



## Sheriff patrols make a big difference in Pontiac

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1:36 AM, Sep. 19, 2011|

More than a month into its new stint policing Pontiac, the Oakland County Sheriff's Office says it's getting harder to be a crook in the county seat.

Officers are serving four warrants a day, response times are down from more than an hour to minutes and the 74 deputies -- 63 of whom were Pontiac police officers -- have fielded some 9,000 calls for assistance, said Sheriff Mike Bouchard.

"They're running fast, they're running hard, but they're getting there and getting there quickly," he said.

The Sheriff's Office took over for Pontiac police on Aug. 1, after a prolonged battle to save the city's police force.

By the time the county Board of Commissioners approved the merger in January, there were only 50 officers with an \$8.9-million budget for a city of roughly 65,000.

Bouchard said the \$10.2-million contract saved the city \$2.2 million. The policing transfer between Pontiac and the county is the largest in the state.

"A lack of resources and protocols really prevented them from being successful," Bouchard said of Pontiac's decimated police force and those police officers he hired. "They can go out there and do their jobs. We're excited to help."

A couple of weeks into the takeover, the Sheriff's Office and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency made the largest heroin seizure in Michigan history, the office said, bagging \$150 million in street value of heroin, more than \$500,000 in cash and more than 23 pounds of cocaine from a house on Pike Street.

Those who used to be skeptical seem excited to have them now.

"People are glad to see them out there," said Mary Pietila, a Pontiac councilwoman, who was outspoken against the merger.

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Warren Rodgers, 54, who said he owns 173 houses and apartments in the city, wasn't sure what the new police structure would bring, but so far, he thinks it's working well.

"I was one of the biggest mouths against them coming, but I've seen what they are doing and they are doing good," he said.

Rodgers has had to deal with crime on his properties, be it siding and copper stolen for its scant scrap value or drug dealers working neighborhoods where he has tenants. Three weeks ago, he said, thieves took as much siding as they could reach without a ladder from an apartment building on Newberry Street. They'll get about \$30 for it, he estimates. He's out \$10,000 to fix it.

"They're patrolling more," Rodgers said of the sheriff's officers. "I would like to see them inside the neighborhoods and high-crime areas," he said.

Bouchard said they've responded to 64 calls of shots fired and 12 shootings of a person. Of the 12, he said, one was fatal. The calls are testament, he said, to community involvement.

Sheriff's Maj. Robert Smith said community calls and faster response times, which Bouchard said went from 72 minutes before they took over to about five minutes now, often lead to crime interrupted, such as the nonviolent crimes that affect people like Rodgers.

"They're important to the people that live in

those neighborhoods," Smith said.

The onslaught of action probably will level out over time, he said, but Pietila said the city's involvement with the Sheriff's Office is not just a temporary thing.

"No, this is not a honeymoon phase. The sheriff's deputies are here to stay," she said.



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Sheriff's Deputy Patrick Law checks a ticket at the Pontiac substation. More than 60 of the deputies working in the city were Pontiac police officers.

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