Greetings,

I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving and a Merry Christmas and were able to enjoy some time with family and friends.

As I reflect on the many blessings that God has given me, I am certainly thankful for the privilege and honor to serve as your Sheriff. As we start the new year, take some time to reflect on what you are thankful for.

Take care, stay safe, and Happy New Year!!

Sheriff Ed


Vice & Narcotics  By: Carol Scheidegger

There are very few people that haven’t been affected in some way by the current opioid epidemic. Like most Law Enforcement Agencies across America, New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office is in a daily battle to fight this problem. Overdose deaths are increasing at an alarming rate and the use of the reversal medication, naloxone, is at an all time high. The result of this trend is not only the high emotional cost of losing loved ones, but also the the loss to society of productive citizens, and the high cost of the war to fight it. In a recent discussion, New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office Vice and Narcotics Division Commander, Captain JA Hart stated, “A large percentage of people who abuse prescription drugs get them from the medicine cabinets of family and friends.” Captain Hart also said “having a drug drop box available to our citizens year around provides a better way for them to safely dispose of their unused prescriptions and keep them out of the wrong hands”.

Tips:
- When disposing of medication bottles remember to remove all identifying information before throwing it away.
- Always store medication away from and out of reach of children and pets.

As part of the effort to keep drugs out of the hands of abusers, the NHC Sheriff’s Office maintains drop off boxes. These boxes are monitored and contents are collected routinely by Lt. Lauren White, Crime Scene Investigation. Here are her answers (in red) to my questions about this process.

Where are the drop off points located? Are the boxes locked or protected?

There are two drop boxes, one in the lobby of the Sheriff’s Office, near the front desk and one in the Historic Courthouse, outside the civil office. They are locked and only CSI has access to the boxes, however, they are strategically placed so that Sheriff’s Office personnel have view of the boxes during operational hours.

How often do you check the boxes or pick up contents?

We routinely check the boxes on a weekly basis but often receive calls from the Front Desk or Civil that there was a large drop off in the box and it needs to be emptied. This happens routinely, so we typically end up emptying the boxes two to three times a week.

What data/records do you keep on contents that are picked up?

We complete property sheets each time we empty the boxes and maintain those records at CSI. In addition, we typically dispose of the contents of the boxes semi-annually through SBI Law Enforcement Take Back Events, where the State will collect medications from law enforcement agencies for disposal. When we make a drop off to the SBI, we must report the weight being disposed of by our agency. Last drop off in March we disposed of just over 900 pounds of medication. The drop off on November 1, 2017 we disposed of just under 500 pounds.

Do you have yearly statistics that you can share with me?

The SBI just started requiring drop off weights this year. In 2017, over 1,400 pounds of unwanted medications were disposed of.

Is there anything you would like to add?

One issue we are seeing is that health professionals seem to be utilizing the boxes from time to time, disposing of large quantities of expired samples or medications. That is not the purpose of the boxes, the boxes are in place for citizens wishing to properly dispose of unwanted medications and not professionals attempting to avoid costly disposal contracts for their expired medications. The misuse of the boxes causes them to be overfilled and out of use when the public needs that service. If professionals are seen attempting to dispose of large quantities of medications, we have asked the Sheriff’s Office personnel working in the area of the boxes to stop them and remind them that that is not what the box is there for and they need to have a licensed disposal company to dispose of their companies expired medications.
Community1 Stopping the Revolving Door

By Carol Scheidegger

New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office has a vested interest in turning life derailments and hard luck stories into success stories. The Community1 program which started up about 10 months ago is doing just that. I interviewed Detention Officer Anthony Johnson and Deputy Dennis Kudro and was very impressed with this program that aims to keep inmates (male and female) from returning to the system.

