Meeting Notes – May 14, 2024

The LaFayette Rotary Club met on Tuesday, May 14, 2024, for its weekly meeting. Rotarian Stephen Wheeler was responsible for providing our speaker/program. Our guest speaker was Chambers County Sheriff Jeff Nelson. Sheriff Nelson spoke to the club about some programs being offered by the sheriff's department and talked of some recent changes made in the department since he became sheriff about 18 months ago.

The first program he spoke of was the Yellow Dot program. This program is offered statewide. There is a yellow dot decal that can be placed on a vehicle's rear windshield. That indicates there is important information located inside the glovebox. There is a corresponding yellow folder, legal envelope size, that contains personal and medical information on the driver or other occupants of the car. This is information that may be crucial in the event of an accident or other emergency when the person is unable to provide the information themselves. That folder should be kept in the glovebox of the vehicle. Even without the yellow dot on the windshield, Sheriff Nelson says law enforcement officers know to look in a glove box in situations where the person is unable to communicate the needed information.

Sheriff Nelson also encouraged the club to download the Chambers County Mobile app. Not only will this allow citizens to see who is currently incarcerated in the Chambers County jail but will provide important alerts. The third program discussed was the RAD Program (Rape and Aggression Defense) for women. The Chambers County and Lee County Sheriff departments partner together to bring this training to women throughout both counties. The course teaches not only self-defense, but also the mindset of how not to be a victim and how/when to fight back. Project Lifesaver is another program, this one designed to help people with dementia or other disabilities who are at risk of wandering off or getting lost. Those at risk are outfitted with a bracelet containing a GPS chip. As long as they are wearing the bracelet, they can be located from the air or from a hand-held device on the ground. The final program discussed was the Women's Firearms Class. This class incorporates both classroom instruction and practice on the firing range. Women learn about the various laws involving self-defense, carrying concealed weapons without a permit, and other pertinent laws. Sheriff Nelson did recommend if you travel out of state that you research that state's laws regarding the need for a gun permit. He also advised carrying a permit with you, even though one is no longer required in Alabama.

Sheriff Nelson reiterated how fortunate he was to have followed Sheriff Lockhart and what a good program he inherited. Sheriff Nelson discussed some of the changes made over the past 18 months. One of the changes is new uniforms. The new uniforms consist of black pants and a lighter colored shirt, made of lighter-weight and cooler fabric. These are the same uniforms worn by the LAPD. He has been able to add four more deputies, which allows for four deputies per shift. They are now the highest paid law enforcement agency in Chambers County and are more competitive with neighboring county agencies. Sheriff Nelson says officers from other counties are now approaching Chambers County and applying for jobs here. Sheriff Nelson thanked the Chambers County Commission for recognizing the need and making possible the increase in salaries. Thirteen (13) new patrol cars have been or will be purchased this year. The two helicopters and the army truck have been returned to the military. This year's Sheriff's Rodeo was the most successful of the past eight years. Proceeds from the rodeo and the upcoming sale of used vehicles and equipment (FEMA trailers, police cars, etc.) will be used to purchase equipment.

Sheriff Nelson discussed some of the most pressing problems for Chambers County: mental health, drugs, and homelessness. He stated the state does not have the resources to provide the needed treatment of those with mental health needs. He feels we have those in our local jail who do not need to be in a jail but instead should be receiving services/treatment in a mental health facility. The price of illegal drugs has gone down, allowing for easier access. Methamphetamine, fentanyl, and even heroin are contributing to our drug problem here in Chambers County. He spoke of the increasing number of illegal immigrants who are often dropped off in Chambers County (and elsewhere) and how that has contributed to our homeless population. The Circle of Care is trying to help with that situation. Sheriff Nelson warned us to be vigilant and assured us that the Chambers County Sheriff's department was here trying to protect its citizens.

Diane Sheriff