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PRESS RELEASE

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Sheriff Announces 2016/2017 Budget Initiatives

PUTNAM COUNTY, TN – Since being elected, Sheriff Eddie Farris has made three promises: to keep our children safe; be diligent in the fight against drugs and crime; and enhance the professionalism of the department.

“I am proud to say that we have made progress on all of those promises and are continuing to enhance our community every day,” said Sheriff Farris. “As you know, our community is growing. Since 2000, we have seen a 22% increase in population which means more people, more housing, more students, more shops and restaurants and, yes, more crime. Community growth is a blessing but with such opportunities comes a greater demand for services and impact on the level of service that residents receive. As an example, we’ve seen a 97% increase in the past 10 years in calls for service and a 48% increase in the number of criminal warrants that we must serve as a Sheriff’s Office.”

In order to fulfill its mission to serve and protect the citizens of Putnam County, the Sheriff’s Office is seeking additional funding from the county commission in the 2016/2017 budget to improve the department and fill deficiencies due to the growth of the county and the continuing demand for more services.

“I am in no way intending to cause an increase in the tax base to the citizens of Putnam County,” said Sheriff Farris. “The Sheriff’s Office has generated more than \$2 million in revenues to the county’s General Fund this past year. We are only requesting that a small portion of these revenues be returned to the Sheriff’s Office so that we can continue to provide the level of law enforcement, corrections and criminal justice services that our citizens deserve.”

The Putnam County Sheriff’s Office generates revenues from housing state inmates and juvenile offenders, and from commissary sales in the jail. All revenues generated by the Sheriff’s Office are deposited with the Trustees Office into the Putnam County General Fund. Currently, the Sheriff’s Office keeps no revenues. State Law does not require the Sheriff to house state inmates or provide commissary items in the jail.

Much of the additional funding will be used to fund new personnel in three key areas: 1 additional School Resource Officer, 2 deputies to handle mental health, corrections and extradition transports, and 2 part-time deputies for court security.

“Children are our county’s most precious resource, but as children, they often lack the skills to protect themselves,” said Sheriff Farris. “It is our responsibility to safeguard their daily school environment.”

Today, there are approximately 11,600 students enrolled in 18 schools within the county. According to U.S. Department of Justice guidelines, we should have 1 School Resource Officer (SRO) for every 850 students, which would equal approximately 13 SROs in Putnam County.

Currently, there are 8 SROs serving at three high schools and two middle schools within the county. With the addition of 1 more this year, Putnam County would continue towards achieving the minimum established standard set by the federal government for the safety of our students and schools.

“School should be a place where a positive learning environment is emphasized, not a place where parents and educators have to worry about safety. That’s our job,” said Sheriff Farris.

The 2 new deputies for transports will help keep our county safe by allowing our Road Patrol deputies to stay here in Putnam County rather than making hundreds of trips around the state transporting people to mental hospitals in Chattanooga, Nashville and Memphis. In addition, deputies are required to transport prisoners to and from other jails and prisons in and out of the state for court hearings, trials, and reassignment from our jail to and from other facilities. The Putnam County Sheriff’s Office is mandated by the State of Tennessee (by State Law) to conduct these transports. Last year, deputies logged more than 500 mental health, corrections and extradition court ordered transports.

“There has been a significant increase in transports over the past few years due to the general increase in jail populations and the growing number of prisoners with mental health issues. Every time one of our road deputies has to make one of these trips, we have one less deputy on the road here in Putnam County,” said Sheriff Farris. “We have tried to utilize our Reserve deputies whenever possible, but these transports have placed a major strain on our existing personnel and could ultimately affect our ability to provide law enforcement services to our residents here in the county.”

The Sheriff is also responsible by State law for the security of any court proceeding in the county. In 2015, over 87,000 came through our courthouse area. According to Sheriff Farris, 2 new part-time deputies are needed to fill deficiencies in court security due to the growing demand of cases and the significant increase in the number of individuals on the docket each week. These new deputies will be responsible for screening entrants into the Justice Center, being present while the judge is presiding over the courtroom, and transferring prisoners safely to and from the jail and/or detention center to the courtroom for hearings or trials.