In the past, inmates served their time and then were released into the same situation they came from...no means of income, no education, perhaps no housing, addiction problems...and the list goes on. Community1 aims to change that by presenting qualified inmates (no violent crimes, willingness to meet the requirements of the program) with the opportunity to better their lives. Qualified inmates are asked, “What would keep you from coming back here?” For example, if the answer is, I can’t get a job because I don’t have a GED, then NHCSO arranges for them to enter a GED program that gives them credit/certification equivalent to a high school diploma. They also work to help find inmates jobs, transportation, and adequate housing by reaching out to businesses and non-profit organizations within the community. Inmates with addiction problems and mental illnesses are directed to appropriate programs that specifically deal with those issues. A DMV representative can help inmates obtain proper identification. At the current time, there are over 50 civil and government organizations, along with businesses that are sympathetic to the goals of Community1 and are working with NHCSO to change lives.

What is the incentive for Community1? One obvious answer is to help people have better lives, become good role models, and productive citizens. While this is a good and lofty goal and we all hope for positive outcomes, there is also a significant monetary gain when inmates become contributing citizens. As an example, take the case of one inmate we will call Mr. John Doe. He has been processed into the Detention facility 19 times, 14 of which have occurred since 2014. His average length of stay is 4 months. He applied for Community1 during his last stay. In one day Community1 was able to arrange services for Mr. Doe to include housing, social security and medical benefits. The average cost to house an inmate is about $84 per day, which comes to roughly $30,600 per year. Community1 cut Mr. Doe’s stay down to one day in lieu of four months. This saved the county about $10,000. The services that Community1 found for Mr. Doe have kept him from returning to the detention facility and becoming another recidivist statistic.

Multiply the savings given in the example by the myriad of inmates that enter the doors of the NHC Detention Facility over the course of a year and it is impressively significant. The first year goal of Community1 was to have 4 success stories in 2017. This goal was surpassed in the first few months with a total of 56 success stories. Community1 is gaining traction and intends to ramp up in 2018 by implementing education in practical skills like resume writing and basic cosmetology skills. There are also plans to extend the GED program to female inmates through separate classes. We congratulate New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office on the success of this program and look forward to hearing about even greater success in 2018.

Some of the Community1 Detention Staff, D. Kudro, A. Johnson, and K. McDonald
Deputy Jill Blackmon promoted to Corporal in the School Resource Officer Section

Corporal Jason Cummings Patrol Division Deputy of the 3rd Quarter for his performance as the Assistant Supervisor of the K-9 Unit and Handler for K-9 Flash.

MDS Adam Bondarek Patrol Division Safe Unit Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, Awarded by Saint Luke AMEZ Church

1st Sergeant Mike Fike Patrol Division Stellar Award for his performance as the Commander of the Sheriff’s Alcohol Field Enforcement Unit.

Deputy Jessie Day, Patrol Division K-9 Unit received a Stellar Award for his involvement in the detection and apprehension of a crime spree suspect in a multi-jurisdictional area.

(Left to Right) - Deputy John Carpenter, Corp. Cori Kiefner, and Sgt. Efrain Granda)

Deputy John Carpenter Patrol Division Stellar Award for his performance in the School Resource Officer Unit.

Corporal Cori Kiefner Patrol Division Stellar Award for her performance as an Assistance Supervisor in the School Resource Officer Unit.

Sergeant Efrain Granda Patrol Division Stellar Award for his performance as a Supervisor in the School Resource Officer Unit.
Did you know that you can experience, first-hand, what Hanover County Deputy Sheriffs face as they carry out their duties? Thanks to the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office (NHCSO) Ride Along Program, you can ride in a patrol car with a deputy who is working a daytime or nighttime shift. You’ll listen in and watch as they take dispatches, respond to emergencies, and handle a host of law enforcement duties. And best of all, you can ask them anything you want to know about their job.

The Ride Along Program is administered by the NHCSO Patrol Division, commanded by Captain D.H. Price. According to Captain Price, the program forms a bridge between the Sheriff’s Office and county residents so they can observe the types of law enforcement situations every patrol officer might face. The program is not new – it has existed since 1991 – but it is becoming more popular.

