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Big Help for a Small Agency

Wayne County covers 484 square miles of rolling hills in south central Kentucky. Fewer than a dozen deputies of the Wayne County Sheriff's Office provide law enforcement services to more than 20,000 of their fellow citizens. Like other agencies in rural and remote areas, it lagged behind its more affluent metropolitan counterparts in access to and use of new technologies until the sheriff's office revamped its operations—with assistance from the Rural Law Enforcement Technology Center (RULETC).

Just 3 years ago, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office had only one computer, which was 20 years old and used solely for tax records, says Doug Dailey, a program manager at RULETC. Using the 1033 Program, which makes excess U.S. Department of Defense property and equipment available to law enforcement agencies, the Center helped the sheriff's office acquire 14 laptop and personal computers, boosting the agency's efficiency and effectiveness.

With the computers, deputies can now use a number of computerized report forms provided by the Kentucky State Police, as well as accident reporting and investigation software. In addition, the sheriff's office can now participate electronically in the Kentucky Incident Based Reporting System (KYIBERS), a statewide network that collects, edits, and stores uniform crime reports from all Kentucky law enforcement agencies and reports these data to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The laptops enable personnel to attach digital photos to the reports and to relegate to the past the errors, illegibility, and submission lag time of handwritten reports. The computers also allow deputies to perform crime and incident mapping using global positioning systems (GPS) and to access information on civil and criminal complaints available on COURTNET, a group of secure websites hosted by the Kentucky Court of Justice and the Administrative Office of the Courts.

In addition to the computers, RULETC helped the sheriff's office acquire two 4x4 trucks and a number of night-vision goggles, which have enhanced, among other things, the agency's marijuana eradication performance.

According to Dailey, the agency can identify and locate a suspected grower using information from COURTNET, monitor nighttime activity with the goggles, pinpoint the grow area with GPS, notify other agencies via e-mail, and haul away seized evidence in the offroad vehicles.

The 4-wheel-drive trucks, Dailey says, also come in handy for other police operations, such as transporting inmates on work detail and patrolling in bad weather. When a heavy snowstorm prevented cruisers from navigating the roads this past winter, the trucks were not only used to perform normal patrol functions—one also

WEEDING OUT WEED . . . AND OTHER DRUGS

According to the website of the Wayne County, Kentucky, Sheriff's Office, the area is "well known for the copious amounts of marijuana grown in the county." Several times during the 1990s, the county was cited as the second largest growing area for marijuana in Kentucky. The sheriff's office has led the fight against the illegal drug in the county, leading the State in the number of plants cut by a local agency.

Marijuana has become the number one cash crop in Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia, which comprise the Appalachia High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), according to the website of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. These three States, with less than 4 percent of the total U.S. population, produced 34.5 percent of the domestic marijuana supply in 2003 (measured in total eradicated plants). Usage rates in the Appalachia HIDTA, however, are below the national average. This indicates that the majority of marijuana cultivated in the region is headed for markets in other areas

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was used to transport an injured elderly woman to the hospital.

In addition to providing 1033 Program assistance, RULETC maintains a mobile interactive, judgmental shooting simulator with a laser-guided shootback feature. Wayne County deputies have used the simulator to hone their use-of-force judgment and practice their shooting skills.

The simulator places law enforcement personnel in simulated real-time situations in which they have to react to a scenario as it unfolds, requiring split-second decisions as to whether or not to use deadly force.

“The system logs where and when an officer fires in relation to a perpetrator, providing feedback on accuracy and reaction time, and the shootback feature helps to reinforce the need to use available cover,” Dailey says. “The best part of the simulator is that the computer operator can vary a scenario to test an individual’s judgment in deciding whether or not to use deadly force. As important as accuracy is, correct judgment in deciding when to shoot is more important. The simulator helps develop this skill.”

Wayne County Sheriff’s Deputy Terry Davis credits use of the simulator with saving his life. While helping the sheriff’s department of adjacent Clinton County in a stolen truck incident, Davis set up a roadblock by parking his cruiser across the highway to stop the approaching vehicle. “I thought the driver was giving up, and I got out of my car. Then I thought I saw him raise a revolver, and I realized that I had forgotten my concealment.”

On instinct, he fired one shot and retreated behind his cruiser, planning to set up for a better shot. In the meantime, the suspect turned his vehicle around and sped off. Davis decided to resume the chase rather than fire again. The entire episode lasted no more than 10 seconds. “I responded to the threat like I had been trained to do and felt good about my ability to react to a deadly threat,” Davis says.

Davis has run through most of the simulator’s 500 scenarios at least once. Many of them take place in rural settings similar to Wayne County. Davis appreciates that he can use a weapon in the simulator that is like the one he uses on the job and that the self-study program allows him to proceed at his own pace. Davis even used his surplus laptop and accident investigation and reconstruction software to recreate the incident for his sheriff and fellow deputies.

Weeding Out Weed . . . and Other Drugs (continued)

and that the Appalachia HIDTA represents a major drug threat. In addition, much of this marijuana is grown on public land. Growers intrude on several national forests, as well as lands owned by the Tennessee Valley Authority. Public use of these areas has diminished because of the threat of violence from marijuana growers, but marijuana is not the only problem.

- The Appalachia HIDTA is experiencing a dramatic escalation in the methamphetamine threat. The number of methamphetamine labs dismantled in the region increased from 45 in 1999 to 474 in 2003.
- Cocaine in both powder and crack forms remains a significant drug of abuse in metropolitan and rural areas.
- Prescription drug seizures by Appalachia HIDTA personnel expanded dramatically from 4,706 dosage units in 1999 to 105,757 dosage units in 2003. The trafficking and illicit use of prescription drugs, especially the pain reliever OxyContin®, may well be the most significant drug problem aside from marijuana within the HIDTA.

For more information about the Appalachia HIDTA, as well as the other programs of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, visit www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov.

Wayne County Sheriff James Hill stresses to his staff the importance of training and using technology, Dailey adds. “RULETC exists to help agencies like the Wayne County Sheriff’s Office build their capacity, add to their resources, and meet their information and technology needs.”

RULETC, located in Hazard, Kentucky, is part of the National Institute of Justice’s National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center system. In cooperation with its technology partner, Eastern Kentucky University, the Center provides technology solutions to a historically underserved population—the Nation’s 13,000 rural, small town, and small county criminal justice agencies. For more information, call 866-787-2553 or e-mail ruletc@aol.com.

In addition to the 1033 Program, State and local law enforcement agencies can obtain excess Federal property at little or no cost through the 1033 Donation Program and the 1122 Program. For more information about any of these programs, access the Federal Property and Equipment Manual at www.justnet.org/virlib/InfoDetail.asp?intInfoID=170 or contact one of the facilities of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center system.

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This article was reprinted from the Fall 2005 edition of *TechBeat*, the award-winning quarterly newsmagazine of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center system, a program of the National Institute of Justice under Cooperative Agreement #2005-MU-CX-K077, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

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