

# Sheriff



**Larry Ashley, Okaloosa County Sheriff**

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## **NEW INITIATIVES COMBAT GANG ACTIVITY**

The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office has undertaken a number of new initiatives in an effort to curb and counteract gang activity.

In November, Sheriff Larry Ashley assigned two investigators who work the sexual predator/offender unit to also monitor and document gang activity. These investigators keep the Sheriff's Office data base updated to ensure those red-flagged in the system meet the state criteria for gang member, associate, or affiliate, to accurately reflect the level of activity.

Documented gang members (as outlined in Florida Statute 874) who are arrested on criminal charges face stricter sentences due to their gang association.

To increase officer safety on the streets and better gather intelligence information, the OCSO Investigations Division also made an in-house, computerized data base with photos and pertinent information available to the patrol officers on the front-lines via their in-car computers. This valuable data base is now only a mouse click away for officers working the streets.

The patrol shifts were also trained to ensure they know exactly what to do if a deputy comes across gang members and how to share information with the investigators so they can verify and update the computer data.

Chief of Investigations Capt. Arnold Brown says the most common crimes associated with gang activity locally involve narcotics and theft. School Resource Officers work to prevent gang infiltration in schools, where the encounters can typically start.

Gang indicators can include specific tattoos, wearing certain colors or types of clothing, hand signs, and association with known gang members.

Okaloosa County investigators say they have approximately twenty different local organizations that claim to be - or are known to be gang-related.

"I think we have a good handle on gang activity in Okaloosa County," said Captain Brown. "However we always encourage local residents to share information that can help us better protect our citizens. They can contact the Sheriff's Office directly at 651-7400/ or 689-5705 or call Emerald Coast Crime Stoppers at 863-TIPS."

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Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation.

"The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office provides equal access and equal  
opportunity in employment and services and does not discriminate"