The Patrol Division’s primary mission is to prevent crime through high visibility, proactive patrolling of every part of the county. In addition, deputies respond to emergency calls sent by the County’s Emergency Communications Center and engage with other first responders, such as the Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services.

Through four squads (A, B, C, and D), the Patrol Division operates twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The deputies are assigned to specific sections of New Hanover County’s 199 square miles. Through their regular shifts, deputies become experts on their assigned sector.

Patrol Sergeant David Dombrowski, a 15-year NHCSO veteran, says that the Ride Along program gives citizens an “eye-opening” experience. He says a rider’s typical response after a ride is: “I had no idea so much work went on inside a patrol car.” Most riders are surprised that deputies spend much of their patrol time working on laptop computers, such as writing reports or researching data.

Sergeant Dombrowski, who patrols as he manages his squad over 12-hour shifts, says that every shift is different. Day or night, the deputies check business and residential buildings, respond to security alarms, and watch for suspicious vehicles and persons. Their duties include checking the perimeters of facilities, stopping reckless drivers, and helping drivers who become stranded. They also respond to domestic disturbances and threats of violence. In short, deputies must be prepared to handle any situation where county residents feel threatened or need immediate help.

Sergeant Dombrowski notes that many of the program’s “riders” are trainees in local law enforcement programs, such as the Cape Fear Community College Basic Law Enforcement Training Program. Others are participants in the NHC Sheriff’s Citizens Academy, where rides are encouraged, but not required. Still others ride as part of high school, college or research programs.

The Ride Along program has been gaining in popularity because of the growth of outreach programs, such as the Citizen’s Academy, and increased public interest in police work generated by TV shows and media coverage. It also gives those pursuing law enforcement careers a chance to see and experience the stress of patrol duties in a real life setting. Sergeant Dombrowski says: “After sitting through classroom briefings and lectures, reading textbooks and taking exams, it all comes together in the patrol car.”

Sergeant Dombrowski points out that the program is also helpful to new 911 Telecommunicators (“dispatchers”) and county information technology personnel because they “see the other side of the radio call or message.” But any citizen can request a ride simply to better understand how patrol officers carry out their daily responsibilities.

In addition, “the Ride Along Program gives Deputies a chance to educate citizens, one-on-one, on the difficulties in keeping the peace in New Hanover County,” said Sergeant Dombrowski. “After a person takes this ride, he or she has a better appreciation for the type of things a patrol deputy faces. And, they get to see the human side of law enforcement – the person behind the badge.”

If you are interested in taking a ride, print out a Ride Along Request Form, under the “Forms, Permits and Resources” Tab, on the NHCSO’s website (https://www.newhanoversheriff.com) and complete it. Be sure to read the application form carefully – it contains important details on the ride. These include acceptable clothing, required conduct during the ride (staying inside the patrol car and following all directions), and a release of liability. The completed request form should be mailed to the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office, Patrol Division, at 3950 Juvenile Center Road, Castle Hayne, NC 28429, or faxed to them at 910-798-4230.

For additional information on the Ride-Along program, please contact Ms. Jordan Kavanaugh at 910-798-4217.
Detective Division  By Sgt. A.D. Womble

The Detective Division was recently responsible for the following case closures:

**Detective J. Varella** - The Homicide of Robert D. Crampton at 2701 Castle Hayne Rd. Lot 2 (Carrol C. MHP) on 11/02/2015. The Defendant, Jennifer Ann Crampton, who was the estranged wife of the victim, was charged and indicted for 1st Degree Murder in November of 2015 and she pled guilty to 2nd Degree Murder, in accordance with a plea agreement. Jennifer Crampton was sentenced to an active sentence of 200 – 252 months (16 ½ to 21 years) in the NC Department of Adult Corrections.

