OUR STAFF OF THE YEAR



For those wanting to help when a child or endangered adult goes missing, please register your mobile phone number with A Child is Missing.

The organization is able to do a reverse 911 of sorts,

notifying members within a certain area when a child, elder, or endangered adult has gone missing.

You can learn more and register here:

<https://AChildIsMissing.org>

EMERGENCY HEALTH PROFILE ASSOCIATION

<https://www.emergencyprofile.org/>



RAPIDSOS



Create a **FREE**
Emergency Health profile



In the event of an emergency,
CALL 911



RapidSOS automatically
SENDS your profile to 911

Help Us Help YOU with Rapid SOS! Our 911 Dispatch is using a new tool to help get the right help to you in your time of need. But it's only as good as the information YOU provide.

Sign up for **FREE** with Rapid SOS and when help is on the way, you know emergency crews have all the right information. Watch a video explaining the system, here - <https://bit.ly/3CnXniu>

Indian River County Sheriff's Office



Download our **FREE**
mobile app today!

Download our mobile app and keep up with everything the Sheriff's Office is up to. You'll get notifications when there's a traffic crash affecting your commute, along with notices about upcoming



SCAN to download!



events we'll be attending. From our app, you can submit tips, see where crimes have been reported, and access citizen resources such as Safe Sale Zones, Fingerprinting, Public Records and Victim Services.



HI EVERYONE,

Before we get too far into 2024, I want to take a moment and look back on 2023 and the great things we've done.

We expanded our K-9 Therapy team into more schools and even into our agency. We've added more technological tools to help our team better protect and serve the community. And we continue to support the mental health and wellness of our members, both sworn and civilian.

As we enter 2024, we will continue to push forward our mission to improve the overall well-being of our staff through Operation Be More Fit. We will offer more opportunities for our inmates to gain skills that will help them reintegrate into society upon their release. And, we cannot forget our annual Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches Barbecue, which returns to our campus this March with the grand opening and unveiling of River Farms, our newest initiative for inmates. I look forward to sharing with you more about this

event in the next Sheriff's Quarterly.

Until then, enjoy page 4 as you read more about how K-9s Gracie, Chip, Buddy, and Spirit are helping to promote empathy, kindness, and resiliency as part of our K-9 Therapy teams.

Read on page 6 how our agency launched what we call the STAR Team - Sheriff's Traumatic Advocate Response Team - which is designed to give all personnel an avenue for addressing challenges that prevent them from performing at their best.

If you've noticed the black poles with cameras on the sides of area roads and wondered what they are, then check out the article on page 10 about our license plate readers. They have been tremendously helpful in getting suspects off the streets and locating missing people.

While we have accomplished so much in 2023, we have more work to do in 2024. I look forward to sharing all we accomplish as 2024 progresses.

YOUR SHERIFF, ERIC FLOWERS



K-9 SPIRIT QUICKLY MELTS INTO A PUDDLE WHEN HIS CALMING SERVICES ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY NEEDED. HE IS KNOWN FOR LOUNGING UNDER DESKS AND TABLES DURING LONG MEETINGS, ELICITING SMILES FROM THOSE WHO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF HIM.

K-9 THERAPY

FURRY FRIENDS HELP EASE EMOTIONAL LOAD

There isn't much that is guaranteed to nearly always bring a smile to a person's face. There isn't much that puts people at ease when they're uncomfortable or elicits a giggle pretty much all of the time. But the Sheriff's Office has found something with four paws, a wagging tail, and a gentle demeanor that can do exactly that.

In 2021, the agency launched its K-9 Therapy Dog program with Gracie, a black Labrador-mix, partnered with School Resource Deputy David Partin at Imagine Schools of South Vero. The following year,



STUDENTS AT VERO BEACH ELEMENTARY HUG ON CHIP BETWEEN CLASSES.

the program expanded to include Chip and SRD Mark Birtel at Vero Beach Elementary School. And in the last half of 2023, the

program doubled in size, adding Spirit and Buddy who are assigned to Public Safety Dispatch Director Robyn Candarini and SRD Sgt. Ron Garrison, respectively.

