



ERIC HARTLEY

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Little time to chase bad guys

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HARTLEY

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he sees the man.

It's a typical start to a day — and an illustration of the job's frustrations. At most of the homes the deputies visit, either there's no answer or the wanted person is not there. They make a handful of arrests, but by 9:40 a.m. each member of the team is called off to other duties.

"We're basically done now," Sgt. Rhodes says with a shrug as he stands in a driveway on Arundel on the Bay Road after a routine arrest. It's the last time the team will be together today.

The deputies separate to perform perhaps their least favorite task: picking up prisoners who are about to be released but have an open warrant in Anne Arundel County for another crime.

They're still doing their job, making arrests. But the hours they function as an armed taxi service could clearly be better spent. They have to drive anywhere in the state where someone with a county warrant might be. Deputy Reio spends close to half this day driving to Hagerstown and back.

The warrants backlog became an issue in last year's campaign, with then-sheriff George F. Johnson IV drawing criticism for it during his losing run for county executive. Sheriff Ron Bateman's opponent said he wasn't the right man to tackle the warrants since he'd been Sheriff Johnson's right-hand man for three years.

On a good day, a warrants team might make a dozen arrests. That's why Sheriff Bateman wants to hire six deputies and buy more cars

to create a "transport team," leaving the warrants teams free to track down more offenders.

At a cost of \$460,000, the proposal didn't make it into the budget this year, but he said he's going to keep pushing for it, or for hiring a private security firm to do the transports.

When the deputies do have time to go knocking on doors, they're often greeted with half-truths or outright lies. Family members often cover for wanted people, and the deputies respond with appeals to do the right thing — "Tell him to turn himself in; it'll look better" — and subtle cajoling.

"This isn't going to go away. We're going to come back and knock on your door at bad times," Deputy Andre warns a woman who's vague about the whereabouts of her daughter, a convicted thief.

At an apartment complex, there are warrants for several Hispanic men. After repeatedly asking one man in his underwear for "identificación," the deputies decide they have their man. The mug shot sure looks like him.

But eventually the man, who seems to speak better English than he let on, coughs up a consular card. It's not him.

Meanwhile, a state database has given a possible new address in Severn for Mr. Green, the manslaughter suspect. With prisoner transports, the team has no time today to check it out.

As of yesterday, the warrant still hadn't been served. But tomorrow, Warrants Team 1 starts its night shift.

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The day starts at sunrise, an ungodly hour calculated to catch people before they leave for work — or even before they get up.

Fueled by coffee and dressed in jeans and sneakers, four plainclothes members of Warrants Team 1 start another work day for the county Sheriff's Office.

Theirs is a largely invisible, but crucial, job in the criminal justice system. Close to 1,200 new arrest warrants are issued every month, either for new charges or probation violations.

And the job of finding those people falls to three teams of sheriff's deputies. They're not always successful, as the backlog of more than 11,000 unserved warrants — some stretching back decades — attests. But they take pride in getting the most dangerous people off the streets.

On this morning last week, the top target is Emmanuel Green, an Annapolis man charged with vehicular manslaughter. Sgt. Chris Rhodes, who heads the team, picks him out as he flips through the day's stack of warrants in the basement of the county courthouse. Attached to each warrant is a basic profile of the defendant and his crime, with a mug shot if available.

The team's four unmarked cars pull up on Lafayette Avenue about 7 a.m. Sgt. Rhodes and Deputy Larry Davis walk around the back in case Mr. Green tries to run, while Deputies Chris Reio and Brian Andre take the front.

There's no answer, but Sgt. Rhodes talks to a neighbor out walking his dog. He says he often sees the man outside. Sgt. Rhodes hands him a business card and tells him to call if

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