



Lake County Sheriff's Office

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**PRESS RELEASE ... LAKE COUNTY SHERIFFS OFFICE
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TERRORISM AWARENESS AND OUR NORTHERN BORDER**

Recently the Sheriff of Butler County, Ohio held a news conference which has been shown nationally where he spoke about the growing threat of terrorism across the United States and how his County is responding and preparing to such threats on his community. Since that time, we have received numerous calls and emails asking what we are doing here in Lake County to protect our community from such threats.

Chief Deputy Robert Izzo and I, as well as our Geauga County Sheriff's Office partners Sheriff Scott Hildenbrand and Chief Deputy Thomas Rowan, attended the same National Sheriffs Association conference in Washington DC that the Butler County Sheriff attended and we share the same concerns. Here is what we learned.

We met with the NSA Border Committee. The southern border Sheriffs emphasized that ALL States in our Country are now border States. They explained that the majority of people coming across our southern borders illegally are single males of military age from 147 different countries. We have no idea where they are today. Since over 2 million people have come across our southern border illegally, they are in every county in the U.S. Further, it was noted that since the Border Patrol resources have been diverted south, the northern border of the United States is now beginning to experience increased illegal entry into our Country. They reflected a belief that many of the unknown "got aways" may be linked to terrorist organizations and that we have no idea where they went once they crossed the border.

At the conference we met in a closed-door session with representatives from the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). They detailed the attack on Israel by Hamas on October 7th. In the video we watched of unedited body cams that Hamas wore during the attack, dash cams, and home camera systems was for me the most horrific and barbaric footage I have ever seen. Civilians slaughtered, adults and children beheaded, young girls raped and tortured and people burned alive were just a few images that stay imprinted on my mind. As well, we heard conversations where young attackers called back to their families and proudly declared how many Israeli's they killed and how they used their severed heads as soccer balls. The IDF explained that in interviews they have conducted with the terrorists, the

attackers have said they hate Americans just as much as Israel and they are already in the United States preparing for similar attacks.

In every meeting, from a session with the Speaker of United States House of Representatives, to Governmental Affairs, to Homeland Security it was emphasized that the Deputies and Police officers on the streets across the United States are the first line of defense against terrorism. The IDF explained that it was police officers that fought off Hamas on October 7th, the military did not arrive for 6-8 hours after the attack began. They detailed that American law enforcement needs to be trained to think terrorism first and need to be physically equipped for similar attacks.

FBI Director Christopher Wray in an October 2023 statement to the Senate Homeland Security committee said “Here in the United States, our most immediate concern is that violent extremists – individuals and small groups – will draw inspiration from the events in the Middle East to carry out attacks against Americans going about their daily lives... Hamas or another foreign terrorist organization may conduct attacks here on our own soil.” What we heard clearly in Washington D.C. is that it is not a matter of IF such attacks will come, it is a matter of WHEN they will come.

Fortunately, we at the Lake County Sheriff’s Office, as well as our policing partners in every city across Lake County, have been training our deputies and police officers to be prepared for the significant threats to our communities. This includes equipping our deputies with modern weaponry and increased ammunition for extended attacks, providing them with protective gear, and providing critical training on expanding threat exposures.

We have expanded our SWAT team, which now includes members from the Geauga and Ashtabula County Sheriff’s Offices, and police departments from across our area that include Painesville, Madison Township, Chesterland, and Middlefield to name a few. Monthly training and real time missions have prepared them to be one of the best skilled response teams in Ohio. In a crisis they can respond to assist throughout Lake County, Geauga County, and Ashtabula County.

In 2023 we completed a renovation to our range that now includes not only a live range, but classroom that provides in house training or brings in outside web-based training from all over the United State. It is now equipped with computer technology where every officer from across Lake County can enter a video environment and be confronted by multiple scenarios where they confront various threats and make split second decisions in shoot or don’t shoot scenarios. Further, the new training facility is equipped with a simunitions building where officers move through a changing walled environment to experience changing situations and threats.

For years the Lake County Sheriff's Office participated in the Northern Border Initiative working with the Border Patrol to be proactive in finding threats to our security along the northern border. Today, that program is called Operation Stonegarden. By our participation we receive federal funding to pay our highly trained deputies to work with the Border Patrol to conduct drug interdiction, combat human trafficking across Interstate State 90 and State Route 2, and the communities along their paths. This detail also works to identify Mexican Cartel operatives and other terror threats to our Lake County communities. In this process we have been joined by local police departments from Lake County who participate in Operation Stonegarden. I am proud to say our Stonegarden work is one of the most active and highest producing details in the United States.

Today we are changing our mindset to think terrorism first. After 9-11 everyone asked "How did we miss this, why were we not seeing the signs." Today the signs are all around us and we realize that we as local law enforcement are the first line of defense against terrorism. Whether through cyber attacks on our critical infrastructures, physical attacks on energy sources and key infrastructure, killing our citizens with fentanyl laced drugs trafficked across our corridors, or persons crossing our borders illegally who mean to us harm, we as local law enforcement on our streets need to be prepared to respond. We remain proactive in finding such threats before they occur, to interact with our communities on keeping them educated on threats, and working with our legislators to providing adequate funding and create laws to address the new threats.

Today we face adversaries who want to eliminate our society. It is a concept outside the imagination of most people in our society. We must think anew and act anew, and never let the safety of our community be taken for granted.

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