

Times of Wayne County

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Avoiding mistrust towards law enforcement in Wayne County

By JORDAN BURNETT

Wayne County may not have the problems of larger municipalities when it comes to police/citizen encounters. It is through community outreach, accessibility, that Wayne County Sheriff Barry Virts hopes to avoid any such mistrust towards law enforcement.

From Ferguson to Baltimore and Staten Island to Cleveland - for more than a year now, national headlines have been dominated by incidents where police officers have been filmed in incidents where minorities have died, as well as the protest movements that grew from such incidents.

Those, along with the recent slayings of random police officers in Baton Rouge and Dallas, have created an obvious divide around the country between police officers and the communities they police, particularly in impoverished areas.

Despite what is happening on a national level, Sheriff Barry Virts is confident that his office has created a strong enough rapport with the community to where those same tensions don't exist in Wayne County.

In an interview with the *Times of*



Wayne County Sheriff Barry Virts talks about avoiding public mistrust

Wayne County on Thursday, Virts repeatedly mentioned that he has strongly emphasized community outreach through the Sheriff's Office to help citizens of the county better understand the office's mission.

I, along with the police chiefs, work very hard at being accessible to our communities, Virts said. Accessible to people who want to talk to us, and accessible to people who want to complain about us.

People can literally go talk to the

boss, file their grievance or say thank you. It's not like you have all of these layers of government or command structure to get through to get to the head guy.

Virts explained that he has a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to proven violations of his employees not treating all individuals with dignity, and he said that he has suspended officers for that in the past.

While he did acknowledge that everybody should listen fully to an officer's command during any sort of arrest or traffic stop, he also said that some departments have created an environment where officers feel that they can get away with not following the rules.

It starts from the top, down. In a leadership role, if there are things going on that are outside of the rules and regulations, and you ignore it or you permit it, you promote it, and it becomes worse, Virts said.

I think that is what's happening in some of these jurisdictions - I'm not going to say that everybody is, but there are some officers who probably haven't been held accountable for their actions, he continued. But again, we can't base what is happening on a 30-second clip of what we see because we don't know what happened before or after.

Violent crime, in general, is uncommon in Wayne County, but violence towards police officers is almost nonexistent. Virts can only recall one time, in Walworth during the early 80s, when an investigator and a few deputies were involved in the shooting death of a suspect.

The only on-duty death occurred in the early 70s, when an officer was killed in an automobile accident.

According to Virts, deputies undergo annual training in all aspects of the job, including interpersonal communication training where they are instructed on how to de-escalate situations.

While he's confident that there is a strong enough connection between the Sheriff's Office and the community to avoid distrust and violence towards law enforcement in Wayne County, Virts said that the job, which he called inherently dangerous, is becoming more dangerous each year.

I never thought that I would actually see police officers being stalked, like in Louisiana and Dallas, just because they wear a uniform and do a job, Virts said. Every night, I ask the Lord, Please make sure my deputies do their job with integrity, that they're safe, and they treat everybody with dignity.

I constantly worry about everybody's safety, I constantly worry about that. The last thing I want to do is go knock on the door of the spouse of a member here and say, Look, we've had a bad outcome.



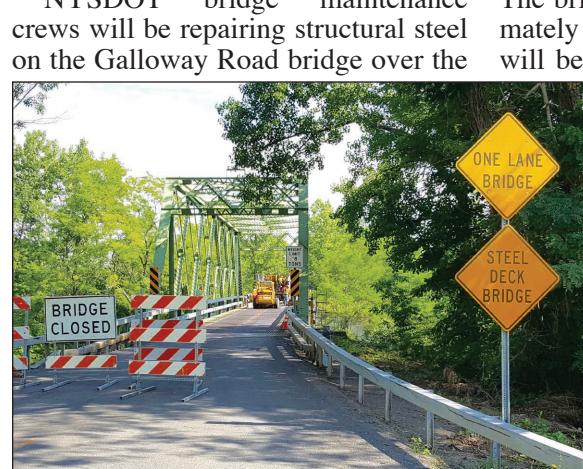
Ryan J. Laws

was found to be in possession of heroin and other controlled substances when taken into custody. He faces those charges in Ontario County. Laws was arraigned in the Town of Marion Court and sent to the Wayne County Jail on No Bail. Laws, a predicate felon who has served prison time, is scheduled to appear in Marion Court.

According to police sources, Laws

Galloway Road Bridge to close for repairs

NYSDOT bridge maintenance crews will be repairing structural steel on the Galloway Road bridge over the



View from Rt. 31 of the NYS DOT Bridge crew already starting to make their repairs on Friday morning.

Erie Canal in the town of Palmyra, just east of the village, in Wayne County beginning Friday, July 29 at 7 a.m.

The bridge will be closed for approximately four weeks. Message boards will be placed on Route 31 to inform motorists of the closure.

Galloway Road connects Route 31 on the south side of the Erie Canal to Hogback Hill Road on the north side of the Erie Canal.

A detour will not be posted. Compounding travel in this portion of Palmyra, the Wayne County Highway Department is also doing bridge repairs to Hogback Hill Road bridge over Ganargua Creek (between Galloway and N.Creek Road).

Route 21 is open to the west and Port Gibson Road is open to the east. If you have any questions, please contact Assistant Bridge Maintenance Engineer, Kevin Cannan, at 585-586-3138.

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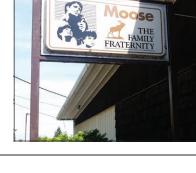


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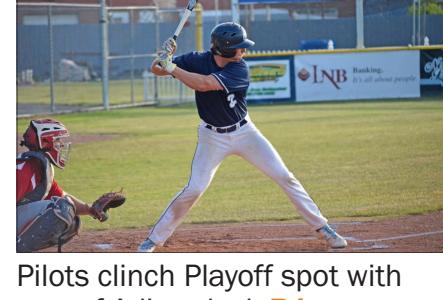
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Paul Stasko, DPM

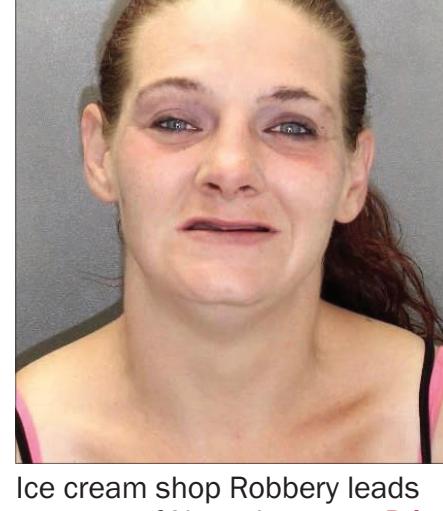
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