How Motocross Will Change Our County's Criminal Justice System

Bateman
Sheriff
e Arundel
County

otocross is a sport that leads to many injuries :ter how good you just can't be avoided. e who has ever rid- ows this painful but the fun of it all ou ridding. Once blood, it's a sport ver seem to grow Sorry, Mom. I have tunate or unfortu- easure of riding my :e at the Pastrana nd, which as you now has produced er of injuries to y and many others e years. Just watch episodes of "Nitro Oddly enough, my jury may end up g the face of our l justice system in undel County and Maryland.

Saturday afternoon I was riding moto- th my son, Zach- ind Travis' house, when my front tire rolled over a softball-size rock, which had emerged from the ground in the middle of a sharp left-hand turn. With my left leg off the foot peg and fully extended during the maneuver, the bolder caused the motorcycle to shift abruptly, causing me to place my boot on the ground to maintain balance and keep from falling. The rapid, violent twisting motion from placing my foot on the ground snapped the ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) in my knee in a split second.

Not long after this injury, I underwent surgery by Dr. Thomas Harries to replace the ACL in my left knee. Not long after the procedure came the all-too-painful physical therapy sessions needed for a successful recovery. Then, one day, it happened. One morning on the way to work in Annapolis, I received a text message reminding me of my morning physical therapy session. I had completely forgotten the appointment and failed to have it placed

on my daily calendar. Not good. With that, I turned my car around and headed for Millersville to endure the multitude of painful exercises.

As I sat in the lobby waiting to be called, I thought how beneficial the text was in reminding me of my appointment. Then the light went off. What if someone in the judicial system could notify a person with a pending criminal or traffic case of the date, time and location of their court date via text, email or voice message? I thought, perhaps, just as I was reminded, so could someone about an upcoming court date. As a result, the birth of the Automated Court Date Notification Program began.

There are those who purposefully miss court and there are those who simply forgot (as I did) or moved to a different address and never received their summons. (Note: The United States Postal Service does not forward district court mail. The court has to be notified of a change of address in order for a summons to be sent to the correct address.)

Remember last month's article where I wrote how 70 percent of all arrest warrants in our county are for people who fail to appear (FTA) for minor offenses. I am confident that if we could obtain someone's cellphone or home phone (if used) or email address, the courts could send out reminders of court dates to individuals, just as the vendor did for my therapist. This would surely reduce the growing number of FTA warrants, save the courts and my office a lot of time and money, and allow my deputies to prioritize their workload and focus on apprehending more serious offenders.

A few weeks after my painful visit, I pitched my idea to Chief Judge John Morrissey. Judge Morrissey had recently been named chief judge of all the district court judges in Maryland. He loved it! I next pitched it to the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention for funding of the program, and they too embraced the idea, recognizing the many cost- and time-saving values of this service.

Judge Morrissey is actively working with members of Stanford University to develop a computer application to perform the functions needed for the Automated Court Date Notification Program. Once this proprietary application is in hand, bids will go out to vendors to launch this service. We hope to see this innovative service, born from personal injury, become the tool that impacts the ever-growing number of FTA arrest warrants. Tentatively, our target kickoff date is early 2018. I will keep our *Voice* readers posted as we draw closer and, of course, publish the results. Sometimes you just never know what spawns innovation.