**Sgt. S. Blissett** - The Homicide of Ben Privott on Bracken Fern Drive. Cory Sullivan plead guilty to the charge of 2nd degree murder from the incident on April 22, 2016, Privott’s fiancée found him lying on the ground near their Bracken Fern Drive home with a wound to his chest. Sullivan was sentenced to a minimum of 144 months and a maximum of 180 months. Sullivan’s sentence will be reduced by 496 days.

Stellar Award

Detective Lisa Hudson played a vital role in the criminal trial of Douglas Edwards. Lisa not only helped in the investigation, but had to testify during the emotional and lengthy trial. Her presence every day at trial from suppression hearings, jury selection, conviction and sentencing was an example of her commitment to seeing the case through to the end. Lisa gave emotional support to the victim’s family throughout the trial. This is a trait that is appreciated and strikes at your heart when it is displayed. Lisa is an asset to this agency and especially to the citizens of New Hanover County. Det. Hudson was presented with a Stellar Award for her outstanding and exceptional work.

JUDICIAL SERVICES  by Lt. Jaime Knox

In October 2017, a man entered the courthouse asking for help. He stated there was a female lying on the ground near 4th and Market Street. Sheriff’s Office personnel (Court Security and Bailiff’s) immediately responded and found a woman lying on the sidewalk. As they started performing CPR, the woman's friend stated they had just tried a "new product." Hearing this, Naloxone was administered. When EMS arrived, they administered a second dose. Responders concluded the female had overdosed on the "new product," which had been laced with fentanyl. Had the medical response not been immediate, the woman may have died. But once revived, she refused further treatment and left the scene.

This incident illustrates why the Judicial Section of the New Hanover County Sheriff's Office has issued Evizo Naloxone HCL 0.4mg auto Injectors to 24 deputies. Each Naloxone box has two injectors and a training injector. The life saving medication was issued to deputies in all 3 sections of the Judicial Division: Bailiffs, Civil and Security / DSS / Transportation. This will allow deputies in the Judicial Division to be prepared in the event Naloxone is needed for an opioid reversal within the courthouse, court rooms, courthouse common areas, Department of Social Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Court Transportation and any nearby areas where citizens require fast assistance.

On a separate topic of interest, the courthouse security system is being improved. There are approximately 78 security cameras and 38 panic alarms situated throughout the courthouse, OJJ and DSS. The security of these building relies heavily on the ability to see everything at every time through the use of cameras. On any given day, the New Hanover County Courthouse has hundreds visitors. This includes staff, patrons, law enforcement, inmates, bonding agents, family members, civil matters, weddings and etc. Sheriff’s deputies rely on an extensive camera system to see where we can’t always be. Starting this quarter, there will be an upgrade to some of the security cameras offering better camera quality and mobility. Information technology has also added to the project via an upgrade of the existing panic alarms stationed throughout the courthouse. Once completed, this should offer a more modern security system in the courthouse.

Det. L. Hudson – Randy Doyle Jackson entered a guilty plea in New Hanover County Superior Court October 4, 2017 to Assault with a Deadly Weapon with Intent to Kill Inflicting Serious Injury and First-Degree Kidnapping. Jackson was sentenced to 67-93 months in prison. Jackson held the victim against her will and brutally assaulted her which led to numerous injuries during the April 2, 2017 incident.

These cases have had successful outcomes due to the continued collective assistance and outstanding performances of all divisions and personnel involved (the tele-communicators that take and dispatch the 911 calls, the responding deputies gathering information and securing the scene, emergency medical responders, crime scene preservation, evidence and processing, detectives gathering further information- interviewing people & entering/executing search warrants, the district attorney’s office, and judicial procedure).
Next Sheriff’s Citizens Academy, begins February 6, 2018 and graduation is set for April 17, 2018.

Academy Objectives

- Increase communication and build a relationship of trust and understanding between the Sheriff’s Office and the citizens of our community
- Provide education and insight to citizens of the community concerning the job functions and duties of the Sheriff’s Office
- Create a non-threatening setting for citizens to share and discuss their concerns with Sheriff’s Office employees

Our aim is to develop solid communications and healthy relationships between the Sheriff’s Office and the community, along with developing a growing pool of well-informed citizens who will share newly acquired knowledge and insight with others in the community.

