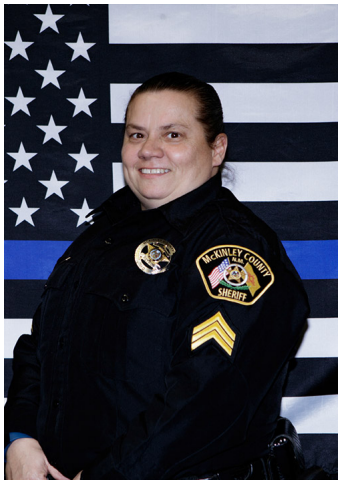
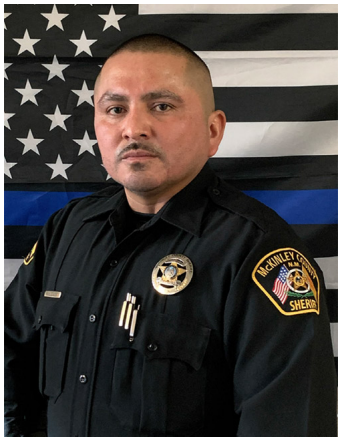
County DWI program acknowledges officers with most arrests

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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McKinley County Sheriff's Sgt. Tammy Houghtaling started 2020 by making the most DWI arrests in McKinley County in January, nine in all. She first began serving with the Gallup Police Department about 2006, running saturation patrols with other officers.

She transitioned to the McKinley County Sheriff's Office in 2011, where she has served for nearly nine years.

"In about three months [after joining MCSO] I was put into [a] DWI unit as a full-time deputy," she said April 15. "I went through the process and was promoted, where I picked up my rank."

In 2012 Houghtaling was promoted to the supervisor of the McKinley County DWI Task Force, where she served until 2017, when she was promoted to sergeant. Since then, Houghtaling has supervised the task force.

A SHOW OF APPRECIATION

Maura Schanefelt, program manager for the McKinley County DWI Program, said the program wants to recognize three DWI Task Force officers for garnering the most DWI arrests since the start of 2020. They are:

January: Sgt. Tammy Houghtaling, 9 arrests

February: Dep. Johnson Lee, 5 arrests

March: Dep. Ryan Blackgoat, 3 arrests

Houghtaling spoke about the efforts of the DWI Task Force as well as the other officers who were recognized.

“[The DWI Task Force] is a collaborative effort throughout the county, of all officers trying to impact the DWI numbers in the county,” she said.

Houghtaling said Lee is coming up on his sixth year of service with MCSO. He works full-time patrol, has a K-9 unit, and works on the DWI Task Force for overtime.

Blackgoat also works overtime on the DWI Task Force. He has served with MCSO for about a year now after transferring over from Gallup Police Department.

“They are both pretty active with getting DWIs,” Houghtaling said.

YEARS OF CHANGE

Houghtaling also spoke about the growth of the task force since she began serving.

“When I started, it was just McKinley County at the time, along with the Navajo Nation Police, New Mexico State Police, and the New Mexico Department of Motor Transportation,” she said. “Now, we have Zuni Police Department, Gallup Police Department, and Ramah Navajo Police Department on board.”

This means all of the law enforcement agencies in McKinley County are participating in the DWI Task Force.

Houghtaling said the task force does a lot of community outreach in addition to running DWI checkpoints and patrols.

“We talk to schools and the kids. We have our Junior Public Safety Academy in the summer,” she said.

Houghtaling also said McKinley County is going to start a DWI Drug Court in the future, and that she’ll be an active member of the court reviewing the participants’ activities and their progress through the court’s parameters.

“We also work with the DWI Planning Council and Coalition for Juveniles on different programs we can implement in the county,” she added.

After years of working on the DWI Task Force, Houghtaling believes it is a good thing for the community, and the people take their efforts to heart.

“They see us out there making traffic stops. I would stop vehicles and they’d have a designated driver in there. I feel like our word has gotten out,” she said.

Houghtaling said since she started serving on the DWI Task Force, she has noticed a decrease in DWI arrests, which also reinforces that the community is listening.

“Sometimes people will come up to me and know who I am,” she said. “They’ll thank me for arresting them, saying ‘You changed my life. I’m on a different path now.’”

“That’s uplifting, hearing you changed someone’s life,” Houghtaling added.

By Cody Begaye
Sun Correspondent