

Sheriff's reserves eager to aid Clackamas County

by JAN LOVELL

The posse, the chaplains, the motorcycle unit and the active line members are all going to go whenever duty may call.

All are part of an organization called the Clackamas County Sheriff's Reserve.

The reserve unit might even be termed unique because it provides most of its auxiliary services to the sheriff's deputies on a volunteer basis. It also has the first female commander in the United States.

The 150-member sheriff's reserve was created in 1947 to supplement the sheriff's department in every phase of law enforcement. Work is on a part-time basis with reserves coming from every kind of job experience background including housewives, businessmen and lawyers.

The reserve unit currently has 110 "active line members" who provide a range of services including search and rescue, jail duty or patrolling for a local sports event.

The 20-member chaplaincy corps is a relatively new addition to the reserve. The group of ordained ministers was commissioned in May and is on a 24-hour basis. "In our business, we have a real need for a corps like this," said Nelda Bryson, commander of the sheriff's reserve. "And they are a fantastic bunch of fellows."

The chaplains will provide counseling in rape cases, child molest cases and serious accidents. They also may give death notices or inform families about a reserve member with an extreme illness.

The chaplains have participated in a firearms familiarization program and are currently involved in "ride-along" programs with the reserve. "We are not trying to arm our chaplains," Bryson said. "We just want them to be able to handle a gun in case of an emergency or at least

know how to react if confronted with one."

Mounted posse

The 25-member horse-mounted posse and the ten members of the motorcycle unit round out the sheriff's reserve contingent. The motorcycle unit, which is the only such reserve unit in the state is now inactive because of insurance difficulties.

The reserve unit is selective about which applicants it will accept for the position. Only 23 were selected for this year's training out of 51 applicants. "We try to keep it a definite honor to be in the reserve," Bryson said.

A thorough criminal and credit background check is done with each applicant. Bryson said the unit does not necessarily look for someone with a law enforcement background. "The reserves come from all walks of life," she said.

"We have sometimes had to retrain the college graduates or those with a law enforcement degree because the book learning is often something very different from the real situation."

Bryson said they often try to assess temperament and motivation of the applicant in making their decision. Once an applicant is accepted, he must take 83 hours of class work at the training academy at Clackamas Community College plus firearms training and a first aid course.

The firearms training course only became a requirement in 1973, although reserves have been allowed to carry guns since the unit's inception in 1947.

During the first year, recruits must work 100 hours, not including meetings and training times. After 2,000 hours of work, the reserve is eligible to replace a regular deputy for pay.

The sheriff's reserve has seen changes other than just course requirements in the past thirty years. In 1977, Sheriff John Renfro decided to integrate the men's with



CLACKAMAS COUNTY Sheriff's Reserves put in long hours of donated work to the law enforcement agency. Reserve Captain Jerry Dumolt helps monitor incoming

calls at the watch commander's desk at sheriff's offices in Oregon City.

Staff photo

the women's reserve unit, which had been started in 1972.

"Before the unit was integrated, we were extremely limited in what we could do," Bryson said. "It was a real battle when we first came in with our unit. 'We weren't allowed to ride in a patrol car with just one male. It had to be either one guy and two girls or two guys and one girl. It was ridiculous.'"

Bryson said things are really different with the integrated unit. "Now the women have an equal opportunity," Bryson said. The unit currently has 13 women and has accepted seven more female applicants for the academy.

"We have a tough time selecting the women, though, and it is something we are constantly criticized for," Bryson said. "We have to watch for those who want to be in the reserve just to be with a 'man in a uniform.'"

"We have never had any problems, but we women have worked hard to be above reproach. We still are very protective of our position because all it takes is one incident."

Bryson said they are also on the constant lookout for any male who might upset the integration. "I do think Sheriff Renfro would be open-minded about any incident, however, and would evaluate the individual rather than the collective group," Bryson said. "But we do have a good rapport with the office and we work hard to keep it."

A definite place

Bryson said she feels there is a definite place for women in law enforcement. "Women sometimes can relate better in child abuse cases or family brawls," she said. "Although in a family brawl, you never know what will happen. Usually the participants don't care what sex

the officer might be."

It might have taken awhile for the women to be accepted on equal footing with the men, but since over a year ago one woman has been a step above the men in rank.

In October 1977, Sheriff Renfro selected Nelda Bryson to be the first woman in the nation to hold the reserve unit commander post. Bryson has also been the recipient of other honors. In 1978 she was given the Distinguished Service Award from the Reserve Law Officers Association of America, the highest honor that organization bestows.