"It's catching like wildfire," said Sgt. Jacob Curby who oversees both the traditional K-9 Unit and the therapy program. He'd like to see more dogs added to provide support in Special Investigations, Victim Assistance, and other units, Curby explained.

"Everyone wants to pet a dog," he said. "It's cool to be able to offer that."

Candarini has noticed an increase in the staff morale



SGT. RON GARRISON AND K-9 BUDDY HELP FOSTER STRONG RELATIONSHIPS AT SEBASTIAN RIVER HIGH.

when Spirit comes in.

“They perk up,” Candarini said of her fellow dispatchers when she and yellow Lab Spirit enter the call center. Spirit makes a lap around the room to give snuggles and get petted in return. “It allows you to breathe for a minute.”

Dispatchers quite often jump from one emergency call to another with little or no time in between to decompress. Spirit is there to help give them that little lift during shift.

“His name fits his personality,” Candarini said. She and Spirit are also part of the agency’s STAR Team (page 6) and are available to provide a supportive paw on scenes or within the agency campus as needed. “He’s a very good boy.”

Spirit, like the other therapy K-9s, are undergoing various levels of training to ensure they behave themselves while working. All have achieved level one – Good Citizen – so far.

Buddy, a black Lab, is the newest therapy K-9, having joined the squad in December.

“He’s doing well,” said Buddy’s human partner SRD Sgt. Garrison.

Having a canine at his side helps “open lines of communication” and initiate conversations that might not have otherwise happened, Garrison said.

“I love having him everywhere I go,” said Garrison.

Vero Beach Elementary SRD Birtel feels the



SRD DAVID PARTIN POSES WITH K-9 GRACIE AND HER PLUSHIE. THEY ARE ASSIGNED TO IMAGINE SCHOOLS OF SOUTH VERO.

same way about his four-legged partner, Chip – or “Sticks” as he’s been nicknamed for chomping any and all sticks he finds outside.

Chip joined the crew in September 2022 and quickly settled in. The moment it becomes obvious to the pup that no one is in dire need of affection, he lies down and calmly observes his surroundings.

“Nothing fazes him,” Birtel said.

Birtel said he’s seen a difference in some of the students after Chip came on board. He explained that certain students who weren’t keen on attending school are now eager to come because they’ll get to see Chip.

He knows Chip is the star – as do the other Therapy K-9 handlers. “I’m just the other guy at the end of the (leash),” Birtel said.



SRD MARK BIRTEL AND K-9 CHIP ARE ASSIGNED TO VERO BEACH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WHERE THEY BRING SMILES AND GIGGLES TO BOTH STUDENTS AND STAFF.

MEET THE K-9s

Gracie:

Handler - Dep. David Partin
Gotcha Day - March 8, 2021
Breed: Black Lab mix

Spirit:

Handler - Dispatcher Robyn Candarini
Gotcha Day - Sept. 6, 2023
Breed: Yellow Lab

Chip:

Handler - Dep. Mark Birtel
Gotcha Day - July 2022
Breed: Black Lab

Buddy:

Handler - Sgt. Ron Garrison
Gotcha Day - December 2023
Breed: Black Lab



STAR TEAM **RESPONSE TEAM PROVIDES SUPPORT**

Public Safety Dispatchers are the first to get the call that someone is in distress and needs help. Deputies are often the first on the scene of a tragedy. Detectives spend time with the victims working to piece together what happened.

But who helps the helpers? For so long, the answer was: Don't ask.

With the creation of the Sheriff's Traumatic Advocate Response team, the Indian River County Sheriff's Office is not only asking who helps the helpers, but also providing that help directly.