Structure

The “Sheriff’s Citizens Academy” lasts for 11 weeks. The classes will be at least three 3 hours per session with classes beginning at 6:00 PM and ending at 9:00 PM nightly. The location for each class will vary depending on the course material. The Academy coordinator will provide the location for each class session.

Qualifications

- Be 18 years of age
- No prior felony convictions or any misdemeanor convictions that question the moral character of the applicant
- Be willing to commit to attending at least one 3 hour class per week for 11 weeks
- Be able to handle graphic material

If you are interested in attending, please visit www.newhanoversheriff.com where you can print a Sheriff’s Citizen Academy application and mail, deliver, scan, or fax to the following below.

You may also return your signed application to any New Hanover County Sheriff’s Deputy.

By Mail:
Sheriff’s Citizens Academy
Attn: Master Deputy Brashier
New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office
3950 Juvenile Center Road
Castle Hayne, NC 28429

Scan/email: mbrashier@nhcgov.com

By fax:
Attn: Master Deputy Brashier
(910) 798-4252

In person:
New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office
Attn: Master Deputy Brashier
3950 Juvenile Center Road
Castle Hayne, NC 28429

If you have any questions, please contact MDS Brashier with the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office at (910) 798-4311.
Adoptions Through the NHC Animal Services Unit  By Jane Love

Americans love their pets. A Gallup poll suggests that six in ten Americans own some type of pet, with 73% owning dogs and 49% owning cats. (Gallup’s Annual Lifestyle Poll, December, 2006.) If you apply those statistics to 88,400 households in New Hanover County (NHC), there should be 53,000 happy households with pets. But unfortunately, not every owner properly cares for a pet or its offspring.

Animals that are mistreated, abandoned or otherwise endangered become a community problem. And that’s where the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office (NHCSO) may need to step in, through the Animal Services Unit (ASU) within the Support Services Division.

Surprisingly, the ASU mission statement doesn’t include the words “adoption” or “pets.” Their formal mission is to protect the public from the threat of rabies and to ensure proper animal care, through prevention, public perception, and education. In recent years, however, they have also operated an animal shelter that allows citizens to adopt abused or abandoned animals.

The shelter cares for animals surrendered by owners or picked up as strays. Surrendered animals become the property of NHC immediately, while strays are placed in a temporary status. Strays that are not claimed after 3-5 days become NHC property. The ASU staff cares for and evaluates each animal to identify the ones most likely to be adopted. Occasionally there are animals that cannot be adopted or transferred, such as feral cats. Those situations are resolved on a case by case basis.

The ASU is headed by Lt. C.D. Grindstaff and supervised by Sgt. Steve Blisset (ASU Deputies and Officers), Ms. Judy Evonko (Clerical Staff), and Ms. Nancy Ryan (Shelter Staff). There are approximately 16 full-time county employees who do everything from medically treating the animals, to assisting the public and entering rabies vaccination information, to enforcing the laws. They are assisted by a small number of dedicated volunteers and, recently, some locally-confined inmates.

As the Shelter Supervisor, Ms. Ryan brings a business background and lifetime interest in dogs to her position. She has worked for NHC for 22 years and serves on the Board of Directors for the North Carolina Animal Rabies and Control Association. Ms. Ryan notes that the ASU regularly passes state inspections and holds multiple licenses for animal care. The ASU also obtains regular and emergency assistance from licensed veterinarians.

The ASU is sometimes confused with non-profit animal welfare groups. The key difference is that the ASU is a government agency, which means that they are required to accept all animals surrendered by residents. In contrast, private animal groups often limit the types of animals they’ll accept. However, whenever possible, the ASU works with animal welfare groups to place adoptable animals into a permanent home. “Canines for Service” and “Adopt an Angel,” are two groups that work closely with the ASU, among many others.

