UNITED FRONT

Trauma recovery team, Cleveland police partner to provide ‘immediate safety net of support’

In 2018, Cmdr. Brandon Kutz of the Cleveland Division of Police moved some new workers into the headquarters of his Fourth District.

They weren’t on the payroll, had no investigative experience and didn’t intend to patrol the streets of Cleveland’s most populous and violent district.

But the team of trauma specialists from the May Dugan Center had a purpose that Cmdr. Kutz and his officers could get behind: helping victims of violent crime heal.

“Police officers are quick to utilize a tool or process that makes sense and helps fulfill the mission of law enforcement,” Kutz said. “Sue was offering an opportunity to help victims be healthy and safe and more accessible to our detectives. This seemed a much-needed piece of the puzzle in providing meaningful service to the community.”

Sue is Sue Marasco, Ph.D., director of trauma recovery at the May Dugan Center. The center, founded in 1969, provides city residents a wealth of services, including help with emergency housing and food, employment training, counseling, training for parents, and community outreach.

The year before they joined detectives in the Fourth District, Marasco and the May Dugan team took

Continued on Page 6
while many in our state work from home and practice social distancing during the coronavirus pandemic, our safety forces don’t have those luxuries. Criminals are still out there, stealing, selling drugs and hurting innocents. People still need to be rescued from house fires, car crashes and flooding. And jails and prisons still need to be patrolled. These are jobs that thousands of Ohioans have signed up for, and they report for duty day after day, in spite of the risk of potentially deadly illness. That requires strength of will, as well as personal sacrifices and risk-taking above and beyond what is already dangerous work.

These officers have my unending gratitude. Of course, gratitude doesn’t go far when officers fall sick. My team and I have fielded calls from sheriffs, police chiefs and police academies worried about reinforcements should illness deplete their ranks. I share their concerns and, with the help of the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission and Academy, I have eased the return to work for retired officers in good standing. To sign up, officers who’ve been retired for less than four years merely need to approach the department they want to work for, and if their help is needed, that department will notify OPOTA.

On the other end of the spectrum, OPOTA has resumed State Certification Exams for cadets who have completed basic training. Extra care is being taken to maintain social distancing during the exam sessions, so that cadets and staff members aren’t put at risk. Unfortunately, basic training is not a process that adapts easily when a pandemic strikes. Cadets are required to attend 100% of their training, and that’s for good reason — to ensure they learn the techniques and tools that their lives, and others’ lives, will depend on. Cadets can’t simply watch a video and call it a day, as many other types of students are doing, because academy lessons are often hands-on, not conventional lectures. Still, staff members at OPOTC and OPOTA — which does not run its own basic academies — have provided the schools with topics that could be taught remotely. The goal is to prevent training from completely stalling where possible.

My team and I are not finished. We will continue to find ways to support law enforcement in this chaotic time.

In the meantime, please remember to take protective measures to reduce your chances of illness. Ohio residents need you more than ever.

Yours,

Dave Yost
Ohio Attorney General

School threat assessment training now available

The Ohio Attorney General’s Office has produced video training to help law enforcement officers work with schools to create threat assessment teams, a proven method of preventing school violence.

The teams work to identify problems for students and move to solve them. In the 11-part video training, school officials and law enforcement officers from throughout Ohio share how their teams have helped students in their districts. School resource officers, or other officers whose primary responsibilities involve school safety, may receive a $500 grant when they complete the training and agree to help form or participate in a school-based threat assessment team. The training videos and grant request can be found on the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway (OLEG).

Ten of the 11 videos — one is available to law enforcement only — are also available publishly at www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/threatassessment. Teachers, parents, counselors and all others who interact with students and schools are encouraged to learn the techniques, which are based on methods developed by the U.S. Secret Service and other experts.

To make that work, agencies that have chain-of-custody responsibilities for sexual assault evidence kits will be using a new online log, called the Ohio Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System.

“Nurses, police, lab workers and my office — we all have a duty to make sure we’re not compounding victims’ pain by leaving them in the dark,” Attorney General Dave Yost said.

An Ohio law passed in 2014 requires that all sexual assault evidence kits be tested for DNA within 30 days of law enforcement determining that a crime occurred, and a state law passed last year established the authority for the Attorney General’s Office to run online tracking of that process.

“We chose this system because it works well in other states, particularly Idaho, which developed it,” Yost said. “The online portal is easy for officers, nurses and lab workers to add kit details to, and the ease with which survivors can access those details means less phone tag for everyone involved.”

B

ew site will keep survivors informed

By this time next year, victims of sexual assault across Ohio should be able to anonymously check whether their examination kit evidence has been sent to a law enforcement agency or to a crime lab for testing.

To make that work, agencies that have chain-of-custody responsibilities for sexual assault evidence kits will be using a new online log, called the Ohio Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System.

Nurses, police, lab workers and my office — we all have a duty to make sure we’re not compounding victims’ pain by leaving them in the dark,” Attorney General Dave Yost said.

An Ohio law passed in 2014 requires that all sexual assault evidence kits be tested for DNA within 30 days of law enforcement determining that a crime occurred, and a state law passed last year established the authority for the Attorney General’s Office to run online tracking of that process.