"We're evolving quickly," said Sgt. Cliff Labbe, who was tasked with forming a peer-to-peer support system.

Peer support had been a part of the work supervisors do. They would check on their staff in the wake of various calls for service. But it wasn't until a neighboring agency suffered the loss of two deputies to suicide, mere days apart, that the Sheriff's Office made a push to get a team together sooner rather than later.

Those who find themselves in need of help can reach out to the STAR Team and someone will be there to lend an ear, a helping hand, or whatever other support is needed. The team keeps all matters strictly confidential. Members don't share the privileged information they receive.

"The biggest hurdle is stigma," said Sgt. Kevin Jaworski, who assists Sgt. Labbe with the team.

Jaworski explained that law enforcement has long held onto the mental health stigma, that if someone needs and gets help, that the person is unfit for the job.

It's not the case, the sergeants agreed. To them, mental health should be treated just like physical health is – if something is hurt, do what you can to fix it and get treatment.

"I think we're slowly getting there," Sgt. Jaworski said of fighting the stigma.

The team is gaining a reputation around the agency for holding true to its charge of confidentiality and for providing the help needed



SERGEANTS CLIFF LABBE AND KEVIN JAWORSKI
COORDINATE THE AGENCY'S STAR TEAM.



in the moment. Help can be as simple as listening, giving advice, giving rides to funerals/medical procedures or anything else the person might need.

"If we can relieve a little stressor, it helps in a big way," Sgt. Jaworski said.

Currently, the team has nearly two dozen members, most of whom have received training for law enforcement peer support as well as resiliency. Those who haven't are expected to complete their training soon.

Some members have received advanced training to become instructors themselves, which will allow the agency to train STAR Team members in-house as well as travel to other agencies and provide training to other teams.

STAR members volunteer for the team and help when and where they can while performing their regularly assigned duties.

"It's definitely not everyone's calling," said Sgt. Labbe. "You want the right person in there."

The sergeants hope to be able to expand the training available to the team and are always looking for ways to provide more resources.

To that end, the Sheriff's Office partnered with Emerald Medical Group, based in Vero Beach, to facilitate the creation of the STAR team.

Emerald Medical has also provided medical care to the staff, recognizing that mental health challenges can impact physical health and vice versa.

Moving forward, the sergeants plan to bring onto the team recent retirees who can provide assistance to fellow retirees and those soon-to-retire.

Sgt. Jaworski noted that long-time employees can retire with years of built up emotional baggage. The agency wants to set up retirees for success both mentally and physically, so they can enjoy their much-deserved retirement.

And while they want to make sure retirees are provided the support

they need, new hires are welcomed into the agency and immediately introduced to the STAR Team and the resources it can provide.

"We want everyone educated on the topic," Sgt. Jaworski said. "They're the ones who notice their co-worker is struggling."