At ASU, animals selected for adoption are given a physical exam, vaccinated, dewormed, and checked for open wounds (which may indicate a risk of rabies). The animals are then placed in an “adoption area” and closely observed while they are cared for.

Ms. Ryan credits her dedicated staff for the attentive care given to all the shelter’s animals. She also notes that NHCSO leadership is fully supportive of their efforts to find homes for the animals. Thanks to their collective efforts, adoptions are up 10% over past years.

Because animals selected for adoption deserve attentive care for their lifetime, the ASU staff encourages interested pet owners to interact with potential pets at the shelter and to bring family members along. Every adoption involves a $60 non-refundable fee, which includes mandatory pet neutering and vaccinations, deworming for hooks and rounds, and a collar and a leash or cat-box. There is also a $10 registration fee (for NHC residents only) payable at the time of adoption. If an adopted animal is later returned for some reason, other than a medical issue, the adoption costs are not refundable.

Ms. Ryan emphasizes: “Spaying and neutering are the keys to controlling unwanted animals” because this is the most humane way to decrease the number of unwanted animals in New Hanover county.”

For more information on how to adopt a pet through the NHSO Animal Services Unit, please call them at 910-798-7500 (main office) or visit their website at http://www.newhanoversheriff.com/animal-services-unit.
In this issue, we will answer the following question:  
“What is the best, and safest way to handle a traffic stop for both the driver and the deputy?”

At one time or another, most of us will see those flashing blue lights in our rear view mirror. If you have never had that experience, either you are an outstanding driver, extremely lucky, or both. In any case, when you see the lights and hear the siren, and it is obvious they are for you, follow the below instructions.

1) Your first responsibility is to find a safe place to pull over. If you cannot immediately find a safe spot on the side of the road, slow down, put your hazard lights on, and start looking for a safe place. Pulling off the road into a parking lot is acceptable if the side of the road is unsafe.

2) Once stopped and the deputy is still either exiting their vehicle or walking to your car, remain calm, do NOT get out of your car, put your hands on your steering wheel where the deputy can see them and calmly wait for them to arrive at your window. Do not, at this time, attempt to find and obtain your license, registration, or other documentation as excessive movement can be misinterpreted.

Recommended, but not required:
- At night, turn on the car’s dome light to help the deputy see the interior of your car.
- If you have tinted windows, especially the darker shades, and the weather permits, roll down all windows. (This assumes the driver has control of all the windows.) Again, this will enable the deputy to better see the interior of your car.

3) When the deputy arrives at your window, If you have not already lowered all windows, roll down the driver door window. They will almost certainly ask for your license and registration. If your documentation is in your glove compartment or elsewhere, ask the deputy’s permission to get it. Pass the documentation to the deputy. Note: If you have a concealed carry permit, you should so advise the deputy at this time, indicate the location of your weapon (if present), and include the permit with your documentation. It’s best not to ask too many questions at this point. You will have an opportunity to pose questions later.

4) When the deputy goes back to their car with your documentation to enter your information into their computer, again remain calm, put your hands on the steering wheel where the deputy can see them, and don’t move around excessively. Remember, movement can be misinterpreted.

5) When the deputy returns to your car window, keep hands in sight and pay attention to their comments, e.g., citation details, warning details, instructions, etc. The deputy should provide a specific reason for the traffic stop. When the deputy finishes, ask your questions in a reasonable manner – do not be hostile or aggressive. Do NOT argue about any charges – once the citation has been entered into the deputy’s computer, the deputy cannot adjudicate the charges; that is up to the courts. Also, an argument can spiral out of control and ratchet up to an issue more serious than a traffic citation.

6) If asked to get out of your car, do so in a non-threatening manner. Once out, do EXACTLY and ONLY what you are directed to do. If you are placed under arrest, both driver and passengers have the right to remain silent.