Some of the additional budget funds will be used to increase the overtime pay line item for the Sheriff’s Office. Since taking office, we have commissioned deputies, administrative staff and certified corrections deputies who have by necessity accrued a growing number of hours of comp time while dispensing their duties. This equates to a significant financial liability in comp time, which does not include the full commission approved overtime budget that was paid out. While the Sheriff tries to limit comp time and overtime, it is often a necessity due to the limited number of deputies, the growing workload, and the nature of law enforcement (i.e., you cannot clock out during an arrest, pursuit, raid or other critical incident, and you cannot leave shifts unfilled due to sick or vacationing deputies). Currently, the Putnam County Sheriff’s Office runs out of overtime pay in the middle of its fiscal year.

According to national law enforcement organizations, we should have approximately 1.7 deputies per 1,000 residents. Current estimates project our county’s population at about 76,000. This is estimated to grow another 13% by 2020. Currently, we have 66 sworn deputies covering 401 square miles which equates to 0.86 deputies per 1,000 residents. That is half of the recommended commissioned deputies for Putnam County. Last year, deputies drove more than 400,000 miles protecting and patrolling the roads of Putnam County. We would need a total of 129 – 205 deputies to meet current national guidelines.

“Earning the Public’s Trust Every Day!”

Similar deficiencies exist with our corrections deputies. According to national guidelines, we should have a ratio of 1 deputy per 14-17 inmates. Putnam County currently has 1 deputy per 45 inmates. According to a letter of finding from Jim Hart of the County Technical Advisory Service (CTAS) in November 2013, we were down 4 deputies per shift or a total of 16 deputies in the jail. And, that was when our jail averaged 239 inmates. Today, we average 308.

“Please don’t get me wrong. I’m not trying to stir up any doubt about the capabilities of your Sheriff’s Office. In fact, I am very proud of the men and women who serve as both commissioned and corrections deputies. They have worked hard this past year and are doing a fabulous job. So good, in fact, that according to the latest statistics reported to the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System (TIBRS), we have seen a significant reduction in major crimes as well as all crimes in Putnam County. We have also seen fewer incidents in the jail and, as a result, fewer lawsuits.”

“When I took office in September 2014, we conducted an immediate assessment of the department and found there were several areas that needed attention, such as: all of the equipment was at the end of its life cycle – patrol cars, uniforms, safety and IT equipment – and due to financial constraints no plan was in place to renew any of it; and due to the growth in the county we needed more deputies.”

“I ran for Sheriff because I have a passion for making your Sheriff’s Office the best it can be. In order to fully achieve this goal, we need to have a more proactive approach. Up to now, we have done a great job of being reactive. We have a dedicated group of deputies who put their lives on the line every day to protect the citizens of this county. In order for us to get where we are in such a short time, many of them have made tremendous sacrifices, trading family time for overtime when a job needs to be done. You can’t just leave in the middle of an arrest or investigation because your shift is over. And when a deputy needs backup, our deputies are there even if it means coming in early or staying late. It’s my responsibility as Sheriff to work with the Commission to try and obtain proper resources so the deputies can do their job safely and efficiently.”

“We have enjoyed a good working relationship with the Putnam County Commission,” said Sheriff Farris. “I know that they are committed to making us the best Sheriff’s Office we can be for the benefit of every citizen here in Putnam County. I truly believe that with the revenues the Sheriff’s Office generated last year, we can achieve this much needed budget increase without additional tax burden to the very people we are sworn to protect and serve. I want to thank our commissioners for their continued support and patience as we work our way through this year’s budget process. I would also like to thank the citizens of our County for their input, cooperation and concerns regarding the needs of our Sheriff’s Office.”

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