*"It's okay not to
be okay."
~Sgt. Cliff Labbe*

COPING METHODS

Exercise/Sport activities

Hobbies/Interests

Communicating with friends/family

Therapy/Counseling

Peer Support

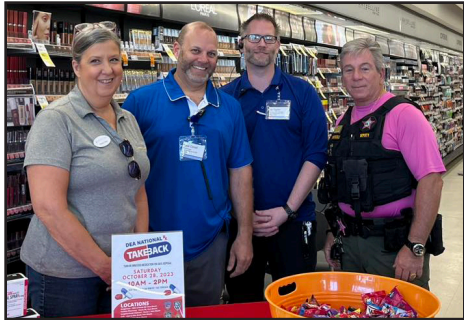
Meditation

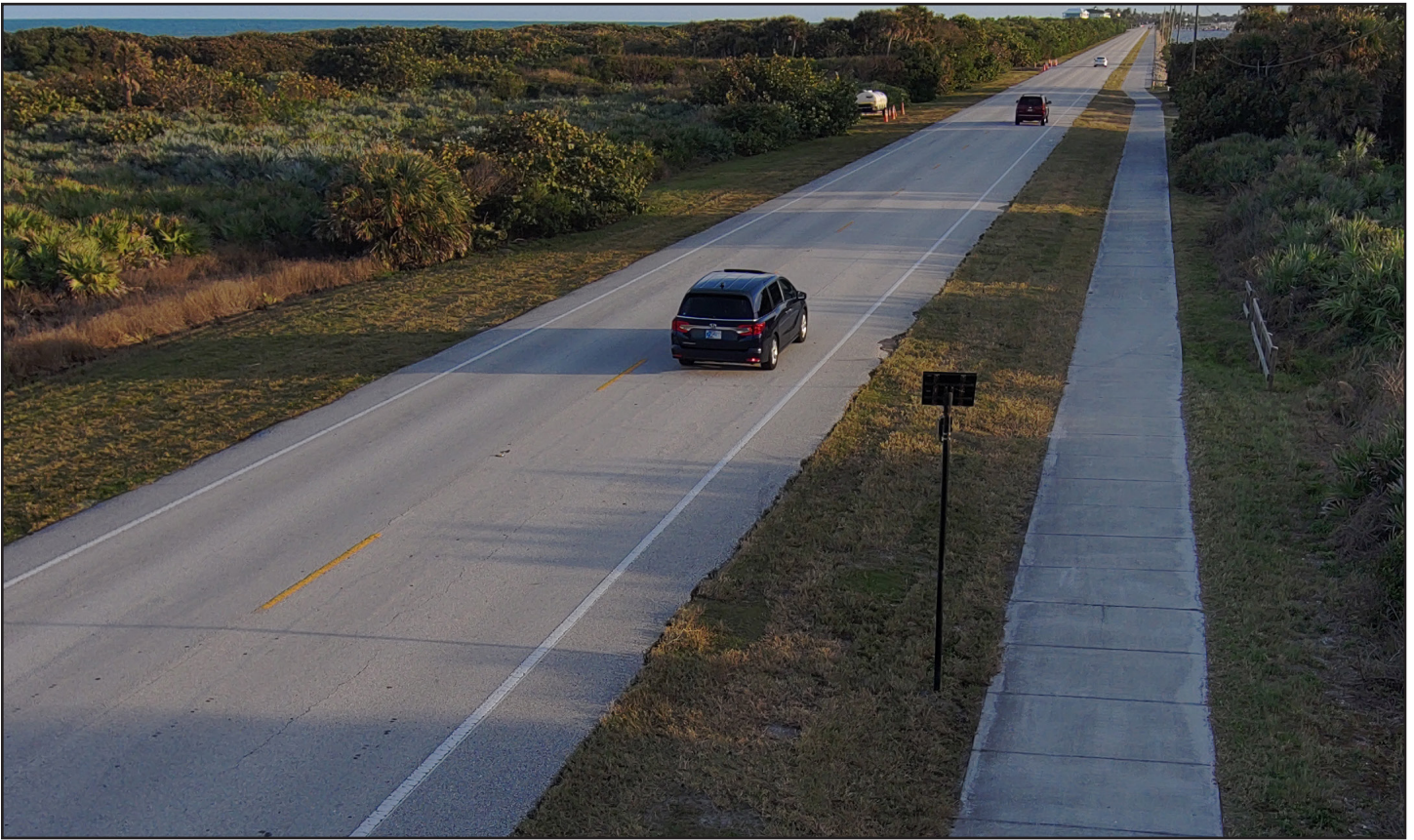
NEED HELP?

Call the National Suicide Prevention
Hotline at 988 or Text Home to 741-741

★ STAR SCENE







LICENSE PLATE READERS ARE STATIONED AROUND THE COUNTY READY TO ALERT AUTHORITIES OF ANY VEHICLES THAT HAVE BEEN ENTERED INTO THE SYSTEM.

