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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PUTNAM COUNTY, TN – School Resource Officers Play Vital Role in Child Safety/Education

One of Sheriff Farris' primary goals when he took office was to ensure the safety of the children in our community. "Nothing is more important than the safety of our students and educators," said Sheriff Farris. "We are going to do all we can to keep them safe because as we have seen school shootings and other horrific events don't just happen in big cities. They happen in small towns too."

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, a School Resource Officer is a sworn officer assigned to a school on a long-term basis trained to perform three major roles: law enforcement officer, law-related counselor, and law-related educator. The officer works in collaboration with the school and the community as a resource for safety and security issues.

Sheriff Farris believes that having an adequate number of School Resource Officers at every school in Putnam County is vital for the safety of our students. Currently there are 12,000 students in 19 schools within the county. According to federal guidelines, we should have 12 SROs based on the number of students and schools that we serve. Prior to Sheriff Farris' election, we had three.

Since election, Sheriff Farris has added an additional 3 for a total of 6 SROs serving at our high schools in Cookeville, Monterey and Baxter as well as the middle schools of Prescott South and Avery Trace. He is committed to increasing the number of SROs until we have a full complement of at least one deputy per school during normal school hours.

The three new SROs who were added in 2014 are: David Cantrell at Cookeville High School, John Pettit at Upperman High School, and Randy Brown who serves both Prescott Middle School and Avery Trace. In addition, Bill Harris serves at Cookeville High School, Steve Elrod at Monterey High School, and Ron Harris at Upperman.

"I am proud of the work that all of our SROs do every day," said Sheriff Farris, "and I am glad that we were able to add such competent deputies to our School Resource Officer program last year. They are doing a great job of working with the kids, parents and school administrators to ensure our kids' safety every day."

Since September 1, 2014, our School Resource Officers handled more than 2,500 incidents, including counseling, bullying, thefts/vandalism, drug activity, and arrests/citations. As part of the department's new training program, all SROs are required to train monthly with the SWAT team so that they are prepared to handle a potential active shooter scenario should that ever take place in Putnam County.

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An SRO provides a highly visible presence to deter or identify trespassers on campus. Each of our SROs assists the school administration in maintaining a safe and secure environment. School administrators benefit from the SROs training, knowledge and experience in handling situations involving possible weapons violations or in the identification of controlled substances.

SROs frequently assist in resolving problems that are not necessarily law violations, such as bullying or disorderly behavior, but which are nonetheless safety issues. They also can serve as a resource for classroom presentations that complement the educational curriculum by emphasizing the fundamental principles and skills needed for responsible citizenship, such as:

- Alcohol and drug awareness
- Distracted Driving Awareness
- Gang and stranger awareness and resistance
- Bullying/Conflict resolution
- Babysitting safety
- Bicycling, pedestrian, and motor vehicle safety
- Special crimes in which students are especially likely to be offenders or victims, such as vandalism, shoplifting, and sexual assault by acquaintances.

For example, this month is Distracted Driving Awareness Month sponsored by the Governor's Highway Safety Office. All of our School Resource Officers are playing an integral role in teaching the students the importance of not texting or talking on the cellphone while driving. As part of this campaign, Sheriff Farris was invited to speak at the Being In The Zone event on Wednesday of this week at Cookeville High School.

"Texting and driving requires motorists to take their eyes off the road, hands off the wheel, and minds off the task of driving. It creates the proverbial 'perfect storm' for a crash, and no one has the right to put another person's life at risk like that," said Sheriff Eddie Farris.

School Resource Officers play a diverse role in the school community and have many duties and responsibilities. They are sworn officers assigned to their schools on a long-term basis and they work in collaboration with the school and the community as a resource for safety and security issues. We are very fortunate to have such dedicated SROs in Putnam County and we can never have enough of these valuable individuals working diligently for the safety of our students.

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