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Chief deputy's retirement shows change and continuity;

Loyalty, integrity, honor and more go steadily through transition



(from left) Incoming Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Robert Willis, Gilchrist County Sheriff Bobby Schultz and Chief Deputy Jeff Manning, who retired about 12 hours after this picture was taken, pose as requested for posterity. The change in second in command at the GCSO provides some change as well as a base of continuity of honor and integrity that is expected from professional law enforcement leaders in Florida.

Story, Photos and Video

By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 3, 2019 at 9:39 a.m.

GILCHRIST COUNTY – With about 12 hours remaining in his post as Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Jeff Manning, the second in command at the GCSO enjoyed a party in his honor held at the conference room of the GCSO in Trenton Friday afternoon (Aug. 2).

<https://youtu.be/mX2sTsfTwCc>

In this video, Gilchrist County Sheriff Bobby Schultz on Friday afternoon (Aug. 2) speaks about Chief Deputy Jeff Manning – about 12 hours before Manning's retirement started. On Aug. 2 as it becomes Aug. 3, at midnight.

“I thank all of y'all for being here,” Sheriff Bobby Schultz said as he opened the celebration to honor retiring GCSO Chief Deputy Manning.

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Gilchrist County Sheriff Schultz, Gilchrist County Manager Bobby Crosby, incoming GCSO Chief Deputy Robert Willis, GCSO Capt. Sheryl Brown, GCSO Lt. Clint Anderson, GCSO Sgt. Edwin Jenkins, GCSO Sgt. Mike Simpson and others shared their thoughts about Manning.

From everything that was said, the retirement of this honorable man who has been involved as a professional law enforcement officer for 34 years brings change; perhaps more importantly from the perspective of Gilchrist County residents and visitors the seamless transition will bring continuity in how the second in command for the GCSO helps Sheriff Schultz serves the GCSO and the residents and visitors of the county.

Manning will turn 57 years old this year. He and his wife Pam are relocating to North Carolina, where they will enjoy their horses and ride on their pontoon boat on a lake there.

Of course, there is bound to be more for the couple although Manning told HardisonInk.com he is retiring and has no plans to accept other employment.

Most of Manning's career as a law enforcement officer was as a member of the St. Petersburg Police Department, where he served from December of 1984 to November of 2010. A few years later, he started at the GCSO in January of 2013 as a lieutenant.

The sheriff saw Manning's value to the county as chief deputy, and he promoted him.

As the sheriff opened his speech regarding Manning's departure, he said it was "bittersweet" to be in the position now to thank Manning for his service to Gilchrist County.

Sheriff Schultz was elected to his first four-year term in November of 2012. At that time, he had not met Manning before. During the campaign to get elected, Sheriff Schultz said, he was at Akins Bar-B-Q & Grill in Bell and Manning grilled candidate Schultz on why he thought he should be the next sheriff of Gilchrist County, the sheriff said.

Sheriff Schultz shared his perspective of Manning.

"When I think of Jeff Manning," Schultz said, "I think of integrity and loyalty. He has been very loyal to the Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office."

The sheriff said Manning's experience as a law enforcement officer over 25 years in a relatively large metropolitan police agency proved to be valuable to the GCSO as this county and its Sheriff's Office grew to become what it is today. The sheriff is very pleased with what has resulted from the chief deputy's work at the GCSO.

"I can say that anything good that has happened here," Schultz said, "he has had a direct role in. And for that, I will be eternally grateful."

The sheriff said he believe Manning is the "hardest working chief deputy" that he has ever seen.

Schultz said Manning helped him in many ways during the past six-plus years, including with finding the best method to speak to crowds. Schultz said he dislikes speaking to crowds.

The single piece of advice Manning gave Schultz was to "speak from the heart." Another key element the outgoing chief deputy gave, which has proved to be sage advice, is to go aside from the speaking engagement, and to say a prayer.

County Manager Crosby on Friday, said a prayer to bless the gathering and the food at this retirement party on Friday.

The sheriff said no person is perfect, but the perfect love of Christ was brought to Schultz by Manning reminding him from whence all people in power can go for comfort,

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strength and peace.

Given the terrible and horrible events Gilchrist County has suffered in the past six years, Schultz said this encouragement for him from Manning is invaluable, indispensable, crucial and a critical element in the GCSO's success in the face of tragedy.

The sheriff shared with listeners that in September of 2014 when children were killed by a grandfather fatally shot his daughter and her six children before killing himself, Manning told Schultz that he would "get him through this, and then I'm done."

"I got fired that evening," Manning said.

The sheriff said he would let Manning tell that story about him being fired that evening.

"But he came back to work the next day," Schultz said. "And a week later, he said, 'I've got a little left in the tank.'"

The sheriff said looking from 2014 to the events of 2018, where two deputies were killed and the murderer took his own life too, and the same conversation was had between the two men.

"He is a man of integrity," Sheriff Schultz said, "because he could have walked out the door on us that day. He could have, and there would have been a void beyond voids; but he was a man. He stood here. He came in. He did his job."