LICENSE PLATE READERS HIGH TECH TOOLS FIND SUSPECTS

A crime is reported and information is collected. Perhaps it's a stolen vehicle. Maybe it's a carjacking or even a kidnapping. Details about the suspect or stolen vehicle are entered into a database connected to a network of cameras throughout the county that snap images of license plates of vehicles that drive by.

A camera catches sight of the entered license plate and an alert is sent to the Sheriff's Office Real Time Crime Center where an analyst is keeping watch for flagged plates. The analyst reviews the images, comparing the color, make, and model of the vehicle to the database's information, making sure that the plate is the one entered.

It's a match. The analyst alerts the road deputies that the vehicle has entered Indian River County and they respond.

Using this tool is how a pair of teens from Fort Pierce were caught in Vero after violently carjacking someone in St. Lucie County. It's how a suspected auto burglar was caught in the parking lot outside the Marshall's on State Road 60.

"They're very successful," said Real Time Crime Center Manager Felicia Stoll of the camera network. "They've proven their worth."

Since mid-2021 when the first wave of cameras was installed, the system has recorded nearly 900 flagged plates which has resulted in at least three



dozen arrests and the recovery of about as many stolen vehicles and missing people. The agency has more than 100 cameras connected to the system, including cameras stationed along roads in Sebastian and Indian River Shores, and even the Pointe West community. And still more cameras are expected to come online in the future.

The Sheriff's Office signed a five-year contract with Atlanta-based FLOCK Safety in 2021, which installs and maintains the cameras at an approximate cost of \$2,500 each.

While the agency collects license plate information on each vehicle that passes by a camera, analysts are only interested in those that have been flagged for a case and have the appropriate paperwork associated with it.

"It's a game-changer," said Sgt. David Rodriguez, who pushed for the license plate readers for more than a year before they were approved. "It's a tool you can't even put a price on."

Sgt. Rodriguez is now a member of the Sheriff's Office SWAT team but formerly worked on fugitive

warrants cases. The cameras help investigators establish patterns of those who are suspected of criminal activity, not just those who might be fleeing from another jurisdiction.

He recalled one case in which a suspect from California wanted on sexual battery charges was entered into the system via information from the

US Marshals. The suspect wasn't known to have ties to Florida, but the cameras flagged the vehicle.

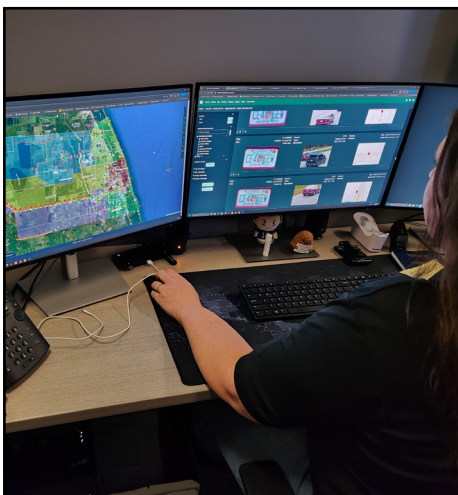
Investigators dug deeper and discovered the vehicle was routinely seen on a camera near Sam's Club. They figured the suspect probably worked there, and began surveilling the area for the man.

"He was really shocked," Sgt. Rodriguez said of the suspect, who had tried to

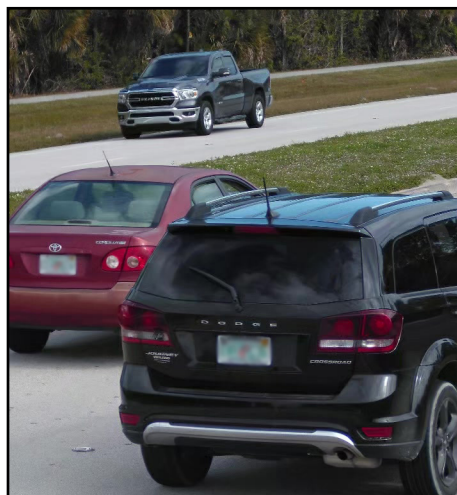
provide false identification when he was ultimately pulled over. "He didn't know I knew about him."