At any time, if the deputy requests your permission to search your car, you can refuse to consent to the search; you can also revoke a previously given consent at any point during that search. However, if the deputy has probable cause, they can search your car without your consent; you cannot revoke this type of search.

If you have a complaint about the traffic stop, do not complain to the deputy on scene. Note all relevant details, i.e., the name, rank, badge number, etc., of the deputy; date/time of the stop; the location of the stop; and the particulars of your complaint. Make your complaint to the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office in person, by telephone, or with a letter. Contact details are provided below:

New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office  
3950 Juvenile Center Road  
Castle Hayne, NC 28429  
Tel: 910.798.4200  
Website: https://www.newhanoversheriff.com

Thanks to New Hanover County Sheriff’s Deputies Grady and Atsumi for their input and guidance on this issue. Information was also obtained from the Wilmington Police Department’s brochure “Know Your Rights – The Law and You – A Citizens Guide to Interacting with Law Enforcement Officials.”
Taking a Fresh Look at Cold Cases

By Jane Love

The Detective Division of the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office (NHCSO) is trying a new approach to revive homicide and missing persons cases that are unresolved. The idea involves assembling a new team of reviewers to look at each “cold case” with fresh eyes in hope they will spot details that could lead to a final resolution.

The term “cold case” is generally applied to any unsolved crime that has been fully investigated, but remains unsolved in terms of prosecution, with no new information coming in. Currently, the NHCSO’s has eight cold cases, with six homicides and two missing persons dating to 1995. But even one unsolved case is unacceptable to the victim’s family and NHCSO detectives.

The fact that there are only a few cold cases in New Hanover County reflects the expertise and persistence of the Detective Division. Deputies selected for detective work are chosen for the skills and abilities they demonstrated either as patrol officers or in a different assignment, and for their tenacity in following leads until a case is resolved. Detectives also receive ongoing specialized training to help them become expert interviewers and investigators.

To understand the new approach to cold cases, it helps to understand the standard approach. Detectives assigned to a homicide or missing person first examine the death scene or last known location of a disappearance. Then they contact the victim’s relatives, friends, neighbors, and anyone else who can offer insight on the victim’s life. They next examine the solvability factors of the case and follow any leads. Critical facts may come from witness information, physical evidence or forensics (fingerprints, blood typing, DNA), apparent methods of operation, or even a Detective’s strong intuitive feelings.

When the evidence has been consolidated, it often points to a person or persons as suspects. The suspects are contacted, but they may or may not cooperate. If detectives believe they have solid legal evidence that convincingly ties a suspect to the crime, they coordinate with the District Attorney’s Office with a view toward arrest.

But if the evidence does not fall into place after all leads have been checked, the result often is a cold case. In some agencies, unsolved cases end up in warehouse boxes and the victim’s family has no closure. But in the NHCSO, these cases are not forgotten. Instead, they are getting a fresh look from new reviewers.

The idea for the new cold case Initiative came from Detective Justin Varella, who works in the Violent Crimes and Cold Case Unit. Detective Varella, a 12-year veteran with the NHCSO, previously worked in Detention, Patrol, and Investigations. Before that, he worked as a Police Officer for the UNCW University Police Department.

Detective Varella came up with the idea for a review panel after working on a joint investigation with the Brunswick County Sheriff’s Office, Unsolved Crimes Unit. He states: “They take a similar approach with retired investigators and citizen volunteers from different walks of life. I have had a passion for cold cases for quite some time and thought ‘why not develop something similar for our agency and tailor that to our needs?’ We’ve always had a couple of current detectives investigating cold cases but I was looking to provide a more concerted effort.”

Detective Varella drafted a proposal to utilize several retired investigators and a few select citizen volunteers with different analytical backgrounds to create a defined unit for this purpose. His proposal was well received and he was tasked with spearheading the initiative.

