

Deputies nab 30 in warrant sweep

9,696 warrants remained unserved in August

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County sheriff's deputies arrested 30 people on 33 outstanding warrants Monday during a countywide sweep.

The Columbus Day sweep was timed to require almost no overtime, and was just the latest operation undertaken by the department as it works to chip away at a nearly 10,000-warrant backlog.

Sheriff Ron Bateman, the organizer of several innovative stings designed to trick people into turning themselves in to police, noted how that backlog stood at 13,584 the day before he took office in December 2006. It stood at 9,696 in August, the last time he received a count.

"This is the best thing to happen to me since the birth of my children," he said yesterday referring to the backlog. "This is better than I ever thought it would be."

He praised the 3,888-warrant reduction and stressed how his office receives and serves 800 to 1,000 new warrants every month. Some of those warrants cannot be served.

The bulk of the backlog reduction, however, came from reviewing paperwork and deleting old and outdated warrants — not from serving warrants.

The Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration helped kill more than 300 warrants after determining the people were dead. And State's Attorney Frank Weathersbee nixed another 3,542 non-violent, misdemeanor warrants after personally reviewing them and determining they were too old to prosecute.

"They are not provable cases. ... They are from more than a decade ago," said Mr. Weathersbee, explaining most of those cases involved people from out of state who were charged with shoplifting or driving while their license was suspended. "I hate for people to think they got away with something, but there really isn't much I can do about it."

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SWEEP

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Sheriff Bateman, who ran for office promising to reduce the backlog, scheduled the sweep for Monday because it was a federal holiday. The courthouse was closed, so he was able to use deputies who normally provide security there, to serve warrants on the street.

"I got a bigger bang for my buck," he said, noting how his annual overtime budget was slashed from \$184,000 to \$134,000 in July.

"I'm not going to let that minimize my efforts," he said.

Deputy Harry Neisser, a spokesman for the department, said deputies tried to serve more than 150 warrants Monday morning from 6 a.m. to noon, going to the individuals' homes and jobs. They nabbed 30.

"You strike out more than you actually get," said Sheriff

Bateman, explaining how difficult it is to catch some suspects.

Extra court commissioners and county booking officers worked that morning to help process the arrests, Sheriff Bateman said.

Most of the people who were arrested Monday faced misdemeanor traffic and criminal charges. Nineteen of the 30 defendants were wanted on warrants for failing to appear in court.

Sheriff Bateman said it is important to arrest those people because "they made the choice to ignore the law." He said that if police arrest someone earlier in their criminal career, that person might turn his life around sooner than later.

"It's well worth the effort to get people for these smaller crimes," he said.

Sheriff Bateman added that most warrants in the backlog are for misdemeanor property

and traffic crimes — not violent felonies.

During his first 22 months in office, Sheriff Bateman has organized several creative stings to help catch those criminals who don't want to be caught.

Last October, his department sent letters to 500 people with outstanding warrants saying that a computer error meant there was a \$572.26 tax refund waiting for them at a state office building. Forty people showed up, allowing deputies to clear 54 warrants.

And on Valentine's Day, deputies disguised themselves as flower delivery men to nab another 12 suspects.

Sheriff Bateman, who jokingly refers to himself as "Batman" on occasion, promised more such stings later this year.

"Batman and company still have more things in the works," he said.

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