It's in situations like these that this tool, the FLOCK System, helps protect the community from threats they weren't even aware of. It has helped to bring crime fighting into the future.

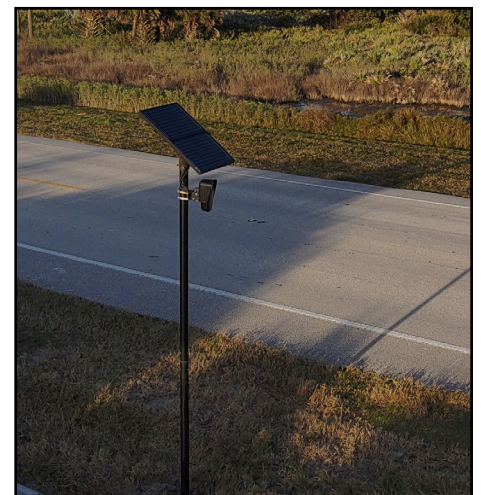
"It's a tool you
can't even put a
price on."
~Sgt. David
Rodriguez



ANALYSTS IN THE RTCC REVIEW HITS FROM THE LPR SYSTEM, CONFIRMING THE PLATE MATCHES THE PROVIDED INFORMATION.



LICENSE PLATE READERS SNAP IMAGES OF VEHICLES AS THEY PASS BY. (THESE PLATES HAVE BEEN BLURRED FOR PUBLICATION PURPOSES)



LICENSE PLATE READERS PROVIDE ANOTHER METHOD FOR KEEPING RESIDENTS SAFE.

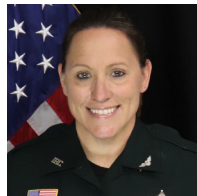
STARWORTHY AWARDS

Law Enforcement Officer of the Quarter



Detective Craig Thimmer - Third Quarter

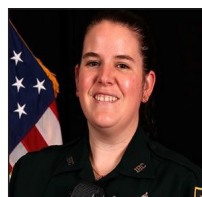
He investigates with veracious vigor until the case is solved and presented for prosecution. Thimmer has solved with arrests multiple shootings, a homicide, and two series of burglaries, as well as help locate multiple missing persons.



Deputy Terri Sweeting - Fourth Quarter

She identified a family in need during the Christmas holiday and used her own financial resources to help give them a memorable holiday. Her assistance to this family shows that she is dedicated to serving her community and exemplifies what the role of a Peace Officer should be.

Corrections Officer of the Quarter



Deputy Brittany Rudolph - Third Quarter

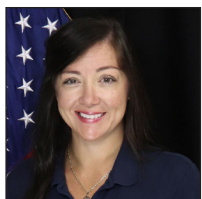
An inmate being released required a tracking device due to his posted bond on a charge of sexual battery on a minor. Information was missing and Rudolph worked past her shift to track down the data to ensure the child's safety while the subject remained out on bond.



Deputy Roderick Jones - Fourth Quarter

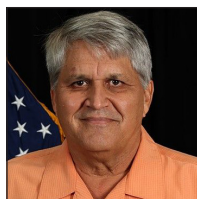
As a member of the STAR Team who has completed Crisis Intervention training, Dep. Jones has helped at least two fellow staff members to overcome personal challenges as well as utilize his training to help de-escalate situations involving inmates struggling with mental health challenges.

Civilian of the Quarter



Ashley Rose - Third Quarter

She consistently represents the agency well, handling every request for help with professionalism and poise. Ashley helped a man track down his towed vehicle in another county, identified a potential suspect vehicle stalking females, and debunked misinformation posted online about a child's disappearance.



