



## March NEWSLETTER

VOL 4: ISSUE 3

Senior Deputy Christopher Korzilius E.O.W. March 18, 2020

### MESSAGE FROM SHERIFF HERNANDEZ

I simply cannot think of a series of events as unusual as the ones we've experienced this month at TCSO. I also can't think of a time when I've seen such generosity, teamwork and sound leadership among the employees of our agency.

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, I heard words no Sheriff ever wants to hear, "...a TCSO Deputy was killed in a traffic accident." In the days that followed, we came to grips with the reality that COVID-19 mass gathering restrictions would have a profound impact on our ability to conduct a funeral with full honors and ceremonially grieve together. It also meant that the plans of Deputy Christopher Korzilius's family would be restricted. Amidst tears and anguish, we found common ground and made alternate arrangements. In this month's issue, we'll share information with you about Deputy Korzilius and the ways in which we are honoring him.

The COVID-19 crisis has affected all of us. My heart goes out to the many people in Travis County who are facing the loss of employment, childcare issues, a business in financial turmoil or the like. I want you to know that we here at your Travis County Sheriff's Office are doing everything we can to serve you well and minimize the negative impacts of this virus on our community. In the articles below, you can read about our efforts.

We're committed to making sure that what we're learning through this crisis response will not go to waste. We're



innovating every day and the problems we're facing are leading to solutions that advance our agency's abilities. We've established an open dialogue that allows information to move through our vast divisions and units. Questions move up the ranks and are addressed each morning in a group work/planning session. New ideas get a test run, then are implemented quickly to keep essential operations in motion. This is not a test. Everything we've been trained to do has been activated and is working thanks to the exceptional men and women of your Travis County Sheriff's Office.

### OUR FALLEN BROTHER



On March 18<sup>th</sup>, Senior Deputy Christopher Korzilius lost his life in an automobile accident. Chris was on his way to work in the VICE Unit, traveling in an unmarked unit when he was struck head-on by another vehicle. He died at the scene.

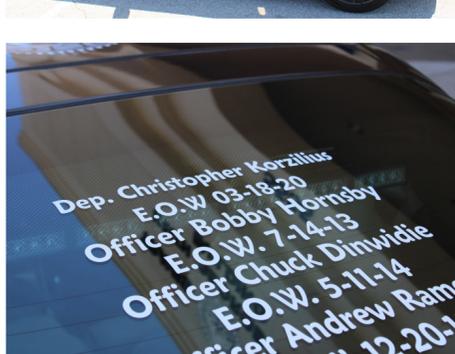
Chris joined TCSO in June 2016 and spent most of his time working night shift patrol in eastern Travis County. He promoted to Senior Deputy two years after joining the agency and joined the VICE unit in January 2020.

He was one of several members of the TCSO family honored just a few weeks ago at the agency's annual awards ceremony. He and five others were awarded the Commendation Bar after responding to a dynamic "shots fired" call in July 2018. He also received several other awards and commendations to include Employee of the Quarter just seven months after being hired, Letters of Commendation and Appreciation from supervisors and colleagues, and Victim Services Deputy of the Year.

It's customary for law enforcement to honor an officer who dies in the line of duty with a funeral that includes full honors. At this time, COVID-19 mass gathering restrictions are curtailing that opportunity for TCSO. The family of Deputy Korzilius held a small, private service Saturday and allowed it to be recorded and shared exclusively with TCSO employees. Three TCSO marked units were positioned in the parking lot of the funeral home and TCSO's Honor Guard was permitted to provide funeral honors in the lobby area.

It's also customary for TCSO sworn officers to wear mourning bands over their badges in honor of a line of duty death. Sheriff Hernandez has authorized TCSO sworn staff to wear mourning bands until April 18<sup>th</sup>.

### FALLEN HERO CAR



On March 25<sup>th</sup>, we enjoyed an unexpected visit from Joe Levine. Joe owns a beautiful Corvette and has transformed it into a moving tribute to fallen police and firefighters from the Central Texas region. He stopped by our Central Command to meet Sheriff Hernandez and show us the addition of Deputy Christopher Korzilius to the list of names that adorn the car. We're grateful to Joe and to the many others who have expressed their sympathies and support.



## CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) RESPONSE

### WELLNESS

COVID-19 has affected all of our lives. Most of us have likely been told that we need to slow down and use this time as an opportunity for reflection and self-growth. However, for sworn staff, this is not an option as public safety needs are constant and may escalate in times of crisis. Dr. Cressida Kwolek, our staff psychologist, offered the following strategies to our employees in an effort help them develop resilience. You may find these a valuable resource as well.

- Be aware of how the news is affecting you. Are you tuning in more than usual? If you come to the conclusion that media is negatively impacting you, then choose a time each day to catch up and stay within that guideline. The same applies for social media. While it's good to connect, especially in a time where you may be physically alone more than usual, pay attention to how your time on social media is affecting your mood and anxiety. You may not find the most reliable news stories on Facebook. Do not believe everything you read- the CDC and WHO are likely to have the most accurate information about COVID-19. The CDC has [resources](#) specifically available for first responders.
- Stay in the present moment. It's important when you feel anxious to take a minute and focus on where you are right now and what you are doing. If you find your mind wandering, bring it back to the task you were working on. Remind yourself that you are healthy.
- Practice gratitude. It may be a lot to ask, but there are many things to be thankful for now. There are a lot of acts of kindness to see right now, like people in line at HEB all helping a very elderly frail man get to the front of the line.
- Remember what you can control, and what you cannot. You can wash your hands and avoid large gatherings, but you can stop COVID-19. You can just control your response to it. Choose to respond with self-care. Your gym may be closed, but you can walk or run outside. There are lots of fitness classes available to stream. Having kids home from school doesn't have to be stressful. It gives you the opportunity to teach them things not taught in school. Take advantage of the time together. They won't remember the virus, just what it was like being home with you.
- Don't be afraid to talk to someone. This is an unprecedented experience, and stressful for that reason. If you have other stressors in your life, it may make this more difficult. You are not alone. You are stronger than you realize.

### MEDICAL

Our medical teams at the Travis County Jail and Travis County Correctional Complex are committed to taking care of our inmate population and preventing the spread of COVID-19. In addition to their normal workload, doctors and nurses are keeping careful watch over our vulnerable population.

Inmates who are being monitored due to symptoms of illness or due to their responses to symptoms screening questions are visited at least twice a day by nurses who provide individualized care and treatment. They're also seen each day by one of our medical providers (which could be a physician, nurse practitioner or a physician assistant) who determines if the inmate may be cleared from observation or if their symptoms meet Austin Public Health's requirements for official testing.

TCSO's medical team is following the guidelines outlined by the CDC; WHO; Austin Public Health and experts in the corrections health field.

### COURTHOUSE

According to state law, Sheriff Hernandez cannot release anyone from jail by her own authority. Whether or not a person remains in custody is determined by judges and prosecutors. In an effort to ensure that inmates are afforded their right to a speedy trial and to protect all parties involved from unnecessary risk of exposure, our Corrections and Support Bureau staff, working in conjunction with the Sheriff and County IT departments, have been working tirelessly to implement a safe, secure alternative to physically bringing inmates to the Criminal Justice Center courtrooms downtown. All departments involved have been working at breakneck speed and have successfully implemented new and innovative ways to bring virtual courtrooms to life.

With face-to-face visitation temporarily suspended, that area of the jail now serves as a hub for criminal and civil courts. Multiple courts have already conducted official hearings using this new process. Our Jail Parenting building, where inmates usually go for GED, parenting, job readiness and other classes, has been converted into additional virtual courtrooms with virtual court attorney/inmate visitation rooms to expedite the process.

With these efforts in effect, inmates are able to move through the court system process without ever leaving the Travis County Correctional Complex.

### LAW ENFORCEMENT

Patrol Deputies are at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to the nature of their assignment. Calls for service put them in direct contact with people throughout their shift. Deputies are exercising social distancing as much as possible, however, they're fully committed to enforcing the law and to apprehending those who pose a danger to our community. As a safety precaution to keep them healthy, deputies are equipped with latex gloves, masks, eye protection, and hand sanitizer. They've been instructed to utilize these protective measures whenever they believe it necessary.

