

Sheriff explains budget

Editor's note: the following was submitted by Brown County Sheriff John Merchant

I wanted to take this opportunity to explain the details of my budget to the public, as many people do not realize the work load and responsibility these employees have to carry and the great liability we all must face each day.

The budget for the dispatch portion of the Sheriffs Office amounts to \$365,000. Taken out of this fund are the wages for 7 full time dispatchers as well as uniforms, training, repairs, updates, notification alternatives and other expenses vitally important to ensure that we are able to properly handle calls for service. Also, expenses for the high band tower on the northern edge of Hiawatha comes out of this fund. We dispatch not only for Brown County deputies, but Hiawatha PD, multiple fire departments, Squad 48, Town and Country ambulance and tribal entities and can contact and notify schools, county and township road crews etc. From January 1st of this year until April 30, dispatchers have taken more than 4,900 calls for service that require occurrences to be generated; dispatchers have estimated an additional 8,000-9,000 calls from individuals requesting road information, concerns of welfare, railroad concerns, follow-up case information including citizen assistance with subject identification, jail information, outside agency assistance, all court paperwork updates and entries, special event questions and general county-wide questions. With the high volume of calls we receive, our dispatch center could still use an additional employee. Many times we try to have 2 dispatchers on duty, but that is not always possible. What some folks need to realize is that these are 24 hour a day 7 day a week positions, when someone is ill or unable to come to work, these folks may work double shifts and they do so without complaint. This is a very highly stressful job and we are very fortunate to have these dedicated dispatchers working for Brown County.

On the jail side of the Sheriffs office there are 8 full time corrections officers and 3 part-timers. The budget is \$530,000. Wages, overtime, utilities, inmate food and health care, uniforms and equipment, jail car and transport expenses, medication, training for staff, supplies and misc. expenses are taken out of this account. Jailers are directly responsible for the care of inmates that are booked in to the Brown County jail. Their duties are many including booking the inmate in to the jail, making sure no contraband comes in to the facility, supervising inmates, cooking and serving meals, dispensing of medication, processing incoming and outgoing inmate mail, washing inmate clothing and bedding, escorting prisoners to court, documenting legal information and court dates for each inmate, random jail cell searches for contraband, arranging jail transports,

delivering and/or picking up inmates to and from different prisons, training, handling complaints, arranging visitations, addressing immediate health care needs of inmates, etc. With everything our jailers have to deal with, they do an amazing job.

The budget for the office side of the Sheriffs department is currently \$715,000. Taken out of this fund are the wages of the Sheriff, Undersheriff, 7 deputies, 2 part-time deputies, clerk and a part-time clerk. Additionally, 4 part-time courthouse security officers and expenses come out of this fund. This security measure was implemented by the Brown County Commissioners and is supervised by the Sheriff. Overtime, fuel, repairs, training, supplies, patrol vehicles, uniforms, ammunition, vehicle and deputy radios and upgrades, etc. also come out of this fund which usually amounts to approximately \$250,000 per year and is included in the \$715,000. This may seem like a lot of money, but with the changing times we have had to adopt different patrol strategies to keep up with current trends in criminal activity. One example is keeping deputies on the road patrolling our smaller towns in the county daily., sometimes more. Each deputy is required to fill out a log sheet each shift and document each town and time of patrol, mileage, calls handled, vehicle stops, arrests and citations etc. We have also had to increase overtime and fuel to allow for extensive patrol on US 36 and 75 HWYS due to road closure on I-29 north of St. Joseph. During the first 4 months of 2019, deputies have responded to more than 60 accidents, have made more than 1100 traffic stops--reckless driving complaints--check on motorists etc, and have over 500 civil process services in addition to many other duties they are required to perform. I am very proud of the extra effort our deputies put forth for the betterment of our county and its residents.

By having law enforcement presence, this in and of itself is a crime deterrent which reflects the KBI CRIME INDEX report for 2017. This shows Brown County has a very respectable reported crime rate of 5.1 occurrences per 1,000 residents per year and 3.1 property crime offenses per 1,000 residents per year. This is based on approximately 4882 county residents who reside outside the city limits of Hiawatha and Horton and does not include their statistics as they each have their own police departments. Based on the latest KBI report, only 14 other counties in Kansas has a lower crime rate than rural Brown County, and most of those counties have a much lower population rate than we do.

It is my opinion that these employees are underpaid for the amount of responsibility and work that is asked of them. We are the only county entity that works 24/7 rain or shine. When someone is sick or cannot make it to work, shifts have to be covered. We do not have the luxury of having holidays off to be with our families, these folks have to be at work. I know these are the jobs we have chosen, but there also needs to be some recognition for everything that these employees miss out on and what they sacrifice to make this county a better place. I share this sentiment for all military, emergency responders, etc. who dedicate

their lives for the benefit of others.

With over 30 employees at the Sheriffs office, I have the largest employees group of any other county department. I am very thankful for the hard-work, dedication and loyalty each employee has shown as well as our emergency responders. Please let me know if you have any questions.

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