



NEWSLETTER

SPRING EDITION 2014



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IN THIS ISSUE ...

Managing the Mental Health
Challenge — Virginia's
Sheriffs Respond 2

It's Time Again for National
Drug Take-Back Day in
Virginia 2

Applications for 2014
Virginia Sheriffs' Institute
Scholarships Now
Available 3

Like VSI On Facebook! 3

Stay Safe and Sound While
Enjoying a Beautiful Virginia
Spring 3

Message from
John W. Jones 4



Managing the Mental Health Challenge — Virginia's Sheriffs Respond



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MANAGING THE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGE — VIRGINIA'S SHERIFFS RESPOND

As the voice for all matters relating to the functions of our Sheriffs and Deputies, the Virginia Sheriffs' Association (VSA) takes a leading role for public safety in our commonwealth. VSA was very active in the 2014 session of the Virginia General Assembly, seeking appropriate levels of funding for critical public safety needs and for funding of public safety initiatives.

Virginia's Sheriffs are an important part of the legislative effort and are recognized by members of the General Assembly because the office of sheriff is an elected office and is representative of all of Virginia, unlike other law enforcement organizations, that are neither elected, nor represents 100% of Virginians. *Everyone* in Virginia has a sheriff.

Among the most pressing initiatives for public safety this year was addressing the problem of mental health services in Virginia. There are more than 6,000 mentally ill people confined in local jails, half of which are seriously mentally ill. While there is clearly a need to incarcerate those that have committed crimes, we have many people confined in our jails that are there because they are sick, not because they have committed illegal acts.

Virginia jails have become mental institutions by default. Many sheriffs have employed mental health professionals to the extent possible and have managed a jail population intended for a medical facility. Virginia's mental health system is difficult for average citizens to understand

and navigate. Imagine having a loved one locked in jail because there are no medical beds available – *something which unfortunately happens every day.*

Public awareness of this issue increased greatly in Virginia as a prime matter of concern after the unfortunate events involving Virginia Senator Creigh Deeds and his son last November 19th. The previous day, Gus Deeds, while under emergency custody, had undergone evaluation by mental health professionals, who released him after the legally allowed observation period of six hours expired. Tragically, the next day Gus attacked his father with a knife, seriously wounding Sen. Deeds, before taking his own life.

The VSA was very engaged with a number of members of the General Assembly, including Senator George Barker and Delegate Ben Cline to craft legislation that ensured that no one would ever again be released who are in need of treatment or a danger to themselves or others.

The bill, which is on the way to the Governor's desk for signature at this writing, provides for a registry of available mental health beds and mandatory admission to a state mental health facility at the end of eight hours if no other beds are found.

Sheriffs are an integral part of this process and were honored to work on a solution to this emotionally charged issue as it progressed through the legislative process.

IT'S TIME AGAIN FOR NATIONAL DRUG TAKE-BACK DAY IN VIRGINIA

As highlighted in the previous issue of the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute Newsletter (see "*Virginia Law Enforcement Agencies Take Part in National Drug Take-Back Day*"), law enforcement agencies across Virginia will once again be participating

in the National Prescription Drug Take-Back Initiative. This year the program, to encourage our communities to properly dispose of prescription drugs, will take place on April 26, 2014.

(continued on pg.3)

Drug Take Back Day (continued)

VSI is proud to serve as a strong partner in this important effort to keep dangerous pharmaceuticals from misuse and abuse, as well as preventing trace contamination of our water resources. To find out more about this important program and where to participate, please visit http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/.

APPLICATIONS FOR 2014 VIRGINIA SHERIFFS' INSTITUTE SCHOLARSHIPS NOW AVAILABLE

One of the many benefits the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute offers to our community is our scholarship program. This award – which is funded by generous VSI supporters like you – is granted to full-time or part-time students majoring in criminal justice and attending a Virginia state college or university. With the help of loyal members like you, we've awarded hundreds of scholarships to Virginia youths with an aspiration to serve their fellow citizens in law enforcement-related careers.