Major Craig Smith works closely with other law enforcement agencies throughout the county, sending daily briefings that allow everyone to be well informed. This collaboration also leads to consistency among all law enforcement agencies as they perform their duties, mindful of the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We receive questions on a daily basis about the Shelter in Place Ordinance which is currently in effect. Here are the answers to frequently asked questions:

**How are you enforcing the ordinance?**

Our deputies are conducting their normal duties, responding to calls for service and keeping communities safe. If we encounter activity that violates the ordinance, our first step will be to educate the persons involved and seek their compliance. If they fail to comply, we have the discretion to write a citation or even make an arrest, but that is the last thing we want to do. It's our top priority to help residents follow the guidelines that will limit the spread of the virus. It's important to note that a violation of the emergency order can result in a fine up to \$1000.00 and/or up to 180 days in jail.

**Do I have to carry papers with me from my employer, stating that I'm an essential employee?**

No, that is not a requirement of the order and TCSO will not stop you just to check paperwork.

**Am I allowed to go pick up my child when it is my turn to have custody?**

Yes, please use caution if you are feeling ill or have symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

**Is it ok for me to leave my house and go outside?**

Yes! In fact, doctors recommend you get some sunshine and fresh air as often as possible. Just avoid gathering in groups and maintain safe social distancing when you encounter your neighbors. Please refer to the order, which details local businesses you are able to visit.

The most important thing we can do is follow the directions laid out in the emergency orders. It's up to all of us to help keep this virus from spreading. TCSO Deputies are always available to answer questions concerning the orders.

### JAILS

Extensive measures are being taken at both the Travis County Jail and the Travis County Correctional Complex in an effort to protect against an outbreak of COVID-19 among inmates and staff. There are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in either of our jail facilities.

Protecting inmates and staff from viral outbreaks is nothing new for our jail system. Whether it be the flu, a "stomach bug" or the common cold, we work to keep the facilities clean and sterilize common areas to prevent the spread of illness. COVID-19 is certainly on the minds of all inside our jail facilities and keeping a clean, sterile environment is something our staff is even more committed to. Sanitization of Central Booking is occurring three times a shift to include all flat surfaces and common touch-points. Hand Sanitizer is available to all at the entrance and throughout the facility and a sink has been installed in the entry port so anyone may wash their hands when entering or exiting the building.

Everyone entering our secure correctional perimeters, including employees, is being screened at the entrance and anyone with a temperature of 99.6°F or greater is not allowed into the facility.

When arrestees are brought to Central Booking, they're asked a series of questions according to CDC recommendations. Out of an abundance of caution, all new inmates spend the first 10-14 days in single-occupancy cells, under observation. This decision, on our part, was approved by the [Texas Commission on Jail Standards](#) with their compliments for the proactive approach.

Our doctors follow [Austin Public Health](#) guidelines and COVID-19 tests are administered to inmates by our physicians based on those guidelines. Inmates needing isolation are being housed in single-occupancy cells, on a specified unit, away from the rest of the population.

We will continue to work with all entities to minimize traffic into our facility. We are changing our procedures anytime there is a new recommendation by CDC, state, county or Jail Standards.

### SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED



We're happy to announce that the [Sheriffs' Association of Texas](#) has awarded the Sheriff Allen Bridges Memorial Scholarship (Spring 2020 Semester) to Detective Paul Salo's daughter, Sophia Salo. Sophia is a student at Texas State University, majoring in Aquatic Biology. Sheriff Hernandez presented her with the scholarship check on March 25<sup>th</sup>. Congratulations, Sophia...We're proud of you!



We'd like to take this opportunity to extend our deep appreciation for the ways in which members of the Travis County community are helping us during this challenging time. [Desert Door Distillery](#) has given us 400 bottles and an additional 55 gallons of hand sanitizer for use in our jails and by deputies on the streets. [Target](#) in San Marcos has provided surgical masks. [Securus Technologies](#) reduced video visitation rates by half to make it easier for families to connect with their incarcerated loved ones. [Longhorn Steakhouse](#) and [Starbucks](#) have both brought food and beverages to various departments within our agency. Thank you so much for offering a helping hand!