

HENNEPIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

News Release



Media Contact:
Lisa Kiava
(612) 919-5918

Hennepin County Sheriff's Office Suburban Juvenile Initiative

Effort begins its third year of focusing on active juvenile warrants

April 23, 2010 (MINNEAPOLIS) – A 16-year-old boy with a prior history of assault was arrested by Hennepin County Sheriff's Office deputies earlier this month. The deputies recovered a loaded 357-magnum revolver from the teenager's pocket. The deputies had been warned by another law enforcement agency that this teen is typically armed. The 16-year-old was transported to the Hennepin County Juvenile Justice Center.

Later that same day, the deputies arrested another 16-year old boy on a probation warrant for assaulting two people and threatening to kill another person in high school. He was also transported to the juvenile center.

By the end of the day-long sweep, the deputies have arrested 14 juveniles who were wanted on active warrants. Their backgrounds vary widely – some are persistent runaways who need the court to determine where they should live if there are serious problems in their home. Others are juveniles who face charges of aggravated robbery, assault, weapons possession, or other crimes.

These are the types of warrants that deputies on the Suburban Juvenile Initiative (SJI) typically handle each week as they locate and arrest juveniles with warrants throughout Hennepin County. The team is part of the Sheriff's Office Warrant Unit and this month, SJI begins its third year of operation – conducting sweeps of juvenile warrants.

"I have arrested juveniles as young as age ten on very serious charges," said Deputy Ken Hall, who leads SJI, "Those are the kids who usually have known nothing but violence in their lives."

Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek developed SJI to make a concentrated effort to seek out and arrest juveniles with warrants in Hennepin County in order to provide consequences and accountability to juveniles. Since SJI's inception in April 2008, SJI has conducted weekly field operations. **By the end of its second year of operations, SJI has made about 600 juveniles arrests.**

"When I see the large number of arrests and the backlog of warrants, I believe it's an indication that our entire community can do more to prevent kids from getting into trouble in the first place," said Sheriff Stanek. "But at the same time, these arrest numbers also demonstrate that SJI is a necessary tool to remove violent youth from schools and neighborhoods." In the past

two years, SJI has sought 816 juveniles, arrested 601, and 83 youth have turned themselves in after being sought. They have confiscated marijuana, 14 guns, five knives, counterfeiting materials, and nearly 200 rounds of ammunitions.

SJI has developed many working relationships throughout Hennepin County and surrounding areas. Probation officers and school resource officers work with Deputy Hall and SJI on juvenile cases every week.

"My priority is to be available to the school and that means I need to be in the school building so it's extremely helpful to have another law enforcement officer available to search the community for a youth who is wanted on a warrant," said Brooklyn Park Police Detective Emily Haywood, school resource officer at Champlin Park High School. "With a school community of 3000, we can't run the risk of a student returning to campus when they are a threat to safety."

Though the SJI team typically locates juvenile offenders in private residences, they also make arrests in middle schools and high schools throughout the county. Deputy Hall works with school resource officers to avoid classroom disruptions and maintain the security of the school.

"Deputy Hall has a good rapport with kids and he knows how the schools function," said Haywood, "He's been a really valuable resource."

Deputy Hall and SJI team members also work with professionals within the criminal justice system. In recent years, there have been efforts in place to reduce the number of bench warrants issued to juveniles because they have failed appear in court.

When a juvenile misses their court date, they may receive a bench warrant for their arrest. Now, Juvenile Probation volunteers call juveniles and their parents to remind them of upcoming court appearances. In 2009, Hennepin County expanded the calling program because it has been successful in reducing bench warrants and overall juvenile detention rates.

In addition, if Deputy Hall locates a youth who failed to appear in court, he may decide not to arrest that juvenile, if certain criteria are met.

"When I find the juvenile, I can make another court date for them on the spot," said Deputy Hall.

This flexibility in the system allows SJI to focus on higher priority cases and make arrests for warrants that involve violent youth.

In the past two years, Deputy Hall and the SJI team have seen trends and typical patterns among young offenders. He estimates about half of the youth with active warrants are connected to a gang – they are a member, an associate, or their parents are gang members. In about one in a dozen cases, SJI has arrested the same youth more than once.

Deputy Hall usually finds that troubled youth don't have a parent or other caring adult involved in their lives. When he calls parents to inform them that their child has been taken into custody, he receives a variety of reactions – some apathetic and some concerned. Yet, in roughly one-quarter of the cases, a parent or family member will cooperate with him and help him find a youth who is wanted on a warrant. Family members see it as an opportunity for the court system to provide help.

"Getting them in front a judge or back to a probation officer might be the start of a process where they can turn things around," said Deputy Hall.

For media inquiries, contact PIO Lisa Kiava at 612-919-5918 or lisa.kiava@co.hennepin.mn.us.

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