

School Police...from Page 1A

will employ Deyton as police officers. Chad Berry and Jeff chief over three school resource McConnell have already been

tapped as SROs for the new police force.

Berry worked previously for UCSO Narcotics before transitioning to the schools as an SRO, and McConnell ran animal control for the sheriff's office.

Chief Deyton said he expects to hire a third SRO by the August school board meeting.

The police department will have no role to play in disciplining students, but instead will work to enforce the laws of the state of Georgia while promoting positive campus culture through proactive engagement in the schools.

"Our guys are going to be interacting with the schools," said Deyton. "They're going to be on the inside during class times, class changes, cafeteria time, high traffic times. We're going to be visible, and we're going to interact with the faculty, the staff, the kids. We're going to make it a good thing, basically.

"If the kids have got a problem, we want them to be assured that they can come and speak with us if they need any help or anything, the same with the teachers and staff."

The police department will also make use of two full-time security officers, one at the guard shack at Union County High and another at Woody Gap School, though the position at Woody Gap is still in the process of being filled.

Ginger Carey, another former employee of the sheriff's office, will work as the criminal agency coordinator for the new department, performing the clerical duties of the office.

In the July 17 monthly school board meeting, Union County Probate Judge Dwain Brackett swore Deyton, Berry



Judge Brackett swearing in Chad Deyton, Chad Berry and Jeff McConnell as the inaugural members of the Union County Schools Police Department.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

and McConnell in as officers of the newly minted police department.

Right now, the board office and Chief Deyton are working to secure all the equipment the department will need to be fully operational.

The school board approved funding for the new department in a July 12 called board meeting, voting to amend the FY19 school budget by \$329,371.03.

Startup costs associated with the new department total \$579,352.27 in its first year.

Departmental salaries and benefits come to \$379,852.27, which includes overtime hours for special events, FICA taxes, retirement funding, health insurance, the Peace Officers' Annuity & Benefit Fund and more.

Other costs associated with the first year include the initial purchase and outfitting

of vehicles, police equipment, K-9 equipment, continuing education, etc.

Moving forward, the police force will cost about \$454,000 yearly.

The quick turnaround on the new police department comes on the heels of the school board approving its FY19 budget in June, which included an SRO budget of approximately \$250,000 for personnel supplied by the sheriff's office.

On top of the \$250,000 in SRO salaries, the sheriff's office was requesting additional money for transportation moving forward.

After its first year, the campus police department will cost roughly \$100,000 more than projected costs to secure deputies on loan from the sheriff's office, with the added benefit of having a police force dedicated solely to the

protection of school students, faculty, staff and property.

The school board also adopted, in its July 12 called meeting, a new policy aimed at arming school security officers to supplement the campus police department.

The policy is called "Possession of Weapons by Employees," and it will allow Superintendent Hill and the board to authorize certain personnel to possess or carry weapons at the schools.

Hill stated that, at this time, it is his intent that only P.O.S.T. certified security officers carry weapons based on this policy, though any information regarding what employees have been authorized to carry firearms is not subject to the Open Records Act.

The police department will be headquartered at the board office.

Cook...from Page 1A

burglaries is a man named Jared Adair, 37, of Blairsville, according to the sheriff's office.

Adair was arrested in January and charged with three counts of burglary in the first degree, two felony counts of theft by taking and two misdemeanor counts of theft by taking, according to the sheriff's office.

As previously reported, three of the Jan. 11 burglaries connected to Cook and Adair occurred in the Town Creek School Road area, and the other happened off Old Blue

Ridge Highway, according to the sheriff's office.

"One of the burglaries was off Old Bald Mountain Road, and one of the caretakers of the residence caught the suspects as they were leaving," said Lt. Osborn at the time. "He followed the vehicle and called 911."

The caretaker turned Good Samaritan kept on the trail of the burglars, but before deputies could arrive, the burglars pulled into a residence on Trackrock Church Road and switched vehicles.

At this point, the Good Samaritan alerted the deputies to the vehicle change and decided to end his pursuit.

"He didn't follow them after that because he felt it was too dangerous, which was smart," said Lt. Osborn. "So, we put a lookout on the second vehicle, and we found that vehicle across the road from

another burglary that occurred later on that afternoon, the fourth that day."

Both vehicles used during the commission of the burglaries were impounded, and search warrants turned up evidence from the scenes of all four burglaries.

"We have recovered all stolen items except for two firearms," said Lt. Osborn, adding that a stolen camper was recovered from the residence where the vehicle swap occurred on Trackrock Church Road. "That residence belonged to a Tracy Lynn Cook."

Added Lt. Osborn: "The other vehicle that they left in at the Old Bald Mountain Road residence was a Jeep Liberty pulling a trailer, and it was full of stolen stuff."

The suspects were caught on security footage at one of the residences on Jan. 11, according to Lt. Osborn.

Search...

from Page 1A

according to the sheriff's office.

Once it was determined that the group would not be making it back before dark, area first responders were called out to assist in the search for them, according to the sheriff's office.

A command post was established at the intersection of Georgia 180 and SR 180 Spur, according to the sheriff's office.

The searchers consisted of personnel from the following agencies:

Towns County Fire and Rescue, Towns County EMS, Towns County Sheriff's Office, Georgia State Patrol, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Georgia Wildlife Resources Division, Georgia State Patrol Aviation Unit, Georgia Department of Corrections, Blairsville Police Department, Union County Fire and Rescue, and Union County Sheriff's Office.

The group had separated in the forest due to one of its members experiencing some medical difficulties while walking out, according to the sheriff's office.

During the early morning hours, two members of the group made it back and reunited with first responders, according to the sheriff's office.

After daylight on Sunday morning, the other members were located, and the member experiencing medical difficulties was airlifted by a GSP Rescue Chopper to a landing zone established on Georgia 180, according to the sheriff's office.

That same member was then taken for further evaluation, according to the sheriff's office.

At this time, the name of the group member with the medical difficulties is being withheld until family members are notified, though the medical difficulties do not appear to be life threatening, according to the sheriff's office.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office and the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office would like to thank everyone involved in searching throughout the night for those who were lost in the Chattahoochee National Forest.