



### MESSAGE FROM SHERIFF HERNANDEZ

Have you ever dumped a jig saw puzzle out of the box, looked at all the pieces and thought, "This is too hard. There are too many pieces. I can't do this."? I recently experienced that feeling. I embarked on what the box claimed to be the "world's smallest 1,000 piece puzzle."

As I worked on the puzzle, I thought about how it so perfectly represents the year 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic came to our nation and we had to find a way to ward off a breakout in our jails. We had to reconfigure the housing arrangements of our inmate population to ensure positive cases could be effectively isolated and the general population protected from exposure. We had to come up with ways to educate and protect our employees from infecting each other or the inmates they work with each day. It seemed an impossible task, but as I write you today, COVID-19 has not made its way to our general population.

I thought about all the personal protective equipment we needed and how lacking we were when the pandemic started. We had to work fast to find resources and allocate them according to urgent needs.

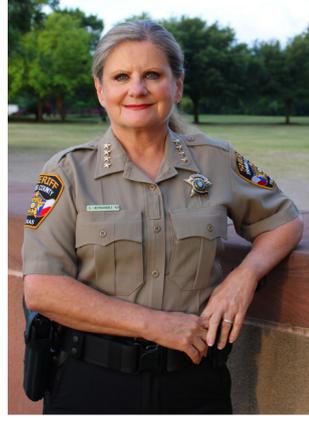
My thoughts then turned to the months of protests that took place at our jail facilities and threatened other county buildings. We had to mobilize a special response team. This meant rearranging shift schedules to pull deputies from their normally assigned districts. It meant shifting the work load amongst the remaining deputies in a manner that would seamlessly keep Travis County patrolled and protected while also protecting our jails and county buildings from being breached.

As I worked on my puzzle, friends and family joined in to help. Some complained the task was too hard; that it was frustrating; that the pieces were too small to contend with. Some laughed at the frivolity of such an endeavor. Others pulled up a chair and started organizing the pieces into categories, according to color and shape.

It was at this moment, I smiled. My mind was flooded

with memories of TCSO employees who stood up this year, looked adversity straight in the face and said, "We will win." I remembered employees who innovated a housing structure at the jail that not only won approval from the Texas Commission on Jail Standards, but also became a model used to help struggling counties. I recalled all the people in our community who sewed masks and brought them to us; the scores of organizations who donated surgical masks, visors, sanitation services, meals and so much more. I reflected on all the TCSO employees, both sworn and civilian, who willingly worked exhausting overtime hours amidst the family struggle of childcare, homeschooling and the needs of vulnerable loved ones during quarantine. They made sure every 9-1-1 call was answered, every emergency handled, every crime victim served, every inmate medically treated and every secure perimeter fully protected.

As I look back on 2020, I see a clear picture, made all the sweeter by the fact it was such a challenge to put it together. What started as a monumental task was accepted and conquered by the puzzle masters. I look forward to the bright hope of tomorrow and am already referring to it as 20-20-WON.



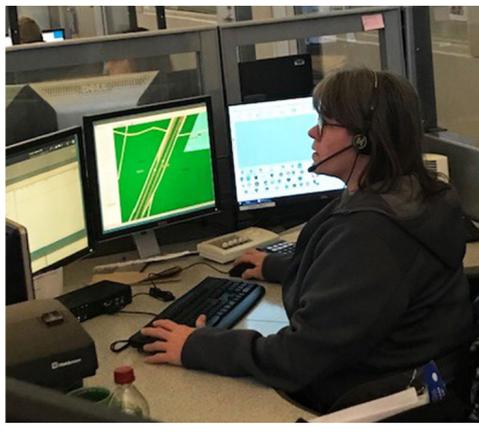
### THERMAL SCANNERS



In an effort to protect the health and safety of both our employees and our inmate population, we had screening checkpoints set up at the entrance to our jail facilities. The temperature of employees and all other entrants were taken to verify they weren't running a fever before being allowed on campus. The effort required officers to manage the checkpoint at all hours of the day and night.

