

Take Note: Special Arrest Warrant Reduction Initiative

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office has taken great pride in developing unique methods to reduce the number of arrest warrants in Anne Arundel County. Besides traditional methods, we have initiated creative programs designed to reduce the number of arrests; conducted large-scale operations; showcased the work of people on the "Anne Arundel Most Wanted" program; and created a new kind of law that allows a wanted person's arrest to be suspended until his or her arrest warrant has been

the most prominent of the Sheriff's Office service of arrest. Many people do

not understand what that entails, where arrest warrants originate and what the majority of them are for. Let me explain. Arrest warrants originate primarily from the district and circuit courts, and from the Commissioner's Office, after first receiving an application for a warrant from an officer or deputy sheriff.

Let's be clear, warrants are not issued by deputies or officers. Once a warrant is issued, it is sent to the Sheriff's Office so that a deputy can locate the person and make the arrest. We are the clearing house for all Anne Arundel County warrants. For example, if a county police officer investigates the break-in of your home and learns the identity of the thief, the officer or detective would submit a warrant application to the Commissioner's Office for a particular bad guy. If the commis-

sioner issues a warrant, that warrant is sent directly to the Sheriff's Office. It then becomes our responsibility to seek out and arrest the person.

Arrest warrants received by my office include both misdemeanor and felony charges. They range from the most minor of shoplifting cases to extremely dangerous crimes such as armed robbery, rape and murder. The public should understand that apprehending someone for even the most minor of crimes can be dangerous. All too often, someone in our profession is gunned down for a minimal charge. Simply put, a wanted person is unpredictable.

These are just the facts, ma'am. To date, Anne Arundel County has approximately 11,000 open arrest warrants. But don't let that number alarm you. The sky is not falling, as some would

have you believe. When I first came into office, we had 13,584 open warrants. What is sad is the steady increase in warrants received each month. In 2006, we received 600 to 800 new warrants monthly. Now, we receive 1,000 to 1,200 new warrants. Unfortunately, we have no control over that, at least not at this point, until the second stage of our plan is implemented.

It's comforting that 70 percent of all warrants are for people who have committed minor offenses but have failed to appear (FTA) in court. We call those FTA warrants. The remaining 30 percent consist of other misdemeanor charges, serious theft and drug cases, and a small number of serious violent warrants. It's my mandate that our deputies first focus their attention on the violent criminals, which they do with great vigor.

Feel safe knowing your Sheriff's Office is relentless in its approach to catching violent offenders. Our philosophy is this: It's not if but when we catch someone.

Recently, we devised a two-part strategy designed to reduce the growing number of FTA warrants. The first strategy is an FTA warrant reduction program, which will kick off on June 23 from 9:00am to 3:00pm. It involves our partnering with the Office of the Public Defender, the States Attorney's Office, and Parole & Probation Office. On this particular Friday, individuals who have an outstanding warrant for failure to appear for a minor offense will be able to come to the Annapolis District Court building (located at 251 Rowe Boulevard in Annapolis), meet with a public defender representative and have their warrant withdrawn.

They will then be issued a new court date to appear for their original offense. We feel this second-chance opportunity is a great way for people to avoid being arrested, perhaps get their life back on track and begin to reduce the numbers of minor warrants. Let me point out one thing to our readers: This is not a sting.

I am committed to doing what is necessary to rid ourselves of these minor FTA warrants. In fact, if you would like to see whether you have an outstanding warrant and qualify for this June 23 program, call me directly at 410-222-1380. I will personally tell you whether your circumstance meets our criteria, or I will help you with any other outstanding legal matters.

Stay tuned for the second part of our innovative two-part warrant reduction strategy.