

From the Sheriff's Desk . . .

by Jeff Dickerson,
Columbia County Sheriff



Do we really need law enforcement?

That is the question each and every one of us has the opportunity to answer on the May 17 ballot. The Office of Sheriff is tasked with many duties under the State Constitution (and memorialized in State Statute) that set this

elected office apart from other elected offices, and also set this office apart from other policing agencies.

Besides providing a law enforcement presence in the areas of our county without a police department (which make up 98% of the 657 square miles of Columbia County), the Office of Sheriff is responsible to run and maintain the Columbia County Jail with its 255 jail beds, conduct all search and rescue in our largely rural county, and serve as the ministerial office for the state courts in our jurisdiction: serving civil papers county-wide and providing security in our courtrooms to ensure that the justice system is available to all.

But if the current trend continues in funding for the Sheriff's Office, the thing we won't be able to continue

is the law enforcement presence in our county. We are simply running out of money to do everything on that list, and the law enforcement piece is the only thing left to cut without eliminating the Sheriff's Office altogether. I am forecasting that unless additional funding comes from somewhere, by summer of next year we will run out of money to fund a patrol function at all.

Back in the fall of 2009, after the Sheriff's Office lost four positions in patrol due to budget cuts, the Board of Commissioners and I worked together to identify participants in a county-wide ad hoc committee, later named the Enhanced Law Enforcement Advisory Committee, who would look at the gaps in the law en-

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