The sheriff said Manning saw the GCSO through the point where it had to hire 10 new employees after the murders of two deputies in 2018.

Sheriff Schultz said his predecessor Gilchrist County Sheriff Daniel Slaughter (2008-2012) told him he should seek to leave things a little bit better than what they were when he found it.

"Chief (Manning), you are leaving things a little bit better than what you found it," Schultz told his retiring friend and colleague.

The sheriff said he thinks there are 18,000 people in Gilchrist County who would agree with that statement.

The sheriff previously had awarded the retiring chief deputy with the service revolver issued by the agency. On Friday afternoon, Sheriff Schultz presented Chief Deputy Manning (who is retired effective at midnight on Aug. 2) with a plaque.

The plaque notes "Sheriff Robert D. Schultz III And the Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office Presents to Chief Deputy Jeffrey L. Manning In Appreciation of 6 years of Dedicated Service and Commitment to the Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office and the citizens of this county, Our thanks for a total of 34 years in Law Enforcement and Public Service exhibiting courage and compassion to Protect and Serve. Congratulations and Best Wishes on your Retirement January 4, 2013 – August 2, 2019."

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Jeff Manning (left) accepts a plaque from Sheriff Bobby Schultz.



Chief Deputy Jeff Manning and Sheriff Bobby Schultz provide a photo opportunity with the plaque presented by the sheriff to the retiring chief deputy.

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Chief Manning then spoke to the room full of people.

He said that when he retired from the SPPD after 25 years, it was an emotional experience. Nonetheless, he added, the retirement event on Aug. 2 in Trenton, gives him emotions that are “off the chart.”

“You guys mean that much to me,” Manning said. “I don’t have a whole lot of family, and you guys have become that.”

The outgoing chief deputy said he recognizes that he may have been seen as being tough on some of them, but that is a requirement of him being the chief deputy.

“I did that because I only want you to get better,” Manning said, “and I know you’ve got it within you to do that.”

He mentioned several names of deputies who were always there for him. GCSO Sgt. Jenkins is a man whom Manning said he put his life in his hands and the sergeant put his life in Manning’s hands, and there was never a moment of doubt about putting that degree of trust there.

“I consider you a great friend,” Manning said before crossing the conference room to hug the sergeant.

In part of his parting speech, Manning said there are some projects and goals he is leaving unfinished; however, he added, this is as it should be.

“I think if you leave,” Manning said, “and you didn’t have things that you didn’t get accomplished, then you can’t say ‘O.K., I did everything I needed to do.’ You can’t have that.”

Manning said he knows Sheriff Schultz has more that he wants to accomplish, and he knows incoming Chief Deputy Willis has said he wants to complete some missions that Manning had on his radar.

Manning said the support by the people of Gilchrist County for everyone in the community, including the Sheriff’s Office, is “off the chain. I’ve never seen anything like it.” He added that the support of the GCSO by the County Manager’s Office and by the Gilchrist County Board of County Commissioners has been appreciated.

Incoming Chief Deputy Willis expressed his hope for Manning to have good luck in his retirement.

Before the event, Manning and Willis shared some candid points with HardisonInk.com.

About Manning, Willis said he is a man of integrity.

Both men agreed, too, that as the chief deputy they have certain traits that are good for leaders in the law enforcement profession.

They are both stubborn in their convictions. They are both thick-skinned. They are both, assertive, dedicated, honorable and committed to the mission of serving the people as they do their best to protect life and property as they have taken an oath to do, while staying within the bounds of the United States Constitution, the Florida Constitution and all of the laws deriving from those documents and from legislators’ work.

In speaking to the audience, Willis said these two men being both stubborn have almost come to blows because they both knew they were right in the application of differing methods to reach the same goal.

Willis said to Manning that he saw Manning always acting honorably, and professionally, and with the passion that is essential to the success of law enforcement.

“What Jeff has shown us,” Willis said to the members of the GCSO, “is that it does

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takes hard-headedness, thick skin, bullhead and being assertive to be a cop. You're not supposed to be a snowflake. You're not supposed to apologize for what you do.

"You're supposed to stand up and be proud of it," incoming Chief Deputy Willis told the listening deputies at the event about 12 hours before he took that post. "Right or wrong, it is better to do what you think is right at that moment, than to second-guess yourself. And that's exactly what the chief has done for this sheriff, and for each one of you, whether you realize it or not."



County Manager Bobby Crosby (standing at right in the plaid shirt) speaks about his friend Jeff Manning.

County Manager Crosby then spoke about Manning.

He told listeners that they had met at Pine Grove Baptist Church during a Chamber of Commerce event.

When Manning needed to share some confidential information with the sheriff, Crosby offered to walk away, but Sheriff Schultz told him to stay.

"That same trust you all put in me," Crosby said, "I have been able to put in you in what we've done."

That is when their friendship began, Crosby told Manning, and he values that

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friendship.

Answering calls on weekends, nights and other times provided opportunities for the two county agencies to work together for the good of the people, Crosby said.

