

It's that time of year again; time to start back to school. While all are busy getting new book bags, pencils, pens, paper and all the other things that you have to buy for your children to start back to school, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the School Resource Officer program. When I ran for Sheriff of Madison County, one promise that I made was that I would find a way to start a school resource officer program for our school system. It was something that was mentioned to me many times and I felt it was something that could only enhance the school environment. At the beginning of the 2010 school year, the Superintendent and I, along with Dr. Stone at MCHS were able to work out a feasible way to start the School Resource Officer program for Madison County. This program welcomed many successes this past year including an approximate 50% reduction in incidences at MCHS in the 2010-2011 school year when compared to the 2009-2010 school year. Much of the success is credited to the administration and staff of the school system and especially to Sgt. Mark Jerome who has jumped into this position and immersed himself into the happenings of the county's schools. Sgt. Jerome has gone above and beyond what was expected of him when he took this position a year ago. He has organized classes, helped with the Toys for Tots program, been a deterrent for criminal activity at the high school, and has been of assistance to the other schools in Madison County when needed. This program has already reaped many benefits to all involved, including the Sheriff's Office since officers are no longer being pulled from other areas of the county to answer calls at the high school. During the course of the past year, I've had questions asked such as why do I read about more incidents from the high school in the paper? Do we really need this? Prior to adding the SRO, discipline incidents were written up by the school, which of course were not listed in the newspaper each week. Now the more serious incidents are handled by Sgt. Jerome and therefore a report is written and the student(s) are removed from school property and taken to the Sheriff's Office. These reports then become public record and are then included in all incidents of the county and available for the media to view. Because of this you will see more in the paper about incidents at the high school. So it's not that there is a higher rate of incidences at the high school, it is just that the procedure in place for handling severe behavior occurrences now shows up more in the paper than it has in the past. As we begin another school year next week, I look forward to keeping with this positive trend with our SRO program by continuing to take the burden of the more serious discipline incidences off of the school staff thus allowing for them to do what they do best which is teaching our children. Sgt. Jerome's will continue to be a deterrent for the negative behavior while also creating positive relationships with students so they can see that law enforcement officers are here to protect and help them when they need us.

In a separate matter, I would like to piggy back off of an article in last week's paper that discussed a potential fitness building at the Sheriff's Office. Over the past year, I have wanted to find a way to encourage my employees to be as physically fit as possible. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of options for this in our county. My deputies spend many hours riding in their cars to then at any given time have to chase down someone on foot or break up a domestic dispute. Because of this, I would like to help provide them with the means to exercise when they are off-duty. Over the past few months, several individuals and businesses have expressed an interest in donating money and building materials toward this type of project. So far the only thing that has been done is to experiment with footings to see what size building is actually possible at the Sheriff's Office. As of yet nothing has been built and when the plan is ready, it will be of no cost to the taxpayers of Madison County. It is strictly going to happen

because of donations. Recently, EMS Director Jason Lewis and I talked about the facility also being available to the county's EMS employees as well. This facility will by no means be a Gold's Gym, as it will likely be approximately 28 x 32 ft in size and will house free weights, a few treadmills, and possibly a few other cardio machines. I feel this is a great way to encourage our public safety workers to stay physically fit while providing them a place to do so. In the long run it will hopefully save the county money in medical costs for our employees and be a means of preventing future medical issues. Not to mention, this will help our public safety men and women be in the best health possible as they help and protect the citizens of Madison County. If you would like to know more information about this project or the School Resource Officer, please give me a call at 706-795-6202, email [sheriff@madisonco.us](mailto:sheriff@madisonco.us), or message me on the Madison County Sheriff's Office Facebook page.