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New Unit Augments Fairbanks Patrol

(FAIRBANKS, Alaska) – In order to put more emphasis on solving property crimes and returning stolen property to its rightful owner, in November of 2015 D Detachment set up the Special Projects Unit (SPU), based in Fairbanks. D Detachment is the largest detachment within the Division of Alaska State Troopers, with the current case load, Troopers have had to think outside of the box to efficiently and effectively handle cases that otherwise could go to the wayside due to the lack of time or the inability to track down leads.

“Fairbanks post is one of the areas where new recruits come in to learn the ropes of Patrol. They have a lot of incidents they handle and don’t have the time to compare burglaries with the same MO or they might not have the experience yet to pick up on telling nuances,” said Sergeant Jess Carson, one of the troopers working SPU. “We have three guys in this unit with 30 years of experience between us. We can review patrol trooper incident reports and find areas to help them close out their case or make bigger and better cases if we see connections to other incidents.”

SPU is comprised of one patrol sergeant and two patrol troopers. They have vast experience working in Narcotics, Bureau of Highway Patrol, Major Crimes, Homicide, and rural communities. Since being formed November 16th 2015 the Special Projects Unit assisted with 14 arrest warrants, patrols of high volume burglary areas, the recovery of approximately 93 firearms, four snow machines, five vehicles, two trailers, a John Deere backhoe, and additional stolen items to include tools, computers, and miscellaneous personal items. In total the Fairbanks SPU, with the assistance of Statewide Drug Enforcement Unit, Alaska Wildlife Troopers, and Patrol, helped recover approximately \$190,000 in stolen items. SPU further assisted in two motor vehicle fatality investigations, and seized cocaine, marijuana, prescription pills, psilocybin mushrooms, heroin and methamphetamine.

“The unit isn’t just for property crimes, we are here to help patrol with whatever issues come up,” said Sergeant Carson. “Right now, property crimes are the big problem. If in a few weeks we have problems with people speeding in school zones, we’ll shift our schedules around and help patrol out with that. If presentations need to be done at schools or various military and civilian groups, we’ll handle those too. If a trooper needs help getting and servicing a search warrant— we’re on it.”

The troopers in the unit communicate regularly with other detachments and agencies to see if they are potentially working cases with the same people involved or have other similarities. If so, they can coordinate parallel investigations for a better outcome. By attending weekly meetings with the drug unit and meeting monthly with other agencies, they can also help identify cases that are connected to potentially larger crime circles that cover larger areas of the state.

SPU has given five public presentations to the community of Fairbanks and worked with local residents in an effort to prevent further burglaries and other property crimes. Additionally, SPU is working toward assisting with the creation of several local Neighborhood Watch programs and implementing an Impact Teen Driving program that has been hugely successful in California.

No additional funding was needed to establish this unit as it reallocates existing patrol resources and serves to assist patrol troopers where they need help the most. Instead of initiating their own cases, SPU is looking at stalled cases from different angles or helping a trooper that is struggling with the work load of a case and easing their burden. "If anything, we are saving money by sometimes eliminating the need for overtime." Sergeant Carson said. "If an investigation needs to move quickly and a trooper is struggling to get all the relevant information together for a warrant, we can take over, get the warrant, do the search and hand over a neat report for the patrol trooper to supplement their case with."

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