Scholarship applications may be downloaded from our website or picked up in your local Sheriff's office. In addition to the application, students must

Help us reach 500 likes



Tell your friends to find us at:
facebook.com/vasheriffsinstitute

LIKE THE VIRGINIA SHERIFFS' INSTITUTE ON FACEBOOK!

Do you have a Facebook account? So do we! This spring, the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute has set a goal of reaching 500 "likes" on our Facebook page, and we'd really appreciate your "electronic approval" as well! Please visit our Facebook page today and help us reach 500 likes at www.facebook.com/vasheriffsinstitute!

STAY SAFE AND SOUND WHILE ENJOYING A BEAUTIFUL VIRGINIA SPRING

The winter snow and ice may be gone for another year, but spring brings its own safety concerns, along with the warmer weather. Whatever the season or weather, it's a good idea to understand how to keep yourself and your family safe, so here's a list of helpful tips to ensure your new season is a healthy and happy one!

- ✓ It's a good idea to keep exterior doors locked at all times. Even if you are on the property, if you are not within visual range of an entrance, it should be kept secured, such as locking your front door and garage when you are working in the back yard. And always make sure to lock your doors when leaving, even if you only intend to be away for a brief time.
- ✓ Be sure to return items used outside to their proper storage places when finished using them, especially ladders and tools which could be used by an

intruder to facilitate entry into your home. It's also a good idea to lock outbuildings such as garages and sheds to prohibit entry to unauthorized persons.

- ✓ After opening sliding doors and windows to enjoy the fresh spring air in your home, be sure to lock them securely before retiring for the evening. The installation and use of motion sensitive lights is also a great way to assure no one approaches your home's entrances during darkness without being illuminated.



(continued on pg.4)

PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM VSI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOHN W. JONES



After a cold, snowy winter in Virginia, it's a great pleasure to once again welcome spring's arrival here at the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute!

I hope you made it safely through the cold weeks of winter, and are preparing to enjoy all the possibilities that another beautiful spring will bring to our lovely commonwealth. With the warmer weather, our communities awaken

with outdoor activities, from the enjoyment of recreational gatherings such as picnics, festivals, and sports to the return of gardening, spring cleaning, and yard work.

But whatever the season, it's always a good idea to keep in mind commonsense tips for staying safe and secure. In our spring 2014 issue of the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute newsletter, we've compiled some simple but effective measures you and your family can take to make your new season enjoyable and safe.

The men and women of the Virginia's Sheriff's offices are committed to keeping our communities safe regardless of the time of year, and just as they strive to keep our neighborhoods safe rain or shine, the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute stands ready throughout the year to look out for *them*.

Whether working with our local leaders and citizens to keep our communities safe, or being there to provide support to the families of officers who lay down their lives in the line of duty, the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute exists to serve – and it's all made possible by your support.

On behalf of everyone here at the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute, thank you again for your steadfast support – I hope you have a safe and happy spring!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John W. Jones".

John W. Jones, Executive Director
Virginia Sheriffs' Institute
701 East Franklin Street, Suite 706
Richmond, VA 23219

Spring Safety *(continued)*





- ✓ Guard against possible home improvement scams. A good policy is to only receive contractor services from a reputable business you have contacted yourself.



- ✓ If a utility worker comes to your home to perform service, it's a good idea to request identification. You can also call the company represented to confirm that the individual is indeed a legitimate employee.
- ✓ Always remember to roll up your vehicle's windows, remove any valuables which may tempt theft, and securely lock the vehicle's doors even if it is parked in your driveway.
- ✓ Lastly, being a thoughtful member of your community is one of the best ways to deter crime and keep your neighborhood safe. Be on the lookout for suspicious activity and help keep a watchful eye when neighbors are away. Together, we can all make a difference – let's enjoy another beautiful spring season in Virginia!

We Want to Hear from You ...

Drop us a note, give us a call, or send us an email.

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The Virginia Sheriffs' Institute solicits articles and comments from associate members of the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute for inclusion in this newsletter. Articles and comments should be directed to: John W. Jones, Executive Director, Virginia Sheriffs' Institute, 701 East Franklin Street, Suite 706, Richmond, VA 23219-2512, or phone (804) 225-7152.

The Virginia Sheriffs' Institute does not solicit donations by telephone.