She also was the first recipient of the unit's Charlie Aldrich trophy which is given to the outstanding reserve of the year. Aldrich was a reserve member who died of cancer in 1974. "I still have that little scrap of papers Charlie used to write down my nomination not long before he died," Bryson said.

Bryson "worked up the ranks" to her present position from a recruit deputy to lieutenant, captain and administrative assistant. "Yes, I must say I really do enjoy the position," Bryson

said. "I feel that I have a good relationship with the members of the unit although there are probably always a few who resent a woman as a commander. There are a couple of guys who give me a bad time, but they realize the job has to be done, too."

A good part of Bryson's day is filled with phone calls and the continuous crackle of two police scanners in her house. Bryson estimated she spends between 150-200 hours per month at her volunteer job.

"My time admittedly isn't really my own anymore," Bryson said. "I used to feel my family came first, but now I'm beginning to think it's the other way around."

Bryson said she is thankful her family is so understanding about her job. Two of eight children are still living at the five acre home on Borges Road northeast of Damascus.

Commander kept busy

The commander holds monthly meetings with the unit captains, who in turn relay the information to the reserves deputies. The commander must answer to everything the reserves do.

"Those deputies I must reprimand probably think I'm a bit tough, but those with no problems think it's great to have the discipline," Bryson said.

Clackamas County Sheriff John Renfro commended the reserves for having put in 40,000 hours last year. "The reserve provides a great deal of service at no cost to the taxpayer," Renfro said.

"But you also have to remember, the program on the surface looks very attractive but there are built-in hazards," Renfro said. "You constantly have to make sure they are a competent group such as they were last year and are not a liability to the sheriff's office."

The relationship between the regular sheriff's deputies and the reserves is a delicate one. Deputies are allowed to make arrests and the first officer to reach the scene is allowed to take whatever action is necessary without having to wait for a regular deputy.

"The regular deputy is recognized as the one in command, however," Bryson said. "And we just don't have problems between

regulars and reserves like some areas do.

"There are always some individuals who are a little too gung-ho about things and cause problems. That is usually straightened out through the unit commander," Bryson said.

Bryson said she felt the public has gotten perhaps a bit gung-ho on law enforcement officials. "The public just doesn't have as much respect for the uniform as it used to," Bryson said. "I wonder if there is a place where officers are safe on the streets. Once you put that uniform on, it seems like your life is in danger."

Why join?

Then why do people want to join the reserves?

Reserves must pay for their own uniforms and equipment, which can easily run over \$800. They also must furnish and pay for gasoline for transportation unless they have logged enough

hours to drive a patrol car. Deputies are paid, however, for working in the jails and at juvenile detention and for patrolling at school or civic functions.

Most of the reserves join to get the experience for an eventual full-time job, while some like to do community work. Others "just like the uniform" Bryson said.

She noted the posse has worked with the Kerr Center for Handicapped Children on the Marylhurst campus by taking the children riding and sponsoring a horseshow.

The reserve deputies are required to work 40 hours per month, Bryson said. Some of the reserves work around 100 hours a month, she added.

"I guess there are only two explanations as to why we would work all those volunteer hours with no expenses paid," Bryson said. "We've either got to have a lot of devotion or else just a little stupidity."

Crash injures woman

SANDY — A traffic accident and a theft were reported in the Sandy area over the past week, according to sheriff's deputies.

Molly J. Thompson, 28, of Sandy was treated for abrasions and cuts at Gresham Community Hospital after her car crashed head-on into a tree at the corner of 362nd and Bluff Road. Thompson was

attempting to turn onto 362nd when she lost control of her car. She was treated and released from the hospital.

Leslie A. Martin, Oregon City, reported her purse was stolen Saturday from her unlocked pickup truck while visiting a friend at 54850 Highway 26 East in Sandy. The purse contained her billfold, driver's license and credit cards, deputies said.

Mudders name officers

The Mt. Hood Mudders 4-wheel Drive Association elected four new officers recently to serve for the upcoming year.

Joe Irvin was elected president; Mike Fischer, vice-president; Dixie Caster, secretary and Janice Fischer, treasurer. Mike and Janice Fischer were also named male and

female Four-Wheelers of the year. The award honors the most active members in the group.

Business grads meet Tuesday

Graduates of the Sandy High School Future Business Leaders of America will hold an alumni meeting Tuesday from 9 to 10:30 a.m. in Room 64 of the school.

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