



## Schaffer: Sheriff's Office saved more than \$1M in 2010

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CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE – Sheriff Gary Schaffer said that new initiatives and restructuring in the Cape May County Sheriff's Office have saved over \$1 million.

Schaffer delivered a report of his department's activities during 2010 to county freeholders, detailing numerous and diverse accomplishments.

"There's a lot that's accomplished here that people just don't realize," Schaffer said. "We don't just maintain prisoners, for example; we're also responsible to move them from place to place when necessary. Or we're serving people throughout the county with legal papers – the ordinary citizen may not know about things like this.

"And yet, we've actually reduced costs over the past two years by restructuring the chain of command and management responsibilities," he added.

Restructuring meant creating a couple new units, Schaffer noted, but instead of adding costs the move reduced them.

One example is prisoner transport, he said. Municipal police chiefs had approached him asking if Sheriff's officers could transport local prisoners to the county jail for them. That would leave two town officers on the street after each incident, Schaffer noted.

In response, he started a new 4-to-12 shift at the Sheriff's office, assigning those on the new shift to cover the transport function as well as serving warrants, checking on individuals on the county's electronic monitoring program, and occasionally serving at the Superior Court when court sessions lasted beyond the regular 4:30 p.m. closing time.

That change alone saved significant amounts in overtime, Schaffer said.

Not that overtime can be eliminated completely.

"In crisis areas, you can't scrimp," he said. "Or you might have a unique situation like a prisoner in the hospital for two weeks, and you must have an officer present there."

Other large savings were created by the "Alternative to Incarceration Program," Schaffer said, which had its first full year of operation during 2010.

After meeting with Superior Court and municipal court judges, as well as their clerks and administrators, he and his team fashioned a program that enables certain individuals to serve their time on an electronic monitor rather than in county jail.

Participants pay \$10 per day for electronic monitoring. For another \$2 a day, they're also eligible to participate in the "Sheriff's Labor Assistance Program" (SLAP), which assigns them work in county venues like Crest Haven Nursing Home, the cemetery, the road department and the animal shelter.

"The program reduced overcrowding, and it gives people who are not serious offenders a chance to stay out of jail," Schaffer said. "There are other benefits as well. An inmate serving 30 days in the center probably will lose his job, and his family will go on social support. With this program, he can keep his job."

At Crest Haven alone, during 2010, SLAP participants worked 1,471 seven-hour days, Schaffer said, typically in the facility's laundry or kitchen.

That created a \$358,000 savings for the county in labor costs, and another \$384,000 in what it would have cost to house each of the individuals at the correctional center – where the county spends approximately \$84 per day for each inmate.

Altogether, Schaffer said, the alternative program saved the county over a million dollars during 2010. Last year, more than 2,500 persons were in the program.

Meanwhile, the sheriff's staff has continued with its traditional tasks of housing inmates at the correction center, he said. During 2010, the prison population went as high as 298 and as low as 210 inmates.

Schaffer noted that, in light of the current budget crisis, his officers agreed to reopen their contracts during the most recent negotiations.

"Then you turn around and look at the amount of work they do – the number of people processed in and out of jail; 93,000 identification processes done during the year; the warrants team locking up 800-plus people and the list goes on."

Schaffer noted that the county correctional center employs some of the latest equipment and techniques, such as iris scanning and "TIP 411," which accommodates anonymous texting tips. Sheriff's officers even visited more than 2,000 local children last year in the MacGraw and Eddie Eagle programs.

As busy as his department is with current tasks, Schaffer said, he's also looking forward to some future improvements.

His department will be instituting a "flash brief" program, a county-wide notification system that will let residents know by e-mail of anticipated bridge closures, or any potential dangers. If there is an actual alert, those who sign up also will be texted a message.

County business owners are particularly excited about that program, Schaffer said, because it is going to enable the department to immediately notify businesses in surrounding communities whenever bad checks are being passed, making it more likely that a perpetrator will be caught.

Internet visitation also is being explored, Schaffer said. He had just reviewed some bids for that project before speaking with the Gazette.

"It's like a Skype program, enabling families to visit without having to go to the correctional center," he explained. "It would be outstanding for young kids, or for folks who live out of state."

That program, which also would accommodate professional visits from attorneys sitting at their offices, would cost around \$10 for a 20 minute visit.

Schaffer would like to see that program up and running by May.

"We're going to be the second in the country to do this," he said.

Asked what other factors contribute to his department's progress, Schaffer mentioned that he has a long-term familiarity with many of the people with whom he works.

"I've been in law enforcement in Cape May County for 38 years, and I've probably trained close to 100 percent of these people and worked with them day to day. So when it comes time to make management decisions you know them, you've seen the work ethic over a period of years," he said. "And they're to be commended from the bottom on up. They take the time to make recommendations, and that has brought us to where we are today."

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