

WASHINGTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



BIRCHWOOD
COUNCIL CHAMBER HALL

Investigations Spotlight: Welfare Fraud

The Washington County Sheriff's Office has a dedicated staff of detectives who work with all law enforcement agencies in the region to investigate crimes and apprehend suspected criminals. The investigations division addresses a wide range of crimes and quality of life issues throughout Washington County, utilizing several specialty units to concentrate on specific areas of criminal activity. In partnership with Washington County Community Services and other State agencies, our welfare fraud unit actively investigates suspected fraud both criminally and administratively in an earnest effort to protect taxpayer dollars.

The term "welfare" refers to a range of government programs that provide financial or other aid to individuals or groups who are unable to support themselves. These programs allow people to cope with financial stress during difficult periods of their lives, and eligibility is based on variety of factors, including family size, income, and lack of employment. Funded primarily through state and federal tax dollars, our welfare fraud detectives are responsible for protecting the integrity of these economic and medical assistance programs by investigating suspected fraud by individuals living in Washington County.

Fraudulent use of government assistance can be committed through a number of intentional acts, including under-reporting income, misrepresenting the number of children or adults living in the home, or falsifying documents. Working closely with Washington County Community Services, cases of suspected fraud are assigned to our welfare fraud unit through referrals from county caseworkers or tips from the public. Detectives will then review reports, conduct surveillance and online database searches, examine social media, interview witnesses, neighbors, and suspects, and review government records to determine if an individual wrongfully received assistance or intentionally applied for benefits through fraudulent means.



If detectives can prove through clear and convincing evidence that the fraud was intentional, the outcome would result in a disqualification of benefits and in more serious cases, criminal charges can be issued. When an individual is discovered to have wrongfully received assistance, they are ordered to repay the overpayment through payment plans, garnished wages, or forfeited tax returns. In the 2020-2021 fiscal year alone, our Washington County welfare fraud detectives recovered over \$490,740 in savings and \$986,033 in overpayments for a total of \$1.48 million – all taxpayer dollars.

The goal of welfare is to support families and individuals in need as they work towards a more secure financial life. Without enough income to provide a decent standard of living, these economic and medical assistance programs are designed to help individuals and families secure safe and clean housing, obtain access to medical care, purchase food, and provide financial assistance for daily living. Our Washington County welfare fraud detectives are dedicated to ensuring government assistance is allocated to those who truly need it - by preventing it from falling into the hands of those looking to exploit it.

Your Stats
at a glance

Incidents

29

Citations

5

Traffic Stops

11



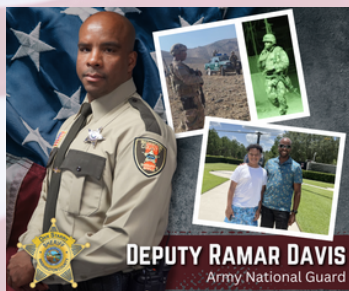
Welcome! We proudly welcomed four new members to the WCSO team last month. L-R Deputy Technician Derek Schweich, Jail Office Cassandra Rice, and Deputy Alec Zachrisson. Deputy Leah Rodriguez



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Honoring our WCSO Veterans...

The Washington County Sheriff's Office is proud to have 40+ military Veterans in our ranks, working in our jail, on patrol, in our 911 communications center, and beyond. In honor of Veteran's Day on November 11th, here are just a few of the dedicated Veterans who have proudly served our country both domestic and overseas.



Amber Valesano
WELFARE FRAUD
DETECTIVE

Detective Amber Valesano joined the Washington County Sheriff's Office in 2015 and is currently assigned as a welfare fraud investigator.

Prior to working in welfare fraud, Amber held assignments in general patrol and our court security unit and remains actively involved in our Peer Support Team and Community Engagement Team. Amber also currently serves as the Secretary/Treasurer for the Minnesota Fraud Investigators Association (MFIA).

Amber is married to a fellow Washington County deputy sheriff and the two enjoy spending their time off with family, making projects with Amber's 6-year-old son, and playing with their nieces.

Washington County Sheriff's Office Sponsors BYRN Burger Night in Hugo

This year the Washington County Sheriff's Office was honored to sponsor Burger Night for the Troops on November 28th at the Hugo American Legion. The Hugo Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Network hosts a burger night each month with a variety of local sponsors. The Sheriff's Office was the November sponsor.

While members of the BYRN are busy cooking and supervising, Sheriff's Office staff take orders and deliver the meals to the patrons. It was a fun event and we met many wonderful people showing their support for our military service members and those of us working in law enforcement. All money raised goes to support military families, many of whom have loved ones who are deployed. The event was made more special as the Royal Court of the St. Paul Winter Carnival stopped by visited with everyone. It was a great community engagement event we hope to sponsor annually.

*-Commander Roger Heinen
Jail Division*

