

Sheriff clearing warrants backlog

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Staff Writer

Sheriff Ron Bateman has a "recipe for warrant reduction" in Anne Arundel County — and while he is short a few ingredients, he's already cracking some eggs to get the plan cooking.

Early yesterday morning, deputies served 37 warrants and arrested 30 people based on those warrants, as part of an effort to relieve a backlog of thousands of outstanding warrants.

"We were so busy that the sheriff and I were even transporting prisoners," said Maj. Rick Tabor of the county sheriff's office. The sweep, which is planned quarterly, is part of Sheriff Bateman's plan to decrease the county's backlog of thousands of warrants.

The sheriff said he inherited more than 12,000 unserved warrants when he was elected in November.

He said he's taking a multi-layered approach to eliminate the warrants that no longer need to be served, and to deliver those that do.

First he enhanced relationships with other agencies, such as the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration, Sheriff Bateman said.

The sheriff said he asked longtime friend Bill Donoho, director of investigations and security services at the state's MVA, for assistance to identify arrest warrants for people who are no longer living. The data was run through the Bureau of Vital Statistics.

As it turned out, more than 500 warrants were for people who have passed away, Sheriff Bateman said.

Clearing more than 800 warrants doesn't get the sheriff's department ahead, considering they get about

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1,000 new ones every month. But every little bit helps.

To take a bigger chunk out of the pile, Sheriff Bateman is working to clear old cases.

He said every other county in Maryland — through a Courts and Judicial Proceedings article — frequently disposes of old, nonviolent misdemeanor warrants.

Anne Arundel County hasn't done this for seven years. Clearing such unserved warrants would eliminate 4,000 to 5,000 from the list, Sheriff Bateman said.

So the state's attorney will look through the older warrants and get rid of those belonging to people they believe do not pose a threat.

For example, a woman may have failed to appear in traffic court back in the 1960s.

By now, that woman could be 75 years old and has no criminal record. This is the kind of warrant that could be cleared, the

sheriff said.

The sheriff has also jazzed up the county's Most Wanted program.

The names of unserved warrants are published in *The Capital* by alphabetical order. He also faxes district court dockets to the state's attorney's office.

The list of warrants is at X, Y and Z this month. Once the list is finished, it will be posted on the county's Web site in its entirety.

The sheriff will continue to list new unserved warrants in the newspaper. The newer warrants have more information than in the past and will hopefully net more tips from readers, he said.

The department also will continue their agreement with the MVA. People's licenses can be suspended if they don't turn themselves in.

Remaining ingredients

If Sheriff Bateman had his way — and more money in his grasp — he would create a prisoner transport team.

The team is needed, he said, to take some weight off of his deputies who spend hours driving throughout the state to do pick-ups.

The sheriff requested funding this year, but it was denied. He said he hopes to get it in the next fiscal year's budget.

"I'll wait my turn and try again," he said.

Sheriff Bateman also wants to add one deputy to each of his three warrant teams. The department needs the increase to keep up with the county's population growth, he said.

"When the number of people go up so do the warrants and summonses," he said.

The problem has been worse in the past. Back in 1994 there was a backlog of 16,000 unserved warrants. That's when the sheriff's office took over all warrants in the county in order to allow the county police department to focus on the emergency dispatch center and community policing.

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