On December 18<sup>th</sup>, thermal scanners were installed, providing quick, accurate readings and allowing employees to return to their normal duties. It's a welcome addition, easing the personnel demands inherent with COVID-19 protective measures.

### 9-1-1 TELECOMMUNICATIONS



Our 9-1-1 Telecommunications team is an integral part of the heart and soul of our agency. They connect people experiencing emergencies, often during one of the worst moments of their life, to first responders who can help, and they work to keep everyone safe during highly stressful circumstances. We cannot thank them enough for their tireless service. We are currently looking to add to our team. If you think you might be a good fit or know someone who is, please take a look at the current [job posting](#).

### DRIVE SAFE DURING HOLIDAYS



The holiday season is filled with celebration and good cheer; unfortunately, the decision to drink and drive can result in tragedy. We strongly encourage you to plan before attending parties. Have a designated driver or call a ride service to get you home safely. Driving while intoxicated is 100% preventable. Please protect yourself and other drivers on the roadways!

### WHAT IS PREA?



Screening for, and monitoring of, vulnerable populations is an important part of the work we do at our jail facilities. The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) was passed unanimously by both parties in Congress in 2003. Its rules were written after intensive study of sexually abusive behavior in custody, and several categories of individuals have been shown to be more vulnerable to abuse.

Inmates are interviewed to determine if they fit in a significant number of these categories. This happens upon entry by trained staff in the booking facility, and if inmates remain in custody, they're interviewed again within 30 days by a PREA officer.

[READ MORE](#)



## BROWN SANTA

Travis County Brown Santa felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as surely as everything else did this year. Registrants nearly doubled, donations were down, volunteers were in short supply, there wasn't even a warehouse available to house the effort until the very last minute. When our employees were made aware of the need, they stepped up and made it happen.

Travis County Correctional Complex Building 12 organized a sausage wrap lunch delivery fundraiser within the agency and raised over \$4,000. They also purchased an additional \$1,000 worth of toys and filled 10 barrels! When our Property Crimes Detectives found out there was shortage of toys for young boys, they took their lunch hour to go buy sports balls, games and toys.

In a morning briefing, Captain Willie Taylor threw down the gauntlet to all the other captains, challenging them to a toy barrel filling competition. The Corrections Bureau Captains took on the challenge and filled three barrels themselves.

The Records, Classifications, Property and Gang Units decided not to have their annual Santa gift exchange this year, but to give to Brown Santa instead. They also asked



their supervisors not to give them gifts, but to give to those

When our Crisis Intervention Team found out there was a shortage of volunteers to wrap presents, they asked their supervisor to approve them to wrap presents between responding to calls. Their efforts helped keep the project going at full speed.

Together, TCSO sent a message to Travis County that in these tough times, we care and are here to help.



### THE ELUSIVE LONGHORN



A four-legged subject eluded our deputies for several days in southwest Travis County. On November 25<sup>th</sup>, TCSO received the first of more than a dozen calls about a longhorn roaming around State Highway 71, Barton Creek Boulevard, and several nearby neighborhoods. Each time, deputies were asked to respond, but the longhorn hid from marked patrol units, leaving the deputies empty-handed.

During their nearly week-long search, our two Estray deputies were listening to a local radio show when the deejays began talking about the elusive steer, so they called in and encouraged people who saw the longhorn to report it to TCSO dispatch.

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, a listener called dispatch after seeing the longhorn. Several deputies responded. After a half hour of searching, it was located and taken into custody, but only after being read his rights to freedom inside a fence with all the grass he can eat.

We invite you to watch the above video footage of the dramatic takedown!

### THE SOBERING CENTER



Sheriff Hernandez recently became an ex-officio member of the Board of Directors for [The Sobering Center](#) and is proud to serve the community through this great organization. Established in 2018, the Sobering Center offers individuals a space away from the jail and emergency room where they can safely recover from intoxication. It also connects them with services that support their long-term sobriety and success, benefiting individuals, their families, and our entire community.