Louie Trops - Fourth Quarter

Through the course of his work, Trops reviews inmates' information prior to them attending classes. Doing so, Trops discovered an inmate was wanted for attempted murder out of California. He alerted a detective, who confirmed the information. The inmate is now expected back in California.

Dispatcher of the Quarter



Kasey Bailey - Third Quarter

Bailey has helped get several new hires on board, providing tireless training and support. Doing this job on a normal day without training someone is mentally draining; training another person to do this job is mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausting; doing this with trainee after trainee is almost an impossible feat.

More Third Quarter Award Recipients

Exceptional Duty: Det. Craig Thimmer; **Honorable Service:** Cpl. Samuel Earman, Dep. Lakia Edwards, Cpl. James Ooley, Dispatcher Kasey Bailey, Dispatcher Elise Bruce; **Lifesaving:** Dep. Chad MacConnell, Dep. Don Robinson; **Community Service:** Dep. Chad Sharpeta; **Going the Extra Mile:** Dep. Patrick Ayers, Sgt. Paul Gautier, Amber Grier, Ashley Rose, Captain Milo Thornton; **Grand Cordon - Stolen Vehicle & Palm Bay Homicide Case:** Dep. Makenzie Baumann, Dep. Matthew Baumann, Dep. Joseph Bologna, Det. Christian Castano, Dep. Jeffrey Chouinard, Cpl. Brandon Dean, Cpl. Daniel Deighan, Dep. Alexander Holley, Dep. Jeffrey Lang, Sgt. Christopher Lester, Dep. Melinda Mangel, Dep. Quinn Martin, Dep. Kevin Peach, Dep. Joseph Pisani, Dep. Jason Pollacek, Lt. Christopher Reeve, Dep. Andrew Sebris, Cpl. Matthew Szott, Dep. Adrean Thomas; **Grand Cordon - Backgrounds and Onboarding:** Anne Cochran, Jason Epling, Amanda Hanson; **Citizen Award:** Brian Neu, owner Island Harbor Custom Builders. **Field Training Deputies:** Cpl. Eric Brashears, Cpl. Brandon Dean, Cpl. David Flores, Cpl. Ryan Hartmann, Cpl. Dwayne Hoilett; **S.W.A.T:** Det. Christian Castano, Deputy Wolf Shaw; **Educational Achievement:** Brandi Ooley, Associate Degree.

More Fourth Quarter Award Recipients

Community Service: Deputy Terri Sweeting; **Going the Extra Mile:** Deputy Michael Fletcher, Deputy Roderick Jones, Derek Knudson, Deputy Mindy Mangel, Dawn Ryan, Sergeant Aaron Scranton, Louie Trops, and Deputy Andrew Ward; **Citizen Award:** Nicole Keppel; **Educational Achievement:** Deputy Landon Richards - Associate of Science Degree in Emergency Administration.

The rank is what the agency member had at the time of nomination.

STARWORTHY AWARDS

2023 Members of the Year

Every year, a committee of agency members representing numerous departments take nominations for employees of the various quarters. They pour over the documents and, ultimately, vote on who will receive the honors.

At the end of the year, the committee convenes one more time to choose the overall winners in each of the four main categories: Law Enforcement, Corrections, Civilian, and Dispatch.

To these, we say congratulations and offer them tremendous appreciation for their work on behalf of the agency and the community.

Law Enforcement Officer of the Year



Undercover Detective - Second Quarter

A detective worked several months deep undercover on a special operation, which led to the arrests of several people and numerous pounds of drugs, several handguns, and thousands of dollars in cash.

Corrections Officer of the Year



Deputy Brittany Rudolph - Third Quarter

An inmate being released required a tracking device due to his posted bond on a charge of sexual battery on a minor. Information was missing and Rudolph worked past her shift to track down the data to ensure the child's safety while the subject remained out on bond.

