

## The Sheriff's Corner

### A Week in the Life of an Allegan County Detective



I wanted to take a little different approach in writing an article about our Investigative Services (Detective Bureau) of the Allegan County Sheriff's Office. These are the people that really are unseen and unheard from unless you are a victim or a witness of a serious crime. I call them our "unsung heroes". You won't recognize them because they are dressed in everyday business attire or "plain clothes". They drive plain cars and several of our detectives even drive pick-up trucks. I thought it would be important for you to understand what a detective does in a normal day and week (although they don't have anything that resembles a "normal" work day). Detectives work 10-hour shifts and their schedule varies throughout the week.

So, let's begin with Monday morning. It's 7 a.m. and the detectives filter in, they grab a cup of coffee and talk about their weekend and get their paperwork together. This is a close knit group of professionals that try to keep a light side to their work even though they have all seen things none of us should ever have to see or experience. They bug each other about the weight they have gained and the hair that is turning gray. They poke fun at each other continually but the ribbing is really meant to support each other. Without humor it would be a very long and gloomy day. At 8 a.m. they meet as a group and the detective bureau commander will go through a formal briefing where the detectives discuss their open cases and share information about suspects, victims and outstanding crimes. Frequently, a representative from the prosecutor's office will be present to assist with legal questions or legal updates. Each detective investigates around 360 crimes a year. These cases include homicides, assaults, breaking and entering, sexual assaults, and drug crimes.

We have eight detectives at the Allegan County Sheriff's Office. They work very closely with the detectives from the Michigan State Police, other police agencies, and with federal agencies like the FBI. We can't operate in a vacuum; cooperation is essential because crime does not know city limits or county boundaries. Our detectives specialize in undercover drug investigations, crimes against the elderly, computer crimes, sexual assault, sexual assault against minors, serious physical assaults, and property crimes. The Allegan County Sheriff's detectives are highly trained and skilled investigators. Their training focuses on evidence management, court testimony, interview and interrogation as well as training in special investigation techniques such as computer crimes and crimes against children. At any given time, a detective will average 30 open cases. In Allegan County we typically investigate one to three homicides a year. We average about 560 assaults (including sexual assaults) per year. Around 240 break-ins are reported each year to the Allegan County Sheriff's Office. About 800 times a year somebody reports a larceny or a fraud complaint to the Allegan Sheriff's Office. We also investigate approximately 220 drug cases a year. (Source: Allegan County Sheriff's Office 2006 Annual Report). One of the fastest growing crimes of concern for us is computer crimes. In the past several years we have seen dramatic increases in crimes where a computer or the internet is used to commit a crime.

A major case such as a homicide can consume hundreds, if not thousands, of staff hours to investigate, analyze evidence and prepare and testify in court. Typically everyone in the Detective Bureau, including assistance from the patrol division, will become involved in a major case. Furthermore, we rely on detectives from the State Police, area police departments, and the State Police Crime Lab for forensic evidence analysis. As one of our detectives put it to me, “our job is to take the pieces of the puzzle and put them together”. How true. Crimes have many different facets, angles and turns. Any detective will tell you that each case does not necessarily have two sides (victim and offender), but many sides. The majority of criminal cases are not black and white, but have many shades of gray that must be determined, analyzed and critiqued.

Allegan County detectives spend a fair amount of their work day at the court house. They also are considered our experts when we obtain search warrants and other orders from the courts. They are required to be in court about three times a week to testify. When they are at the court they spend about ten hours a week testifying and obtaining legal documents such as arrest and search warrants. They work very closely with the prosecutor’s office and assist the prosecutor with preparation of cases that are going to trial.

All of our detectives are “on-call” 24 hours a day, but they rotate their weekends for “on-call” duty once every six weeks. So really they are never “off-duty”. When they go home at night they can be called by an on-duty patrol deputy requesting a search warrant or with questions on an outstanding case. While they are at home detectives may receive calls from witnesses, victims and suspects that they could not contact during the day. They may also be called out if there is a major crime, such as a murder or serious sexual assault that needs immediate attention. There are not many weeks that a detective does not receive calls at home about cases they are working on. As one of our detectives said to me “unlike many jobs where you go home when your shift is done and somebody else picks up where you left off - our job is never done – there is always another witness to interview or another lead to follow up on.”

It’s Friday, and the Allegan County detectives just started a new program that they call “project day”. The detectives sit down together and review outstanding cases and pick a couple of cases that need immediate attention. They make a game plan and work as a team to locate and apprehend the suspects. Allegan County has around 3,600 outstanding warrants. Of those warrants, 440 are felony cases such as breaking and entering, serious assaults and criminal sexual conduct crimes. About 2,000 of the outstanding warrants are misdemeanor crimes such as drunk driving and other driving offenses, trespassing and minor assaults. The remainder of the warrants are for other offenses such as civil warrants. For example, on a recent “project day” they had two cases they wanted to work on. The first case was an individual that was wanted for failing to report to his parole officer. His original conviction was for armed robbery. He is a known drug abuser and is known to be unstable and aggressive. He was apprehended after a joint team of detectives and patrol deputies searched a number of places the offender was known to stay. A second project of the day was to obtain a search warrant (for the computer) and

an arrest warrant for a child pornographer who was using the internet to prey on local children through an online chat-room.

Allegan County detectives also are involved in their community in a number of other ways. They present classes on drug education and make presentations to senior citizen groups. They serve on community service boards like Sylvia's Place and Safe Harbor. They attend Homeland Security meetings and area detective meetings on a regular basis. They also make presentations in schools about what detectives do. Many of our detectives contribute their time as sports coaches, volunteer in their kid's school and volunteer for events sponsored by charities like the Torch Run for Special Olympics and the annual Relay for Life for The American Cancer Society. We talk about detectives being on call 24 hours of the day, but we must also remember their families who also contribute by foregoing family time and holidays spent together while detectives are out on investigations.

Allegan County detectives may not be easily recognized in our community, but they are very special people with a very special commitment to their community. Don't kid yourself - the crimes that they investigate and see everyday take a toll on them both physically and emotionally. These are very strong people and they are dedicated to serving you to make our community safe. You may not easily identify your Allegan County detectives when you see them on the street, but rest assured they are working very hard to keep you safe.

In my next article, I will write about how we fund the Sheriff's Office. So, until the next time I write - stay safe!!!!

Blaine Koops  
Your Sheriff