Crosby told a story about Chief Deputy Manning pulling him over by activating the GCSO's county truck's emergency lights, while Crosby was driving a Gilchrist County truck. It happened one day when both vehicles were heading the same direction around Walker's Curve (U.S. Highway 129 at Gilchrist County Road 307).

Both of their cell phones kept lighting up with people calling them as they were on the side of the road trying to talk. Everyone wanted to know why Chief Manning pulled over County Manager Crosby, he said.

Crosby said he was not pulled over to be issued a citation or a warning.

The radio system through dispatch had broken that morning, Crosby said, and Crosby was on his phone speaking with someone about that. Manning was trying to call Crosby as he was driving behind him.

Crosby saw Manning behind him as he looked in the rearview mirror.

"He can see I'm on the phone," Crosby said. "So, he just turns his (emergency) lights on to pull me over."

Manning said he pulled Crosby over because they needed to return to the radio antenna tower.

"The funny thing is," Crosby said, "is that this was at 8 o'clock in the morning when all the school traffic was going over. So, for about two days we answered the question of why I did get pulled over."

Crosby said that was a fun occurrence. He wished Manning and his family the best, and told him he will be missed.



Chief Deputy Jeff Manning reaches across a table to hug his friend Sgt. Edwin Jenkins.

GCSO Sgt. Jenkins said he was called by Sheriff Schultz to a home invasion at 4:30 a.m. where a person was killed. The sheriff said he would call Chief Deputy Manning to the scene as well.

Within 15 minutes, Schultz and Jenkins were at the scene, the sergeant said.

About an hour or two later, Manning showed up, Jenkins said. The sheriff and sergeant were looking rather haggard at that time of the morning, having rushed to respond.

Sgt. Jenkins said then-Lt. Manning showed up shaved, showered, wearing a suit and

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tie. Jenkins said it has become a standing joke to talk about whether Manning had showered before going to a scene.

This happened one or two months after the sheriff took office in 2013, Manning said. So, on Friday afternoon (Aug. 2) he “confessed” as to why he arrived a bit later than within 15 minutes. His GPS had directed him to the crime scene.

“They give me this address and I’m like, ‘Yeah, I’ll be able to find that.’” Manning said.

Manning said he may have driven by the location 10 times, but he had to call in for turn by turn directions to find that location.

As for being clean shaven, he was trained at the SPPD that when you are on the clock, you are prepared.

Sgt. Jenkins said Manning has always been firm, but fair. They did not always agree, the sergeant said, as he congratulated the man on retiring, because he earned it, added that he will miss his friend whom he saw daily as a member of the family at the GCSO.

Sgt. Simpson, who leads the GCSO Special Response Team, and the Honor Guard as well as serving daily as a sergeant, said he and Manning have had the same goals but they both expressed to each other their different ideas on the best method to complete missions.

Simpson said he sees now where he might have thought Manning was just riding him without cause at some points over the years, it was to help Simpson exercise an opportunity to advance in his career.

Lt. Anderson said he appreciates everything Manning has done to help him over the years.

Capt. Brown said the chief deputy brings forth growth when he sees potential in a person. She said the past few years have presented her with times when she spoke to him and the sheriff about things she would not normally speak about with her coworkers. Manning provided her with good advice and directions, and Capt. Brown said she is forever grateful for that.

Todd Holder said he remembers going from being a road deputy to being a School Resource Officer and missing a softball event, where he was then called on the carpet.

Another time, he faced the sheriff and chief deputy and was told to surrender his gun and badge, while that sounds tough, it was one of those moments where those two leaders helped him gain a better sense of humor.

Holder thanked the chief deputy for all of the opportunities he gave him, including as an SRO, to grow in the profession.

GCSO Patrol Commander Lt. Scotty Douglas said he remembers when Chief Manning started at the GCSO in 2006, and while they had moments where they saw the same thing with different points of view, Manning helped the lieutenant get through some things.

Sheriff Schultz shared a story to wrap up that part of the event.

When Schultz was first elected, it was by a narrow margin. He saw that 50 percent of the voters wanted him and 50 percent of the voters wanted the other candidate. There was a lawsuit, he continued.

The sheriff said that when Manning and he would show up at the courthouse, Manning would always literally stand behind him rather than beside him. This was before he was chief deputy.

The sheriff mentioned it to Manning, and he told Schultz that is where he belonged –

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to watch his back.

The sheriff's mother told her son that she saw Manning as a good man. Schultz said with that endorsement, he saw Manning had the best seal of approval possible.



One section of the tables full of food that was brought by many members of the GCSO for the celebration.

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The cake is part of the desserts available at this event.

And then, there were the “refreshments.”

The invitation to the event noted refreshments would be available after the ceremony. Long tables were covered with plates and crock pots of various meatballs, chicken wings of differing spice levels, homemade chicken salad, homemade egg salad, homemade turkey sliders, homemade ham sliders, cheeses and finger-food forms of vegetables galore were there. A wide assortment of soft drinks, as well as sweet and unsweetened tea were available to drink.

All of the guests enjoyed the refreshments after the retirement celebration.