“We chose this system because it works well in other states, particularly Idaho, which developed it,” Yost said. “The online portal is easy for officers, nurses and lab workers to add kit details to, and the ease with which survivors can access those details means less phone tag for everyone involved.”

For more information, contact

Eric Johnson at 614-995-4231 or Eric.Johnson@ohioattorneygeneral.gov.

B

asically, each time a hospital, laboratory, or police department or sheriff’s office sends a sexual assault evidence kit to another agency or receives one, a worker enters or scans the kit barcode into the website. Victims can use that code, given to them at the completion of their post-assault exam, to check the location of their evidence kit.

Victims will never need to enter personal information into the website, only the kit code, and the website log will not include victims’ names or other identifying details.

Law enforcement agencies can use the system to track how long kits have been in their custody and whether any are overdue for action.

“With a little extra work on our end, we can offer victims peace of mind that action is being taken in their cases,” Yost said. “And, for law enforcement, we can make sure that no DNA profile mistakenly goes uncollected, which is crucial — as we’ve seen DNA evidence solve many investigations and cold cases.”

As part of a pilot program, trainers from the Attorney General’s Office in February showed agencies and victim advocates in Akron, Delaware and Clark County how to use the system, which is scheduled to come online next month for the initial rollout group. Further training, set to take place in stages across the state, has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the hope is to complete statewide accessibility by March 31, 2021.
BECAUSE OF CORONAVIRUS CONCERNS, THE ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE FOLLOWED THE LEAD OF THE NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MEMORIAL IN CANCELLING THE OHIO PEACE OFFICERS’ MEMORIAL CEREMONY. BUT THAT DOESN’T MEAN WE SHOULD POSTPONE HONORING THE OFFICERS WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN 2019 TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF OHIO. HERE, WE PAY TRIBUTE TO THE THREE WE LOST LAST YEAR IN THE LINE OF DUTY.
In 2019, trials in Ohio resulted in death sentences for six people, the most since 2010 and a rare total for the decade, according to the 2019 Capital Crimes Annual Report.

The report, recently released by the Ohio Attorney General’s Office, details the cases of every person in Ohio sentenced to death in a state court or federal court since 1981.

Among them was George Brinkman, who last year was sentenced to die in Clayhagan and Stark counties, after he killed an elderly Lake Township couple and a North Royalton woman and her daughters, ages 18 and 21, in 2017.

Since 1981, Ohio has issued 349 death sentences to 335 persons. Fifty-nine have been executed, 102 have had their sentences commuted or overturned, and 30 died before they could be executed. Still on Death Row awaiting execution are 143 people.

The Capital Crimes Annual Report shows how the death penalty has been imposed less frequently as the years have passed.

In the most recent decade, an average of 3.6 people a year were sentenced to death. That compares with 14.3 people on average in the 1980s. 1985 brought the most death sentences: 24. By comparison, a total of 36 people received death sentences from 2010 to 2019, including just one each in 2017 and 2019.

### Violent Offender Registry reaches one-year mark

Ohio’s Violent Offender Registry has been “live” for a year and contains 8144 records.

The total includes 374 people still incarcerated and 3099 people who have actively registered their home address and vehicle information after being released from prison.

The database identifies people convicted of aggravated murder, murder, voluntary manslaughter, kidnapping and/or abduction in the hope of preventing them from committing another violent crime. Anyone convicted of such offenses after March 21, 2018, is required by law to report to his or her local sheriff’s office once a year for a decade and within three days of moving to a new address.

Maintained by the Ohio Attorney General’s Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the database is available to law enforcement officers.

The registry was created as part of Sierah’s Law, named in memory of Toledo resident Sierah Joughin, a 20-year-old college student abucted and killed in 2016 by a man who had been convicted of abducting another woman under very similar circumstances 25 years earlier. Justice for Sierah, a nonprofit group founded by Joughin’s family, championed the law.

“[It is my purpose to make sure that Sierah is remembered for the positive changes we’ve made and not for the tragic way she was taken from us],” said Tara Ice, Sierah’s aunt and president of Justice for Sierah.

“In those first crucial hours that Sierah was missing, law enforcement was able to access the sex offender registry, but we were shocked to find out that they did not have access to specific information on the people who have committed the most serious and violent crimes,” Ice said. “We knew at that moment that we had to make a change.”

Among other efforts, the group is advocating for registry laws in all other states and working with education leaders to incorporate Sierah’s Strong program, which teaches children self-awareness and self-defense, into curriculums for grades K-8.

“Self-defense, empowerment and knowledge,” Ice said, “are the first steps towards protecting our youth.”
Mark Your Calendar

Law Enforcement Conference

The 2020 Law Enforcement Conference is set for Sept. 14-15 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. Workshops are being developed, and nominations for awards were due early this month.


Help fight robocallers: Report junk calls

Illegal robocalls are autodialed calls aimed at getting you to pay for something or give away personal information. The Ohio Attorney General's Office is building cases against the bad actors who use them.

To help, answer questions about your call by texting ROBO to 888111 or visiting OhioProtects.org/robo.

REMEmBERING 3 OHIO HEROES

COVER STORY

NEW TOOL

AG starts system to track sexual assault evidence

TRAUMA TEAM, CLEVELAND PD PARTNER TO HELP VICTIMS

REMEMBERING WOODS, BREWER and DEL RIO gave their lives while working to build safer communities