

Night Patrol: John Newcomer protects Stinesville



Stinesville Town Marshal John Newcomer often helps the Monroe County Sheriff's Office on calls near Stinesville.

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Around 5:40 p.m., John Newcomer starts his patrol around Stinesville.

The first stop of this night is serving court papers at a house on Brighton Road, about three miles from the police department's location just past the elementary school.

Newcomer's tan SUV maneuvers out of the town proper, and seems to bounce on every bump in the road along the way.

He slows as he nears the house. "I think that was it," he says, pulling into a neighboring driveway.

"That's the biggest problem, you get out here and half the houses are missing numbers."

Newcomer and another deputy patrol the 0.11-square-mile town of Stinesville, trading shifts, and another deputy does computer work and helps with special events.

In recent years, the department's also picked up serving papers for the sheriff's department and patrol duties for the entire Bean Blossom Township. In return, Monroe County provides gas and insurance, a benefit to the department's shoestring budget.

Newcomer walks up to the door of the house and knocks. After a few minutes of waiting, he slips the papers inside the door.

Back in the car, Newcomer logs the drop on a laptop mounted in the front seat. The system is offline, right now, so the logs are simply an Excel document Newcomer made, but soon it will be connected to the new dispatch equipment.

The first stop of the night is over.



Stinesville Town Marshal John Newcomer uses a radar to check for motorists speeding on Stinesville Road. Newcomer said speeders often enter the town on Railroad Street. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

Listen to the audio story:
<https://soundcloud.com/the-herald-times/ride-along-with-the-stinesville-town-marshal>

minimum new equipment costs about \$1,000 per officer. Equipment — which includes weapons, a protective vest and a radio, among other things — is about \$4,400.

In August of 2014, the Monroe County commissioners agreed to cover \$4,209 in fuel and insurance for Stinesville police for help serving papers in the northwestern corner of the county.

“It’s worked very well. It is a good partnership,” Commissioner Patrick Stoffers said at the time.

The car Newcomer drives now is a hand-me-down; a newer hand-me-down car from the sheriff’s department will replace it soon.

“We’re trying to make do with what we can,” Newcomer said.

Patrolling dark roads

Back in town, it’s quiet. This night in December, Newcomer’s path around town changes slightly. The town made North Street a one-way, although residents have said they probably won’t abide by the mandate.

There are also more interesting parts to his patrol this time of year, with Christmas lights and blow-ups ornamenting lawns. His favorite is the Santa peeing twinkling lights on the roof of one downtown house.

A lot of times on patrols, Newcomer stops to shut the door of a car,

Small town

Newcomer takes a different way back to town, driving out Moon Road. It’s a county road, he says, though it might seem strange because the portion he’s driving on is mostly dirt. At some point, it was the main connection between Stinesville and Gosport.

Moon Road’s become a part of his patrol path, a place he could witness poaching.

So far, he hasn’t found anyone, but he still checks, just in case.

Most of what the Stinesville police deal with are self-generated traffic stops, averaging five or six a night. Officers might get a call to assist another agency; they might also get a call for service.

If that happens, it’s usually a domestic call, Newcomer said.

A good portion of the shift, though, falls to patrolling the 194-person

town and surrounding area.

“The county is extremely busy, so they don’t really have time to patrol,” Newcomer said.

The Stinesville Police Department is a three-person operation right now, with Newcomer as its interim town marshal.

“Interim” is what Newcomer will stay as marshal — to become a full-time marshal, he would need to complete more extensive, and costly, training.

Newcomer grew up in Vincennes, and moved to Bloomington in 1992. He’s worked in emergency response for 25 years, training dogs and serving as a reserve officer and firefighter around Indiana.

Because the department is so small, there’s no training officer on staff as in neighboring departments in Bloomington, Ellettsville and Monroe County.

“We’re a small department with a volunteer staff,” Newcomer said. “All of our officers have to have the basic training. Just because we’re volunteers/reserves doesn’t mean we’re undereducated or undertrained.”

Most training opportunities come from the neighboring departments, which usually offer opportunities to all law enforcement officers in the county.

The department’s budget for 2015 is about \$1,850. About 40 percent of it will go to police liability insurance, leaving about \$1,100 for everything else: auto repairs, gas, office supplies, etc.

“We have to buy all our own equipment, our own uniforms, basically anything we need,” Newcomer said.

The average bare-

accidentally left open by an unsuspecting resident.

"I enjoy it, even though it's quiet and we don't have much going on," Newcomer said. "We're not solving the big crimes and dealing with bad people all the time; we're still keeping people safe."

Serving papers

The second stop of the night takes Newcomer almost to the northern edge of Monroe County.

After the 20-minute journey, he eases his car into the driveway of a white mobile home, shining a spotlight on the door.

He turns the engine off and hears a sound that may be frightening to many when approaching a strange house: the bark of a dog.

For Newcomer, a longtime dog trainer, it's not a big deal, though, and he ambles up to the door and waits.

A woman eventually answers, but Newcomer returns to the car papers in hand.

"She said the person on the papers hasn't lived in the house in years," he says, putting the papers back in the car.

As he heads back into town, the scanner starts going off. The man Newcomer was trying to reach has made contact, thinking police were trying to arrest him.

He heads through town, crossing over the new bridge that connects Stinesville to Ind. 46 for the third service police provide: traffic stops.

He stops just off of Hedrick Road, hoping to catch speeders as they cross from Owen County into Monroe County.

"If you sit there long

enough, you can tell if someone's going normal limits or if they're speeding," Newcomer says.

He points a radar gun toward the road.

"The higher the pitch, the faster they're going," he says.

Traffic stops are one of the more dangerous things officers do. On some roads, there's not a wide shoulder to pull off onto, putting the officer getting out of the car in danger of being hit by passing cars. And officers never know what they are going to find in the car.

It's also a hit-or-miss job.

Sometimes Newcomer can stop and immediately catch a speeder; tonight, after 15 minutes of waiting, he comes up empty-handed.

"No one's speeding tonight," he said.

The same dozen streets

Newcomer heads back toward town.

He makes a quick stop and shines his spotlight on a pull-off near Phillip Rogers Memorial Bridge. He caught a woman sleeping in her car there several nights, but she's not there now.

Newcomer turns back into the downtown area, and starts circling the same dozen streets he did earlier.

"It gets monotonous," he admits. "There's enough roads in this township, I can float around to different areas."

"Sometimes, it's flat boring."

He turns down another street.

"I always have the peeing Santa to break the monotony."