

## Long-time sheriff knows LEC needs

Kingman County Sheriff Randy Hill first joined the office as a deputy in 1981. He was appointed sheriff in 1996 and first elected by voters in 1998. Since then, he has been re-elected by voters four times, with the most recent affirmation coming in 2012. Hill speaks about the needs of the sheriff's office, its staff and the Kingman County Law Enforcement Center with 32 years of hands-on experience in the department and in the current building.

The county hired a Hutchinson firm in 1998 to evaluate what could be done. The firm ruled out remodeling because complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act would make offices that were already too few and too small, even smaller. Hallways and doorways would have to be widened. But there was a school bond before voters, so Hill didn't press the issue.

In 1981, the sheriff's office consisted of seven people (sheriff, undersheriff, secretary, four deputies). Deputies did all the duties related to the Kingman County Jail. They fed inmates and booked them in. The first jailer wasn't hired until 1997. Today, Hill oversees 23 employees (eight officers, five jailers, eight 911 dispatchers and two administrative personnel).

The configuration of the LEC offices has changed numerous times, as the department evolved from typewriters and teletypes to computers. But the finite space of the building hasn't changed. Five deputies share one small office on the main level that's equipped with one computer. That computer stores all the computer aided dispatch (CAD) tickets. If one officer is writing a report, no one else can check e-mails or do other computer-based work.

Reports are important. Hill said every word is scrutinized, especially if the report becomes evidence in a court case. His officers need enough space to work so they can concentrate and not be interrupted. And sometimes, officers just need space because of what they see and deal with in the field. "It's very difficult to do that in this facility," he said.

Another vital need is adequate, dedicated training space where officers can stay current as required by law. Currently, the only adequate space is at the Kingman County Activity Center, which can only be used when it's available. Law enforcement can't store training equipment there.

"We have a difficult time trying to do the proper training that we need. Kansas requires full-time law enforcement officers to have 40 hours of continuing education every year. Anytime we can do it all here and not send officers to another location, it saves us a lot of money. If we had our own training room, we could train more at one time and still have staff on duty."

The men and women who work in the sheriff's office are highly trained and are capable of conducting the kinds of evidence processing and investigation often shown on television shows such as CSI.

"One of the things a lot of people don't understand is we're a fully investigative team. We can go out to a crime scene or bring items in and process that evidence ourselves in-house, do it immediately and we're that much ahead on an investigation," Hill said. That same, small room in the courthouse was set up for evidence processing but it's been totally taken over by the records.

Records storage is another commonly misunderstood aspect of law enforcement work, Hill said. Most records have to be kept in perpetuity. But it's not as simple as it sounds.

"We have to keep records separate for juveniles. It's something that all the agencies that audit us will check. Medical records must be separate from regular records – they have to be in separate locked containers," he said.

Storage has migrated even into the bathrooms at the LEC. The next step will be renting storage somewhere else at taxpayer expense. It's a lament Hill has heard many times from his fellow sheriffs, even those whose counties have built new facilities. "The last three facilities I've been at, each of the sheriffs said we wished we would have done a bigger room with storage because we've already maxed out the storage," he said.

Hill also says having the county's emergency manager in the LEC is crucial. Hill has spent literally thousands of hours planning what a new LEC should include. He has always tried to do what's best for the citizens of Kingman County, the citizens he has sworn to serve and protect.