

Billy Wofford, Sheriff of Pickens County

-by Gerald Reid

“I’ve gone from the days of busting up whiskey stills to taking meth labs down now,” says Sheriff Billy Wofford. When Wofford began as a Deputy in 1971, the department consisted of a sheriff, one deputy, and a secretary. Today, there is a staff of 54.

After graduating from high school in 1965, Wofford went to work for Georgia Marble Company in Tate. With an employee cut back and little seniority, he was laid off in 1971. He went to Sheriff Harley Cantrell to see about obtaining a security job at Bent Tree. Wofford recalls that Cantrell was losing his deputy and asked



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Wofford to try the job of deputy and see how you like it. The pay? \$400 per month. “It was a real hardship time for me as well as my family. Back in those days I was the only deputy in the county. You had to work from start to finish,” Wofford remembers. Off days were few and far between and the hours were long.

In 1972, Wofford and his family moved into the jail. He says that he will never forget that experience. Wofford said, “It was some bad times, but there were some good times, too.” The inmates were in the upstairs portion of the jail. His wife, Donna, prepared the meals not only for the family, which by then included a toddler, Billie Jean, but the inmates as well. She washed the dishes, answered the phones, and worked the radio. There was no 911 service then. The Sheriff admits it was hard on him and his family, but still they managed to raise two

children, and now enjoy their four year old granddaughter.

In 1980, Wofford ran for the top job. There were three people in the race: Harley Cantrell, Bill Wigington, and Wofford. Wigington and Wofford were in the run off and Wofford won and took office January 1, 1981, at the age of 32. He is the youngest ever elected as Sheriff of Pickens County and has served the longest of any Sheriff in the county’s history.

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Despite being one of Pickens County's most popular officeholders, Wofford has faced opposition in every election. "I've had opposition every time I've ever run. I've never had a free ride," Wofford stated.

The Sheriff has to be a jack of all trades. Wofford said that there are a lot of things mandated by law that you have to do, but there are a lot of things not mandated by law that you have to do also, including being a counselor, whether it is a marriage counselor or some other

counseling role. Said Wofford, "You have to provide for the people. They trust you. They come to you with all their problems — not just law problems but a lot of personal problems. I've always appreciated people having that much confidence in me. If it's a problem to them, then it should be enough of a problem for me to take it upon myself to try to help them."

Like the county, the jail's population has increased. The jail was designed to sleep 46. As many as 75 have been incarcerated at one time.

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About \$4.5 million of the SPLOST revenue will be used to either build a new jail or renovate the existing structure.

Is retirement on the horizon? Wofford says that he will run for one more term. He would be 61 at the end of the next term and likely retire at that time.

Reflecting on his career in the Sheriff's department, Wofford remembers the good times and the bad, not just for him but for his family. They endured a lot for him to make it this far. "I contribute a lot of my success to my family," he stated and added. "I've got a lot of things to be thankful for."