The review group is made up of two retired detectives from the NHCSO, a retired ATF Agent, a former U.S. Secret Service agent, and a chemist. Working one case at a time, the group collectively re-examines the entire file, which may contain reports, photographs, interviews, test results, video and audio tapes, and detective notes from the original investigation. They track down original witnesses and persons of interest to determine their status and re-examine persons on the fringe of the case to determine if anyone might have been overlooked. The panel also assesses whether any of the existing evidence might be enhanced by new technology or expanded access to criminal databases. Finally, they assess original case theories and brainstorm possible new theories.

Because the public often has information on a case, the NHCSO has also partnered with television channel WWAY to broadcast videotaped summaries of the unsolved cases in New Hanover, as well as those in Brunswick and Pender County. Summaries of Bladen and Columbus county cold cases are in the works. You can watch these videos, presented by news reporter Hannah Patrick, on the WWAY website (wwaytv3.com/unsolved). NHCSO is exploring additional ways to use social media on pending homicide and missing person cases, and to share ideas with other law enforcement agencies.

“Our cold case initiative uses the experience of seasoned investigators that have been dedicated to this type of investigation for quite some time,” says Detective Varella. “We can also use a fresh perspective from citizen volunteers from different walks of life to examine these cases and, hopefully, progress them towards a resolution. We are also combining traditional fundamentals of investigation with a research and analytical approach to seek justice for those that can no longer speak for themselves and the family and friends they have left behind.”

If you have a tip on a crime or active investigation, please go to the “Submit a Crime Tip” tab on the upper right of the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office website website: https://www.newhanoversheriff.com or call the NHCSO Detective Division at 910-798-4260.
Cold Case of the Quarter—Kathleen Cotton Homicide

By: Det. Justin Varella

On July 21, 1999, Deputies of the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office responded to 2500 Middle Sound Loop Rd. to conduct a welfare check and found the deceased body of Kathleen Cotton in the bathtub inside the residence. Ms. Cotton’s next door neighbor had contacted the Sheriff’s Office to conduct the welfare check because she had not heard from or seen Ms. Cotton in a few weeks. The neighbor sent her son over to Ms. Cotton’s house to check on her and he came back to report that he could not get Ms. Cotton to answer the door and saw what appeared to be blood on the floor, after looking into the house from the outside.

Deputies found Ms. Cotton deceased in her bathtub and badly decomposed. The date of death can be traced back to the probable date of July 3, 1999 and the autopsy of Ms. Cotton revealed that she died from blunt force trauma. A door to the residence had been forced open and it appears as though the 68-year-old Cotton was beaten to death in her own home. Deputies were able to determine that her vehicle had been taken and at least one area of the house had been rummaged through for money or valuables. Ms. Cotton lived alone at the time and did not have any close family in the area.

The investigation has determined a person of interest in this case and the Sheriff’s Office is searching for any information that would assist bringing a resolution to this incident. If anyone knew Kathleen Cotton around the time of her murder, lived in the area of 2500 Middle Sound Loop Rd. at the time, or has any information that may benefit the investigation, please contact the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office at (910) 798-4200 or use https://www.newhanoversheriff.com/submit-a-crime-tip/

Case Number 1999-28499
Report Date: July 21, 1999

The NHCSO VIPR Unit wishes you a healthy and prosperous New Year. We sincerely thank each of you that have championed and supported the “Word On The Street” during it’s first year of publication. It has been an honor to provide it to the citizens of New Hanover County and we hope it has served to increase transparency and deepen the citizen’s awareness of the activities of the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office. Printed copies of the newsletter are available to read in various places throughout the county and on the Sheriff’s Website at www.newhanoversheriff.com but we welcome you to sign up for electronic copies by sending your name and email address to NHSONews@nhcgov.com. Your comments and suggestions are always greatly appreciated, and can be directed to NHSONews@nhcgov.com. We would love to hear from you!

Sincerely,

Carol Scheidegger, VIPR 128
csheidegger@nhcgov.com