

Getting your Money's Worth



Did you ever wonder how much it costs to run a Sheriff's Office? I have. Occasionally someone will call me and ask, "I called a half hour ago and your deputies still aren't here; what's taking so long? I pay your wages; you would think I'd get better service than that". So I thought you would like to know how much it actually costs us to operate the Allegan County Sheriff's Office and what you get for your money. The majority of our funding comes from property taxes. I wanted a simple way for us to understand how we (as property owners) pay to operate the Sheriff's Office. I sought the help of our Finance Department, to determine how much of our property taxes are dedicated to public safety through the Sheriff's Office. The Finance Department made a complex issue understandable. One of the reasons it's complicated is the fact that there are many differences in property tax rates. This is because each jurisdiction and school district has different millage rates depending on what the voters of the various jurisdictions have approved.

Likewise, we have several different funding sources for special purposes. For example, we receive a grant from the State to partially operate our Traffic Enforcement Unit. We get money from the Department of Natural Resources to partially operate our Marine Enforcement Program as well as our Snowmobile Enforcement Program. We get training funds to train our law enforcement and corrections officers from funds authorized by State legislation. Additionally, we have a grant to fund our Methamphetamine Diversion Program, which has been nationally recognized for its innovation. These are just a few of the programs we operate with grant money from the State of Michigan and the Federal Government.

I have always liked the phrase "you get what you pay for." I believe this statement is true in my personal life as well as my professional life. So, I would like to explain how much we are actually paying to operate the Allegan County Sheriff's Office 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. For example, if you have a house that is valued at \$150,000 in Allegan County, your cost to operate the Sheriff's Office is \$152 a year. *In other words, for the homeowner with a home worth \$150,000, that is less than 42 cents a day to operate the entire Sheriff's Office -- You can't buy a cup of coffee for that price!* The total general fund budget for the Sheriff's Office is about \$7,834,500 this year. This is what we are getting for our money: We get 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - at your doorstep - law enforcement service. We just might not be there as quickly as you expect. We get a Detective Bureau that investigates serious crimes, and we get the support services that process all the reports and keep all the records. We get Animal Control Enforcement and an Animal Shelter (yes - we do that too.) We get highly trained response teams specializing in dive, search and rescue, and special operations for situations involving water-based events, missing persons, tracking of suspects, barricaded gunmen and hostage negotiations. In addition to this, we get a full complement of jail services: a jail that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year. *The building we are in has functioned nonstop since it opened in 1962.* Let's face it; with that kind of day-to-day

use, our jail is getting close to being just plain worn out. We also fund the staff to operate the facility, as well as the costs to take care of the inmates, such as food, housing, medical and clothing. We get programming to help our inmates to be better people when they leave; such as work release, inmate worker programs, the Detail Enabling Better Transition to Society (D.E.B.T.S) program, and our G.E.D. (high school equivalency) program to name a few. Plus, we get the support, equipment, and training to get the job done. These costs DO NOT cover additional deputies that are contracted by townships or cities, Central Dispatch operations or Emergency Management. Those programs are covered under other general fund line items or funding sources. So, as I said, “you get what you pay for” and in my opinion, we are getting a pretty good bargain for the money we put into the Sheriff’s Office.

Still, when it takes longer for the Sheriff’s Office to respond, or you don’t get the exact service you think you deserve, I hope you understand we can only respond with the resources that we have. This doesn’t mean we can’t do better or shouldn’t try harder, but I hope this gives you a glimpse at how much it costs and where and how our money is spent to operate the Allegan County Sheriff’s Office.

Another way to look at it is as insurance coverage. This is insurance to help our community continue to grow and Allegan County to be a great place to live, do business and raise a family. A safe community, like good schools and other public services, actually adds to your property value. I would like to end with a quote from John Schuiteman from the Virginia State Police:

“Adequate police protection, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. The optimal or appropriate ratio of troopers (deputies) to population, traffic volumes, reported crimes or accidents, etc. is not a matter of mathematics or statistics. It is a matter of human judgment and community resources.”

So, until I write again - Stay Safe!!!

Blaine Koops
Your Sheriff