CCSO Year in Review: A Humble Reflection of 2020

Posted by TBN[Staff] On 01/14/2021

WALDORF, Md. - Many will look back at the year 2020 and wish to forget it, and for good reasons. While we remember the many difficulties and challenges, we come away from the past year grateful and humbled. Amidst a global pandemic and continually changing public directives and orders, the men and women of the Charles County Sheriff's Office were able to continue operations to provide services to the citizens of Charles County. Our officers on the front lines responded to calls and were recognized for meritorious service and lifesaving work. Most importantly, our community came together, on many occasions, to show support for one another. Here is a positive look back at 2020:

New Protocols, Same Service: In March, the world as we knew it changed drastically. What started as social distancing became orders to stay at home, avoid gatherings, and wear masks when out in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Such orders and directives had great impacts on policing across the nation in terms of how police respond to calls for service and how they interact with citizens and each other. Police officers, who come into contact with many citizens each day, were faced with the challenge of protecting and serving while trying to limit exposure.

Despite these challenges, the men and women of the CCSO were able to quickly shift gears in order to safely provide full law enforcement services to Charles County. Our Command Staff made scheduling changes to limit employees’ exposure to one another, and PPE was distributed Agency-wide. The Planning Section worked tirelessly to rewrite policies based on new Special Orders from Command. The Communications Section revised how they take calls to ensure officers were adequately prepared to contact citizens displaying symptoms. The Patrol Division carefully and cautiously responded to every call for service and were able to handle certain calls over the phone when possible. With the closing of schools, School Resource Officers were deployed to Patrol or the Telephone Reporting Unit. Civilian employees converted their homes into offices to fulfill their duties.

One of our greatest accomplishments through this pandemic was our Corrections Division’s ability to keep the inmates and staff at the Detention Center safe and healthy. Each and every employee worked meticulously to follow protocols in order to keep the facility clean, limit exposure between inmates and employees, and to make sure people coming in weren’t displaying symptoms. When many facilities nationwide were experiencing outbreaks, our Corrections Division ensured business as usual through their exemplary efforts.

Meritorious Service: Each November, the CCSO gathers together to honor those who have retired throughout the previous year as well as recognize employees for brave work, saving lives, superior field service, and for going above and beyond their duties. Although we were unable to have our formal event in 2020, we were still able to safely recognize our retirees and awards recipients separately. Eleven retirees, who served a total of 273 years of service, were honored for their outstanding careers. Six officers were awarded Bronze Medals of Valor, one of our highest honors, for their heroic actions which saved lives at the risk of their own. Earlier in the year, the Detention Center named Correctional Officer First Class Eric Keys as the 2019 Correctional Officer of the Year. Aside from being recognized for his teamwork, encouragement to his fellow officers, and for always going above and beyond, he received this honor for an incident which occurred in 2019. CFC Keys pulled an occupant from a burning vehicle he observed while transporting an inmate to another facility, saving her life.

Officers also received accolades throughout the year from outside organizations. In late October, Detective Christina Gilroy and PFC Jack Austin were awarded the 2020 Law Enforcement Award by the Maryland Retailers Association. In 2019, the officers investigated an increase in thefts from local big box stores. Through their tireless efforts, they were able to develop leads, obtain search warrants, and eventually arrest the suspects in connection with the thefts. In November, PFC Ron Walls was named Citizen of the Year, Charles County, Maryland by Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. Tua Lambda Lambda Chapter. He was selected for this honor because of his profession as a police officer, his longtime personal commitment to community involvement, especially with children, and his dedication to community outreach. In December, Sgt. Gus Proctor was named Deputy of the Year and Sgt. Matthew Kline, Cpl. Justin Davis, and CFC Michael Keeler were named Correction Officers of the Year by the Maryland Sheriff’s Association for their work and commitment to the CCSO and the Charles County community.

Professional Excellence: The men and women of the Charles County Sheriff’s Office continued to demonstrate leadership in their profession. In September, Sheriff Troy Berry was sworn in as President of the Maryland Sheriff’s Association (MSA). His peers from the MSA elected him after he finished his term as Vice-President of the association. Sheriff Berry will have the privilege of leading 24 sheriffs of Maryland counties.

We demonstrated our professionalism as an Agency as well. After an extensive assessment of all aspects of the CCSO by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA), in November we received our re-accreditation, with Excellence, the highest rating possible. “We are beyond honored yet humbled as we recognize that this achievement is only awarded to a few agencies, world-wide, during reaccreditation processes,” said Sheriff Berry.

The CCSO Training Division works diligently to ensure that all employees are trained to perform at the highest levels. Early in the year, members of the Agency attended Force Science training, which focuses on behavioral science and human dynamics with a goal “to enhance public safety, and improve peace officer performance in critical situations.” In October, the Southern Maryland Regional Crisis Intervention Team Hosted a 40-hour certification course for police and corrections officers from Charles County and other local agencies as part of a continued commitment to advance training and awareness of handling calls for service relating to mental health and to help officers diffuse problems associated with emotional or mental illness.

Commitment to Community: Perhaps what gave us the most hope in 2020 was the Charles County community. Despite all of the negativity in the world, this community showed that its people care about each other. Many annual events sadly had to be cancelled, but we all found a way to connect with one another. Businesses and individuals continued their support for Special Olympics Maryland by purchasing Torch Run t-shirts and hats, and we had yet another record breaking year in fundraising with more than $88,000 raised. The Torch Run event that was scheduled for June was held virtually in October, and many supporters around the county proudly wore their shirts and ran the race that day on their own.

During the holiday season, the Corrections Division was able to hold its annual toy drive to benefit the Charles County Children’s Aid Society’s Christmas Connection Program. They, too, had a record-breaking year with $20,000 in toys donated to deserving families. Others in the agency joined in the holiday spirit as well. Lt. Bill Welch and Sheriff Berry, along with members of the Traffic Operations Unit and the Criminal Investigations Division, identified four local families who could use a little extra help with Christmas. They purchased necessities and toys for each of the children and delivered the gifts with lights, sirens, and Santa Claus. The K-9 Unit held its annual “Santa Paws” event, and provided Christmas gifts (purchased with their own money) for a special family.
In the spring, we were proud to introduce our new Comfort K-9, Liberty. The Comfort K-9 Program was established by the Special Victims Unit and is a resource that has been utilized to assist victims of assault, particularly children. Liberty has been a valuable asset to the CCSO and to our community.

While last year was different in so many ways, many things remained the same. “The CCSO remains steadfast in our mission to serve Charles County at the highest level,” said Sheriff Berry. “Our pride in our community and dedication to duty is stronger than ever, and we look forward to continuing to grow together in 2021.”