

SHERIFF & DEPUTY

A Resource for Sheriffs, Deputies, and Other Public Safety Professionals
VOLUME 69 | ISSUE 1

BUILDING

PUBLIC TRUST

Sheriffs focus on the need for shared responsibility

SHERIFFS.ORG



ALSO INSIDE:

Gathering Intelligence
Behind Bars pg28

Responding to a DOJ
Civil Rights Pattern and Practice
Investigation pg36

The State of Law Enforcement
Training Academies pg44

No Barriers to Leadership ... pg48

Free Speech or
Fighting Words? pg52



NO BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP

Wheelchair is “only a perception” for New York sheriff

Sheriff Randy Bower

I am Randy Bower, and I currently serve as sheriff of Orleans County, New York, a position I am extremely proud and honored to hold.

On Oct. 10, 1983, at age 18, I was involved in a serious automobile accident that left me paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheelchair. My employment with the Orleans County Sheriff's Office began in November 1986, when I was hired to perform the duties of public safety dispatcher. In my 29 years as a dispatcher, I heard the cries and crises of the people of Orleans County as they were unfolding in real time. I was the conduit for getting emergency and law enforcement services where they were needed.

Besides working as dispatcher, I also staffed the control room in the county jail for 12 of those years. In addition to these duties, I was a member of the off-road patrol from 1992 to 1998; I rode all-terrain vehicles to help locate missing persons, stolen property, and respond to various other situations.

CAMPAIGNED FOCUSED ON IMPROVED SERVICE

After a lot of thought and consideration into my decision to run for sheriff, I had a good amount of law enforcement experience, I was active in the community (serving as a high school varsity girls basketball coach, and chairing an annual bocce ball tournament for my church), and I owned and operated an apparel printing business. My desire to run was fueled by the skills, knowledge, and leadership I gained from my experiences, along with the flood of support I received from all divisions of the sheriff's office and my goal to give the Office of the Sheriff back to the people.

The primary and general elections were two of the most competitive and grueling local elections in recent history. While my “disability” never really became an issue during my campaign, some questioned whether it would be a huge expense for the county taxpayers to outfit a special vehicle for me. I promptly alleviated the concern by explaining how the Chrysler Mobility Program offered assistance by paying for the hand controls in my vehicle.

While running as the people's sheriff, I focused on improved service, and I wanted to be the best advocate for Orleans County. My objective was to bring a team approach to the Office of the Sheriff, where we work for the citizens of Orleans County, and not for the State of New York or any special interests. Although I secured the endorsement of the Conservative Party (a political party in New York State), I narrowly lost the endorsement of the Republican Committee.

ACCOMPLISHING CAMPAIGN GOALS

With a large group of supporters, I was able to force and win a Republican primary election and later, the general election. The people were ready for a change, and while it was a great feeling to garner the support of the voters, it rapidly set in that now we had to get to work for the people of Orleans County and accomplish the goals we set forth during my campaign.

After the election, my undersheriff and I met with many law enforcement leaders around the county and region to exchange ideas and identify each of our goals, while also working to establish



a collaborative effort moving forward. We also attended a statewide conference for sheriffs in the state capital, where we formed many relationships with law enforcement professionals who were eager to offer their assistance and encouragement. It wasn't long before we started checking off one campaign objective after another.

In our corrections division, we started the Sheriff's Transition Addiction Management Program (STAMP), an effort to lower recidivism rates by providing rehabilitation to inmates with drug addictions. The program uses the drug Vivitrol, which, hand in hand with drug and mental health counseling, helps prevent inmates from relapsing into alcohol- or opiate-dependent behaviors post-release. We also partnered with the neighboring Erie County Sheriff's Office to utilize its K-9 unit to perform regular searches of the jail to promote safety and act as a deterrent to those individuals thinking about introducing contraband to the facility.

We have been able to increase community policing by improving our visibility and availability in our towns, villages, and our rural school districts. We have started outreach programs, such as Lunch with a Deputy Sheriff, in our schools to promote and foster a better relationship with our youths.

Our marine division has been further developed and now actively patrols more than 24 miles of Lake Ontario shoreline, along with other bodies of water, including the Erie Canal and Lake Alice. In the communications division, we have been successful in getting police agencies to fully participate in the county dispatch system. We also now have dedicated monitors to view who is responding via the county's fire response system. Additionally, we are working to gain access to the video links in all of our school districts, in the event a police or emergency response is needed.

The animal control division has long been grossly understaffed for the number of calls it typically experiences. Adding to that workload, the division recently assumed animal control duties for one local village. Fortunately, we have been able to add staff to better assist with the high call volume. We are also leading an effort to obtain more funding from all of the towns in our county to further advance our animal control services.

EMBRACING THE PROCESS

The best piece of advice I received along this journey was to surround myself with high-quality, first-class people, and I have. I am proud to lead and organize dedicated staff in each and every division of the sheriff's office. Without their diligence and cooperation, we would not have experienced the accomplishments we have in my first year.

From the first day of my campaign through to the general election, I absolutely embraced the entire process. Being out in the community allowed me to meet many great residents, community leaders, and business owners, with whom I formed genuine relationships that I continue to maintain.

In closing, I am blessed to live a great life with my wife of 25 years, Robin; my 24-year-old daughter, Jessica; my 21-year-old son, Jacob; and family, friends, and coworkers. I continue to be inspired, motivated, and encouraged by the people of Orleans County, and I thoroughly enjoy serving them every day.

I have never let my disability stop me from doing anything I want to do professionally or personally, even as I carry on being an avid sportsman. My wheelchair is only a perception, and those who get to know me are quick to forget that I am even in a wheelchair. I am just one of many of a determined disabled community; we simply adjust and adapt to achieve our objectives. ★