

## 2009 Crime Victim Services Award Winner

### Cherokee County, North Carolina Sheriff's Office



*From left to right: Sheriff (ret.) Aaron Kennard, NSA Executive Director; Executive Vice President Tom Seigle, Public Safety Division, Appriss; Sheriff Craig Webre, Chairman, NSA Crime Victim Services Committee; Acting Director Joye Frost, Office for Victims of Crime; Sheriff Keith Lovin, Cherokee County, NC; 2008-2009 NSA President Sheriff David Goad.*

The Crime Victim Services Award was initiated in 2005 with funding from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), U.S. Department of Justice. NSA's Crime Victim Services Committee administers this award program which recognizes "outstanding achievement by a Sheriff's Office in support of victims." Since 2008, the award has been generously sponsored by Appriss, Inc. The award recipient for 2009 is the Cherokee County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office.

In 2003, the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office successfully applied for the OVC-funded Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement demonstration grant through NSA. Subsequently, Sheriff Keith Lovin hired a Program Administrator, Brandi Watkins, and put the full weight of his administration behind implementation of some innovative concepts that were foreign to the county. Deputies were required to complete extensive training in victim services; volunteer Victim Advocates were given call numbers, radios, and uniform shirts bearing the Sheriff's Star; and deputies and advocates began responding side-by-side to calls of violent crime.

Although grant funding ended in 2007, the Cherokee County Victim Advocate Program remains fully staffed and responds 24/7 to victims of all violent crimes. The program is equipped with vehicles, radios, cameras, child safety seats, stuffed animals, a bullet proof vest, and the Saving Steps informational booklet which is given to every victim. Moreover, the Victim Advocate Program is not restricted to supporting only Cherokee County Sheriff's deputies. Its Response Team supports all law enforcement officers in the county. Thus, when a victim calls 911, the victim has access to an advocate, regardless of the jurisdiction. The victim immediately receives crisis intervention and information about resources. Furthermore, victim services continue for a minimum of three months after the victimization or conclusion of the court process.

The Victim Advocate Program also offers assistance with document presentation, such as protective orders, crime victim impact statements, and victim compensation applications; personalized safety planning; danger assessments; and liaison to shelter placement and private and public financial resources. This thorough protocol has led to an increase in prosecutions and, more importantly, an increase in victims' voices being heard in the judicial process.

The Cherokee County Sheriff's Office believes that effective law enforcement must include the entire community. Historically, area law enforcement safeguarded all agency information. Sheriff Lovin and the Victim Advocate Program, however, initiated an open-door policy with the county's department of social services, child advocacy center, and school system. In addition, the Sheriff's Office placed trust in the capacities of non-sworn volunteer

civilians to respond to crime victims in a professional, dignified, and competent manner. An extensive victim advocate training curriculum was instituted that includes classroom instruction; ride alongs with deputies; sitting with 911 Dispatch; and on-scene training. In short, the Sheriff's Office takes the approach to many law enforcement issues that the best results come from sharing information with community members and collaborating on strategies for success.

Finally, Sheriff Lovin educates his community to understand that crime victims are not victims by choice or because of something they could have prevented. In addition, he and Program Administrator Watkins emphasize to deputies that victims require services that are as important to an investigation as evidence against the offender. Also, the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office reminds everyone that victims continue to need services long after their offender has been processed by the court. In summation, the Sheriff's Office preaches and practices a philosophy that understanding and empathetic deputies/officers, supported by the Victim Advocate Program's compassionate and comprehensive response to victims, ultimately leads to increased community trust of law enforcement and improvement of the entire criminal justice system.