

MCSO Sheriff has big plans for 2024

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
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James Maiorano III just finished his first year as McKinley County Sheriff, and he's already planning out everything he wants to accomplish in 2024. In an interview with the *Sun*, he laid

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out five goals he has for the McKinley County Sheriff's Office in the new year.

HIRING MORE DEPUTIES

In an October 2022 *Sun* article, Maiorano (who was then only the Undersheriff) talked about how the MCSO was facing an officer shortage. At the time, they had nine open positions. To be fully staffed, the office would have 43 people. Now, at the beginning of 2024, Maiorano said they only have six open positions they need to fill.

He said that even though their numbers are better than what they were in 2022, they're still working to recruit people from the community.

"Our goal is to continue to go out into the community and recruit through the high school, the colleges, and job fairs," he said. "Our emphasis has always been on trying to hire home-grown McKinley County folks who are invested in our community to become deputies."

SELF-DEFENSE CLASSES

Another goal Maiorano has for the McKinley County community is setting up self-defense and other classes. He said community members have been asking for self-defense classes, specifically ones geared toward women.

"We've been asked a lot for a self-defense class, more specifically a women's self-defense class, and we're trying to work on building that program," the sheriff said. "That's not specifically

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our specialty, our guys aren't particularly trained in that area, but we're going to try and figure out how to do that. ..."

The types of classes the MCSO could offer doesn't end with self-defense. Maiorano said they were also interested in offering active shooter classes, which would teach people what to do in an active shooter situation. Other classes include a "Stop the Bleed" class, which would teach people what to do in an emergency while they wait for medical personnel and/or law enforcement, a firearms safety course, and a class on how to administer Narcan, which is a drug that can treat a narcotic overdose.

MCSO already offers active shooter classes to schools and churches, but Maiorano wants to open the opportunity up to the public. People could either come to the sheriff's office, where classes may be offered on a monthly basis, or a business could host the classes at their office.

A NEW LOCATION

Community members who are interested in the aforementioned classes will soon have to go to a new location.

Wilson Elementary, which is located at the intersection of Ford Drive and Aztec Avenue, was used as a school in the '50s, but lately Gallup-McKinley County Schools has used it as its Educational Development Center. The county purchased the building from the district in December 2022, and now the sheriff's department is working to relocate to it.

Maiorano said the county has been working on the new design for the building for the past 10 months, and now that it's complete the county commissioners just need to approve it.

"There's going to be a lot of time and a lot of money that goes into retrofitting that to turn it into a

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sheriff's office," Maiorano said.

The inside of the building will need to be completely gutted and a floorplan that fits the MCSO's needs will be put in. Three additional properties will round out the new sheriff's office, with an evidence yard and both employee and public parking.

Construction should start in March, and Maiorano expects MCSO will move in at some point in 2025.

WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

MCSO has recently increased their involvement with the local school districts. They bring K-9s into schools to look for drugs in students' lockers and around the schools. Maiorano said the dogs were identifying different THC products that his department had never seen before, so he thought it would be a good idea to start a drug education program.

The department is working with local schools, Battered Families Services Inc., and the state's Children, Youth and Families Department. The program will be open to anyone who works with teens, whether that's in an educational setting or dealing with troubled teens for a different purpose.

"We're going to launch this class to teach people how to identify vaping products, THC products, [and] edible gummy products, so that they can understand what it looks like, what the dangers of it are, and what the laws are surrounding it," Maiorano explained.

The class will include hands-on displays to show what the products look like, what the labels look like, how to read them, and how to identify the difference between a THC product and a tobacco product. Maiorano said the program has gone through multiple phases, and the MCSO

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is now ready to launch it this year.

The goal for the class is to reach as many teachers, school staff, and parents as possible.

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

More and more law enforcement agencies are using drones to help with a multitude of law enforcement aspects, including search and rescue, crime scene processing, traffic control, and special events. And now MCSO is stepping up to the plate as well.

The MCSO has already purchased and received two drones. Maiorano said he's very excited about the next step.

"We're very happy to have received the funding and got those, now we need to launch the policy and we need to train and certify the pilots," he said.

These drones are the same model as the two used by the Office of Emergency Management, which means any trained operator could fly all four McKinley County drones.

Maiorano said the two new drones will be up and running by February. MCSO plans to use the drones as cameras during any major car crashes, taking photos and video for the public.

A NEW POLICY

Maiorano's final goal for the MCSO in 2024 is working on new policies. The department's handbook hasn't been fully updated 2009, so now he and his staff are working to rewrite it.

"Every department has a standard operating procedure, and ours is just starting to become outdated. As laws change, as how we do business changes, the way the law enforcement community changes, it's important to keep those policies relevant and just kind of keeping up with the times," Maiorano said.

One law the policy needs to change for is the state's laws concerning escaped convicts. The law was changed in 2021, and now states that if someone who escapes from a community custody release program was originally committed to the program due to a misdemeanor, they will only receive another misdemeanor for escaping. Meanwhile, a previous felon charge will earn someone another felon charge.

The rewritten policy book will eventually be published online for the public, but Maiorano estimated that the project will take most of 2024 to complete. Once it's written, deputies will be trained on it before it is published.

Maiorano was elected as Sheriff during the 2022 local election, and he took office on Jan. 1, 2023. He said the team he has behind him has made the past year a successful one.

"I had a really good staff behind me, between my chief deputy, my captain, my executive assistant, and myself. The top three, all have 20 years law enforcement experience, and my executive assistant has eight years of experience in McKinley County government, so we were really able to hit the ground running, knowing the office, knowing its inner workings, knowing county policy and how things need to be done," he said.

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