The Orange County Sheriff's Office Reserve Unit: A strong, cohesive volunteer unit able to handle multiple functions.

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The Orange County Sheriff's Office officially was formed in 1845, but it was not until 1964 that the agency began a reserve deputy program under the leadership of then-Sheriff Dave Starr, with an allotted manpower of 10 reserve deputies to supplement his 25 full-time deputies. Today, the Orange County Sheriff's Office has over 2,000 paid employees, of which over 1,400 are sworn law enforcement officers, making OCSO one of the largest sheriff's offices in the nation and particularly in the southeast United States. The agency is responsible for all law enforcement and criminal investigations in the unincorporated areas of Orange County. The agency's reserve unit takes pride in being able to work cohesively with the full-time members of the agency, and independently on special details, functions, and enforcement.

DEPUTY AND COURT OFFICER
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Developing a World-Class Reserve Program

When Sheriff Starr established the Reserve Unit in 1964, legal requirements in Florida for acting as a reserve or auxiliary officer were vague, and many reserve deputies at that time began their law enforcement positions with little or no training. Deputies classified as "reserve" or "auxiliary" were required to purchase their own weapons, uniforms, and duty gear.

As with most agencies nation-wide, requirements and training have changed since then. Today, agency volunteers must attend academy training and take a state-administered examination to be eligible as a reserve deputy. The OCSO Reserve Unit has two classifications of volunteers, Reserve I and Reserve II. Reserve I volunteers have completed a state auxiliary academy (over 290 hours), while Reserve II volunteers have completed full state basic law enforcement training academy (over 790 hours).

Initially, Orange County auxiliary deputies wore a six-pointed sheriff's star, while fully-certified reserve officers wore a traditional five-pointed sheriff's star. Reserve and auxiliary deputies also had slightly different uniforms than their full-time counterparts. However, in the early 1990s, the unit developed a training program that required similar training for reserves deputies as for full-time deputies within the agency and across the state. Now, the uniforms of all reserves are consistent with the uniforms of full-time deputies within the agency. The agency also provides the same equipment to volunteer deputies that are provided to full-time deputies, including radios, handguns and shotguns, duty gear, and agency laptops. The unit also has ten marked cars that are used solely for reserve unit functions, special enforcement details, patrol, and other approved functions.

Unit Organization and Training

The reserve unit organizational structure closely mirrors the chain of command at the Orange County Sheriff's Office, in both the amount of responsibility and authority for each rank. The Reserve Unit is led by a Bureau Chief, two Division Chiefs (Operations and Administration), and four Captains. The unit also has a training sergeant, platoon and staff lieutenants, and squad sergeants and corporals with approximately 7-10 deputies assigned to each squad.

Corporals and sergeants are assigned duties related to administering the program, including collection of volunteer time sheets and conducting annual evaluations, but are also able to lead special details, vice or decoy operations, or squad details. Lieutenants are given responsibility related to a platoon (three squads) or to special projects. Captains are responsible to each Division Chief for administering the platoons, training, and special projects. The Reserve Unit Bureau Chief works with the designated full-time agency liaison assigned to the Volunteer Services Division of the Sheriff's Office.

Reserve Deputies must complete the same physical, psychological, background, medical, and interview requirements as full-time recruits. Applicants for Reserve II status must meet the same educational/experience requirements as applicants for full-time positions. Reserve unit personnel, in conjunction with the OCSO Human Resources Division, coordinate an agency hire board and provide an orientation for all new recruits to the unit. Each new reserve deputy is assigned to an experienced reserve as a mentor to guide them through the training phase. All reserve deputies, whether classified as Reserve I or II, must complete the same rigorous field training program as full-time deputies. This consists of a six week orientation program, followed by the equivalent of 14 weeks in the Field Training and Evaluation Program under the supervision of a Field Training Officer. This training can be, and usually is, completed on a part-time basis. All reserves who have not completed field training must work under the supervision of both the reserve chain of command and the OCSO full-time Training Coordinator.

