



Choctaw Sun photo by Tommy Campbell

Retiring Sheriff Donald Lolley (right) hands over the keys on Thursday of last week to incoming Sheriff James Lovette. Lolley retired after 32 years as Sheriff of Choctaw County.

"I wasn't sure if I wanted to drive that bus for the rest of my life ... "

Lolley looks back on almost four decades of law enforcement service

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — Donald Lolley was driving a Trailways bus when the Chief of Police of the Jackson Police Department came to town recruiting new officers.

"I wasn't sure if I wanted to drive that bus for the rest of my life, so I made a choice to go over there and go to work with the police department," he said. "I took a huge cut in pay, but I liked the police work."

Now, with almost four decades of service under his belt, Lolley looks back on the decision as being one of the best he ever made.

He moved back to Choctaw County to take a job as a deputy with the late Sheriff Leon Clark, and later served as Chief of Police in Silas, a position he held until he was elected Sheriff in 1974.

Lolley ran for re-election seven times afterward — often without opposition — and seven times he was re-elected.

But in 2006, he decided to not seek re-election for an eighth term, and for the first time in more than three decades, the name of Donald Lolley was not on the ballot as a candidate for Sheriff.

"I am thankful to have been here for all of this time," the outgoing sheriff said in an interview with the *Sun* just before handing over the keys to his department and the jail to Sheriff-elect James Lovette. "I am thankful to have had some good people around me all of these years, and it certainly doesn't hurt that you serve good people. We have some of the best people in the world here in Choctaw County. No matter how good or how bad I am as sheriff, it's my employees who are out there 'selling the program.'"

Lolley said that he can truly say that he has enjoyed the job, even though at times he has had to deal with some tough situations.

During his 32 years as sheriff, Lolley has been shot, cut, and even had a contract put out on his life by some international drug smugglers.

Lolley said that even though he has seen a lot of people at the lowest points in their lives, most of those folks eventually came around to under-

stand that he and his department were just doing their jobs and upholding the law.

"They do get upset, sometimes, but if you just treat people fair and let them get over that first few days of being mad, they start to look at the overall picture and realize they were wrong," he said.

Since 1974, a number of things have changed in the Sheriff's Department.

"When I first took office, it was just me, a secretary and four deputies," he recalled. Later, the department added four jailers who also had to "double" as radio dispatchers.

"A lot of times that caused problems because the jailer might be upstairs giving out medication or whatever, and someone would be calling on the radio," Lolley said.

Eventually, four dispatchers were hired. In recent years, with the advent of the independent Choctaw Co. E-911 Dispatch Center, three dispatchers and the sheriff's secretary, Patsy Allen, moved across the street to take jobs with the new emergency communications office.

Lolley said that the E-911 office has been a true blessing to law enforcement agencies and other emergency personnel throughout the county.

"Now, I can lock the Sheriff's Office at 4:30 every day and know that someone is on duty to handle calls," he said.

In later years, a relief jailer and a civil paper process server were hired, along with a dietician/matron. The department now has six active deputies (and one who is still out on extended medical leave), a warrants clerk, a civil clerk and a secretary.

"It's a whole lot better than it used to be," he said.

Plus, changing technology has put even more tools at the disposal of law enforcement officers ... tools such as fax machines, email, the World Wide Web, satellite communications, cellular phones, global position finding devices, and far better radio communications abilities.

"We have a computerized fingerprinting machine at the jail that we got on an \$87,000 grant," he said. Fingerprints taken on that device can be sent elec-

tronically to the FBI's National Crime Information Computer in Washington where they can be quickly matched with millions of others in the electronic database.

In addition, stolen cars and firearms, missing persons, and a host of other items can be tracked on the NCIC system, as well as the issuance of nationwide and worldwide "wanted" bulletins.

The department also has access to what is known as the LETS system, whereby law enforcement agencies can access driver's license information and vehicle registration data from an internet link to the Alabama Dept. of Public Safety.

"Back in the early days, we thought we were lucky to have a telephone that worked and a typewriter," he quipped. "A lot of times, when it came to our two-way radios, there were times when we couldn't talk from Butler to the Fire Tower on Hwy. 17 south. Now that we have new repeaters, if our guys are at the Washington County line and want to talk to someone on the Sumter County line its not a problem."

Lolley said that in the past 32 years, he has seen just about every type of crime imaginable in a small rural county, but by far the most prevalent problem is drug abuse.

"Just looking at the jail list, about 85% of those people over there are in jail because of drugs or drug-related offenses," he said. "It's a major, major problem. A lot of the domestic violence cases, burglaries, robberies, and other cases we get called on can be traced back to some type of drug- or alcohol-related incident. Almost everything revolves around dope when you get right down to it."

Even though he is retiring as sheriff doesn't mean he is getting out of law enforcement.

Far from it. After taking a brief "vacation" — one day — Lolley is going to work this week as an investigator for District Attorney Spencer Walker.

With tongue planted firmly in cheek, Lolley told the County Commission recently that his "sentence was about over."

"I really was joking," he said. "I want to end my term on a positive note and let the people know

that I truly appreciate their votes and support over the years. It meant a great deal to me and my family."

Lolley's son, Scott, has followed in his father's law enforcement footsteps and is now a member of the Alabama State Troopers.

The retired sheriff and his wife, the former Rachel Linder, have made their home in Gilbertown for a number of years.

■ Abston

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at Frazer United Methodist Church in Wesley Hall.

Abston told the *Sun* last week that she will be competing in the Physical Fitness portion of the program during Friday night's events, and will perform her talent presentation on Saturday.

Abston will be vying for a share of \$51,200 in cash scholarships and \$1.75 million in college-granted scholarships.

If she is named Alabama's Junior Miss 2007, she will receive a \$12,000 scholarship award and will travel with all expenses paid to Mobile, AL, in June to take part in the 50th annual America's Junior Miss National Finals where she will compete for the title of America's Junior Miss and a share of more than \$100,000 in cash scholarships.

The categories in which the contestants will be evaluated are scholastics (20%), interview (25%), talent (25%), fitness (15%), and self-expression (15%).

Other representatives from the surrounding areas include Hannah Etheridge of Thomasville, Gracie Smith of Demopolis, and Elizabeth Howell of Chatom.

Tickets for Alabama's Junior Miss are available now by calling 334-271-7580. A weekend pass, which includes admission to all three shows, is \$50.00. Tickets for preliminary shows are \$15.00 per show and tickets for the final show are \$30.00 each.

For more information about Alabama's Junior Miss, contact Terry Ballant at 334-277-4528 or 334-324-3400.

■ Accident

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"He's hanging in there," Lucas said. "He's tough." The family asked the *Sun* to convey to all local churches, family members and friends their thanks for the prayers, visits and phone calls.

"We certainly appreciate the support," Lucas said. "It means a lot at a time like this. We know this is going to be a long, drawn-out thing and the prayers of the folks back home mean a lot."

According to reports from the scene, Lewis hit a street sign. The impact snapped the sign post, threw the driver from the 2001 Yamaha onto the pavement, and sent the ATV into a nearby ditch.

A State Trooper spokesman in Mobile put the time of the accident at approximately 12:45 p.m. The first call was received by the Choctaw Co. E-911 Dispatch Center at 1:50 p.m.

State Trooper Chuck Gilliland was the investigating officer. Deputies with the Choctaw Co. Sheriff's Department also responded to the scene.

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