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Rangers & Riders: When GV JP Court needed help, they answered the call

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The Green Valley Justice Court is getting some help with security and bailiff duties from the American Legion Riders and Arizona Rangers after the coronavirus outbreak left them shorthanded.

Jorge Encinas / Green Valley News

Rangers and bikers are riding to the rescue after Green Valley Justice Court found itself short on bailiffs.

The Arizona Rangers' Madera Company and the American Legion Riders are taking over bailiff and security duties at the Justice Court.

The Rangers started their shifts on just over a week ago and the Riders began Monday.

The Sheriff's Auxiliary Volunteers typically performs bailiff duties at the court. The Pima County Sheriff's Department recommended that the SAV withdraw its members from the court and other areas where they interact with the public because of the coronavirus outbreak.

SAV Commander Doug Kenyon said he supported the Sheriff Department's recommendation since 95 percent of his volunteers are 65 or older.

While they won't be fingerprinting or doing bailiff work during the outbreak, Kenyon said they are still doing patrols, winter-visitor home checks and surveillance. However, their absence left a void at the Justice Court.

Justice of the Peace Ray Carroll said he was relieved the Rangers were able to step in and fill the gap while the SAV is out.

"Us, in this very desperate time, have now found the Arizona Rangers willing to fill the gap and the American Legion Riders," he said. "They all have experience. They're all able to make their decisions for the safety of the court and they're also willing to work in pairs at the court in case there is some kind of a security breach."

Capt. George Grove is the commander of the Madera Company of Rangers. He said they became involved when Carroll notified the Rangers that the court needed security.

"One of our primary functions as Rangers is to provide assistance to law enforcement organizations," Grove said. "That's the reason why we're here because he said he needs somebody, and that's what we're in business for."

The 14-member company of Rangers still needed an extra hand to fill in the schedule with two-person teams to provide security. And that's when the American Legion Riders stepped up to help out, too.

"A lot of our Riders are retired combat military, military police or law enforcement," American Legion Madera Post 131 commander Dan Cady said. "We got an eclectic group of law enforcement and once it was mentioned, they stepped up."

The Rangers and the Riders have had most of their other events canceled because of COVID-19 concerns.

However, volunteers from both groups fall into the 60 and over group that health officials recommended to self-isolate.

Grove said about 60 percent of his people are in the high-risk category. While there is a risk of being exposed, he said it's not so much his personal exposure that concerns him.

"The thing that concerns me personally is not so much my risk associated with it, but the risk of my wife when I go home," Grove said. "Because whatever I run into, I take home with me. So, that's the big concern."

Cady said working the court is strictly volunteer for the Riders.

"We're happy to help the community in any way that we can," he said. "Are there a few wives that aren't all thrilled with it? Maybe. But if we have a Rider at home who's not comfortable doing it or not comfortable leaving home because of a conceived threat, we're not twisting any arms."

And so far, Cady said there hadn't been any shortage of Riders stepping forward to help out.

It's not just Carroll who appreciates the two groups taking on the risk to help keep the court secure.

Precinct 7 constable Thomas Schenek said he's looking forward to having the Rangers on hand to help the court.

"I've personally worked with a lot of Arizona Rangers throughout my 26 years in law enforcement, and they bring a lot to the table," he said. "I also think it's going to save the court, and in turn the taxpayers, some money."

Schenek said it's a win-win since the community will benefit as well as the court.

"Not only from a financial aspect but also from a security aspect," he said. "You never know what's walking through those doors."

Safety first

Carroll said that some people might use emergency periods such as the current COVID-19 outbreak as an opportunity to harass court staff. However, he said there's no tolerance for any harassment, contempt or intimidation of the court staff and their safety.

"I'm glad that the Arizona Rangers and the Legion Riders are going to work together to make sure there are two people on the premises during these difficult times," Carroll said. "To make sure that my court employees are safe, the defendants, victims and plaintiffs are safe in this government center the best we can."

In Carroll's courtroom just over a week ago, the Rangers and Riders met after their first day on duty. They joked about who can still ride motorcycles and who couldn't with banter going back and forth.

While they had a good laugh, they were also ready to get to work and maintain the court's security.

"We're just looking forward to doing what we do, you know, and to help out and provide the security that they need here," Grove said. "That's what it's all about. That's what we're here for."

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Reporter Jorge Encinas was born and raised in Tucson. He graduated from the University of Arizona with master's in journalism in 2016.