Agency and Community Involvement

From the Sheriff on down, full-time and civilian members of the agency cannot say enough positive things about the Reserve Unit. This confidence in the training and dedication of the reserve deputies has been won by years of dependable service, including backing up and working in patrol cars with full-time deputies. Special initiatives by the reserve unit have also added to the positive reputation of the unit. During 1998 the Reserve Unit initiated a new operation titled "Squad Relief," where volunteer reserves relieve a patrol squad for an entire shift allowing the full-time squads to either focus their energies on proactive patrol, high incident areas, or squad-level training. The Reserve Unit has also implemented the Fast Action Support Team (F.A.S.T.) program, which can mobilize at least one squad of reserve deputies within one hour of a call for assistance. This additional resource is particularly important to the Sheriff's Office in a major tourist destination like Orange County, Florida. The unit has provided supplemental road patrol during SWAT hostage negotiation callouts, coordinated and participated in multi-jurisdictional law enforcement operations, and has provided security for World Cup Soccer and for crowd-intensive sporting events and activities.

One of the most significant accomplishments of the OCSO Reserve Unit is the solid reputation achieved in coordinating and staffing annual special events. OCSO reserves are continually recognized for their work with the March of Dimes, Bacchus, Children's Miracle Network, Hispanic Celebration, Walk America, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Give Kids the World, Diabetes Walk, local parades and festivals, local Public Broadcasting System events, and local church and community festivals. The community relies on the OCSO reserve unit for these events, and requests for assistance are constantly under consideration. In its history, the OCSO reserve unit has







coordinated hundreds of events like this, where millions and millions of dollars have been raised for charitable functions, with the security and traffic handled entirely or largely by the reserve unit.

OCSO Reserves in a Larger Context

As part of a major county sheriff's office, the OCSO reserve unit is very much involved with the law enforcement community. The reserve unit has been part of this outreach through mutual-aid requests with agencies within the county, its involvement with relief efforts in southwest Florida after the devastation of Hurricane Andrew, Hurricanes Charlie, Francis and Jeanne in central Florida, and other unusual events. When unable to respond to an emergency elsewhere in the state or country, the unit has offered assistance in different ways. In 2005, the unit raised money for OCSO's "adopted" Waveland (Mississippi) Police Department to replace police uniforms lost in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

The reserve unit was also proud to host the International Reserve Police Conference held by the Reserve Police Officers Association in Orlando in 2009. This international outreach has extended to the Caribbean, where, after its leadership attended the previous year's conference in St. Croix, the OCSO Reserve Unit agreed to help the Virgin Islands Police Depart revamp training for their Auxiliary Police program. The training included an integration plan for auxiliaries into the emergency management structure there, in view of OCSO experience during the Florida hurricanes. OCSO reserves have also led training in Saint Lucia, West Indies, for the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force, and their auxiliaries, in developing strategies and police training programs prior to Cricket World Cup. OCSO reserve leadership also presented at the 2010 Specials Conference in London, England about reserve policing in the United States.

The OCSO Reserve Unit Today

There are currently over 90 men and women who are proud to be "citizen police officers" in Orange County, and who work entirely as volunteers for the agency and the community. During 2009 alone, these volunteers participated in: enforcement related details, agency advanced/continuing education training (such as Active Shooter, NCIC/FCIC, firearms, Law Enforcement Vehicle Operations, and Hazardous Materials training classes); community charitable-event special details; and in specialized functions, such as recruiting, mounted patrol, marine patrol, motors unit, and others. Each reserve deputy in the Reserve Unit has a unique background and a distinctive reason for being a part of the team. OCSO Reserves hold full-time careers as ministers, business owners, educators, realtors, pilots, lawyers, mechanics, and fire-fighters, among



many others. Reserves are encouraged to utilize their work-experience as deputy sheriffs, and many take the initiative to seek advanced training or assignments related to these experiences or personal interests.

Sworn reserves with the Orange County Sheriff's Office contribute approximately 25,000 man hours each year to help keep the county safe and support the Sheriff's Office outreach efforts to the community. OCSO reserves participate in road, marine, mounted & motor patrols and DUI roadblocks, and through their own civilian careers bring valuable outside skills to the Sheriff's Office. The unit enjoys the strong support of Sheriff Jerry Demings, himself a former reserve deputy, and represents a particularly valuable asset in these times of challenging fiscal constraints. The unit is widely recognized and appreciated as a reliable and effective part of the Sheriff's Office by its full time officers and civilians. The Orange County Sheriff's Office Reserve Unit is a tremendous success story, by what has been accomplished, the reputation established, and the professionalism exhibited on a daily basis. ✪

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