



125th Anniversary NEWS RELEASE

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MESA COUNTY SQUARED AWAY

Mesa County Sheriff's Office covers 3,309 square miles.

Introduction— Mesa County is the largest county on the Western slope of Colorado, both geographically and by population. The majority of Mesa county citizens live in an urban environment located in the valley around the confluence of the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers. However, a large number of people also live in and around the communities of Collbran, Mesa, Debeque, Gateway, Mack, and Gladepark. These are the areas more commonly considered “rural”. These rural areas range from the alpine meadows of the Grand Mesa to the desert area near the Utah boarder, to the canyon lands and plateaus of Gateway and Gladepark. The diversity and expanse of these rural areas create some very unique challenges for the Mesa County Sheriff's Office.

Around May of 2002, Sheriff Claussen, working with of then Lt. Stan Hilkey, created three full time rural deputy positions in response to significant positive public feedback from having deputies working in the rural areas, especially the Plateau Valley area. At that time, Deputy Gary Foss was working the rural areas during the day and Deputy John Hildebrand worked mostly at night. Deputy Hildebrand was officially transferred to the RAD (Rural Area Deputy) unit in the spring of 2002 along with then Deputy Tony Marsh, Deputy Tim Henderson, Deputy Gary Foss, and Deputy Marvin Dipilato.

With any new unit, the question often raised is what the team will specialize in. That question was answered rather instinctively when Lt. Larry Bullard was hired and developed a Search And Rescue (SAR) management program which would be overseen by the RAD unit.

The role of a RAD deputy is limitless. Besides managing over 200 SAR volunteers, the

Deputies are expected to maintain a fleet of specialized search and rescue equipment, the RAD unit is also responsible for the upkeep of their own equipment. The RAD unit generally manages an average of one critical incident a week (usually in the form of a SAR mission), not to mention their responsibility to respond to calls throughout the county in which the vast majority is rural and mountainous.

As with all aspects of the Sheriff's Office, the roles of the Rural Area Deputy are forever changing with the hope of bringing about positive results and harboring a strong relationship with the community. The RAD's work hard to build partnerships with the community but also the organizations that are often responsible for our public lands including: Colorado State Parks, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife to name a few.

The RAD's are now facing a new set of challenges with the increase in industrial activity taking place on our public lands. The increasing traffic in the rural communities from the explosion of growth in the oil/gas industry and mining operations has lead to increase traffic in once quite communities.

RAD deputies are a true example of the spirit of the Sheriff's Office in that they are often times faced with little or no backup, work with little or no supervision, and are tasked with making sometimes difficult and life altering decisions. It takes a unique breed of individual to volunteer to work under these pretenses. That breed was not hard to find with the current RAD deputies - Sgt. Richard Acree, Deputy John Hildebrand, Deputy Jeff Melchior, Deputy Jeff Doty, and Deputy John Coleman.

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“Many faces, many places. One community—Mesa County.”

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