

Sheriff recruiting volunteers for marine observer program

By LINDA GALLAGHER

BELLAIRE-Watch out unsafe boaters! In addition to the regular Antrim County Marine Patrol, Sheriff Dan Bean will have "O-O's" watching for unsafe marine behavior on the waters of Antrim County this summer.

"O-O's are actually Official Observers who will be part of a new program to be called the Antrim County Lake Watch Program.

The program, a voluntary partnership between the public and the Sheriff's Department, will hopefully encompass 14 lakes within the county, Bean said last week, enabling private citizens to assist the existing marine patrols in promoting water safety.

"Our Official Observers will be people who reside on the lake who are responsible individuals and respected members of the

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Volunteers

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community known to the department," Bean said. "I'm sure a lot of these people will be folks who have done this for many years on their own anyway, just not in any type of official capacity."

O-O's will be asked to keep an eye out for what's happening

on the water within plain view of their residence, the Sheriff said. "On occasion, the department might ask an O-O to assist in watching an ongoing emergency such as a capsized boat or a boat fire until one of our Marine Patrol officers is able to reach the scene."

Each O-O's residence will be assigned a unique alpha/numeric

designation and a suitable sign to display from their dock, Bean said. "We'd like to have at least one O-O for every mile around the lakes to enhance search and rescue capabilities."

In addition, if necessary, the department's Central Dispatch may send ambulances to the O-O's home to pick up injured patients from the patrol boats

in order to speed transfer to the hospital, he added.

Each patrol boat will have a full listing of names, locations, and telephone numbers of the O-O's they may contact for support when needed.

The program is part of Bean's effort to increase law enforcement on the water, he said, noting that marine officers will be encouraged to ticket more violators this year. "Last year, out of 45 warnings, only 13 tickets were issued," he said. "We're going to step that up a bit."

Bean is also working closely with new Kalkaska County Sheriff Dave Israel in order to do a better job of enforcing marine recreationists' behavior at the often notorious south Torch Lake sandbar this summer, he said.

To become an Antrim County O-O, residents must live on the lake full-time during the warmer months of the year, complete an application, and participate in class sessions where they will learn what constitutes a marine violation, how Central Dispatch works, take a tour of the 911 Emergency Operations Center, and learn about road patrol operations and other facts intended to help the observers be more informative for marine patrols.

If you are interested in becoming an Antrim County Official Observer, contact the Antrim County Sheriff's Department at (231)533-8627, ext. 2551.