

We have put another year behind us. A tough one it was as far as working with the Sheriff on a contract, however this year we hope to gain some ground for those members who wear a gun and a badge and place themselves in harms way on a daily basis.

A couple weeks ago we spoke to our FOP Attorney and discussed several issues. One was the issue of Impasse. The impasse looks good in FOP's favour as it stands. We recently received an e-mail update on yet another positive note from the Clay County FOP who are going through the same issues with their Sheriff. It appears to be a common thought that when we win this issue, the Sheriff will take it to court, thereby delaying the process even further. However we have to realize that this is a big decision. Not only will it work in our favour, but for the remaining 66 Sheriff's Offices which may or may not have a union. Pasco and Clay FOP are currently in this fight together and unless politics gets involved at the PERC level and not just plain law, we will win this. We will be at the cutting edge of change for a union. That is why it is imperative we all stand strong together and see this through. When talking of unions such as those up north or those in the cities, they have been established through hard work from the beginning. It did not happen overnight. We are at that point of beginning what will benefit many for years to come.

This year leads us to an opportunity to see whether the Sheriff will work towards mending the torn bridges between the members and his administration. If he heard the words for change and takes them serious, then we will have a good and productive four years. It's a new year and everyone needs the benefit of the doubt to see what they are made of. We all have made mistakes and a new year is a good point in time to wipe all the past mistakes clean and start fresh. This can be said not only in our professional lives but that of our personal ones....As always, the union is ready and willing to work with the Sheriff to help bring about some positive changes to the agency, if he will open the door and allow for that to happen.

We spoke at length on the state statutes which dictate to Sheriff on completing administrative investigations within a 180 day period (approx 6 months). I am attaching the Attorney General's opinion (Charlie Crist at the time) on this issue. I have been told several members bill of rights have been violated by our I.A. section in not bringing about a resolution within the states times. There are some exceptions, but for the majority, it is simply a matter of getting the investigation completed in a timely manner. We will be more proactive in this area as members deserve to have their complaints resolved in a timely manner and not hanging over their head for months at a time. Can you imagine if a citizen had to wait 180 days to have you look at their case. You bet they would be on the phone to the Sheriff and we know what happens from that point. Be extremely careful in checking the box when given notice of an investigation that you wish to proceed without IA interviewing all witnesses. They are required to interview every potential witness prior to interviewing the accused officer.

We talked about members not receiving an FOP attorney when requested. Most administrative investigations do not require an attorney, however can be properly represented by a trained Rep. the Rep. can be there with you to make sure your bill of rights are not violated and provide guidance prior to going into an interview. The FOP REP can, based upon the allegation, the seriousness of the allegation, whether a potential crimes is involved, or if it is political in nature, can speak with the FOP Legal Defense and see if an attorney can be assigned. If a member chooses to get his/her own attorney, one has to understand if something goes wrong and that attorney is no longer used, the FOP Attorney is probably not going to become involved in the matter. Everyone is encouraged to call your local FOP Rep and discuss issues prior to going into any IA by yourself. Based upon all the information at hand, a decision can be made whether an attorney will be assigned or not. But again, most situations can be readily handled by a trained Representative.

We are still trying to finalize a date in the near future where we will have the attorney present at a general meeting to answer all your questions. Once we decide on a date you will be notified via e-mail. We would also like to see some new faces on the union board. Those who may be interested in a board position should contact Gary Kling or Bob Mitchell.

More to follow. We will be sending out the e-mail from the attorney regarding the impasse later today.

We wish everyone a blessed, healthy and prosperous New Year.