Civilian of the Year



Oscar Ruan - First Quarter

While waiting more than two months to transfer to his new position, Ruan completed 10 online courses related to the new post. Despite the wait, his attitude and desire to make the switch to Offender Tracking Specialist never wavered.

Dispatcher of the Year



Marissa Phillips - Second Quarter

Phillips calmly and clearly handled two high-stress law enforcement incidents back-to-back. One was a felony traffic stop that included subjects at gunpoint. The other was a VBPD assist for a reckless fleeing vehicle involving deployment of stop sticks.

STARWORTHY ANNIVERSARIES

The Indian River County Sheriff's Office congratulates its employees who have served this agency with honor and dignity for at least 10 years.

An organization benefits from the longevity, stability and wealth of knowledge and skill

accumulated by its employees.

These are the Indian River County Sheriff's Office longest serving employees since the start of the fiscal year.

Thank you for your continued service.



Deborah White, 36



Carl "Mike" Rozier, 36



Lumaine "Lu" Owens, 39



Elise Bruce, 34



Kyle King, 34



Laura Turner, 31



Linda Nolan



Sheriff Eric Flowers



Roderick Smith



Luis Avila

STARWORTHY RETIREMENTS

Carl "Mike" Rozier

Oct. 1, 1987 - Oct. 31, 2023
Length of Service: 36 years



Rozier was promoted from mechanic to Fleet Supervisor in 2005 and became Fleet Services Manager in 2020. He received many commendations and was regarded as a skilled and knowledgeable professional.

Deputy Jerry Montanaro

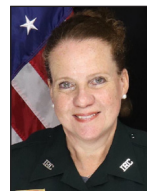
Jan. 16, 1995 - Oct. 27, 2023
Length of Service: 28 years



Deputy Montanaro spent nearly 3 decades with the agency, first as a Corrections Deputy and later as Courthouse Security. He received the Tactical Award and was regarded as a dedicated employee.

Deputy Sabrina Harding

Oct. 4, 2004 - Dec. 22, 2023
Length of Service: 19 years



Deputy Sabrina Harding served in Corrections and was a field training officer upon her retirement. She received the Educational Achievement and Instructor awards during her time at the agency.

NOW HIRING

GOT WHAT IT TAKES?

Come join our team of amazing professionals. We are hiring numerous civilian positions within both the 9-1-1 dispatch center and the county jail, among other divisions and departments.

Dispatch hires can expect a starting salary of \$40,000 - \$53,000 based on experience. Civilian Corrections Assistants can expect to start at \$34,680.

Both posts are great entry points into a lifelong law enforcement related career. Want to be a first responder without having to go out in the field? Consider 9-1-1 dispatch. Interested in working in the jail but not up close with the inmates? Then apply for the Civilian Corrections Assistant position.

Interested applicants may apply online at www.ircsheriff.org. For additional information, applicants may call (772) 978-6355.

Telecommunicator

This position is responsible for screening, entering and relaying/routing calls for service for emergencies and non-emergencies in a 911 dispatch center, including dispatching of Fire-EMS and Police Calls for service.

Applicants for this position must have excellent computer skills, capable of working under stress, and be able to react quickly and calmly and make sound decisions in emergency situations.

Starting salary is based on recent, verifiable experience - between \$40,000 and \$53,000.

Civilian Corrections Assistant

The position of Civilian Corrections Assistant performs a variety of duties, including the following assignments: Security and maintenance of Control Rooms, Booking area and Visitation Center. A competitive starting salary of \$34,680 per year.

Other Positions Available

- Law Enforcement Deputy - starting \$50,618
- Corrections Deputy - starting \$50,618
- Network Manager - starting \$70,686
- Victim Advocate - starting \$41,820



Support our K-9 Unit - take one home today!

www.IRCSheriff.org

Email Mindy Mangel - mmangel@ircsheriff.org





**Indian River County Sheriff's Office
Eric Flowers, Sheriff**

4055 41st Ave.,
Vero Beach, FL 32960

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