

# WHITFIELD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE DEDICATES NEW TRAINING FACILITY

5,000-square-foot center dedicated in honor of Capt. Rick Swiney, who's been with the sheriff's office for 43 years

**By MITCH TALLEY**

*Whitfield County Director of Communications*

Years from now, area law enforcement officers will still be reaping the benefits of the Whitfield County Sheriff's Office's new Training Center and Firing Range that was dedicated during a June 14 ceremony.

That was the word from Sheriff Scott Chitwood, who addressed a large crowd of area lawmen, county officials, and other well-wishers on a bright, sunny day outside the facility located on Old Prater's Mill Road.

"This is a very special day for us," the sheriff said. "This is going to be a facility that will be here for many, many years to come. When the time comes and we pass the torch off, we're going to leave this facility and the jail in much better shape than when we entered law enforcement. The next generation's going to have something to be proud of."



***Cutting the ribbon at the new training facility are (from left) Capt. Charles Bunch, Maj. John Gibson, Capt. Rick Swiney, Sheriff Scott Chitwood, Capt. Steve Fields, and Capt. Wesley Lynch. (Photo by Mitch Talley).***

Best of all, taxpayers didn't have to foot the bill for the 5,000-square-foot facility, which was paid for with drug forfeiture funds. The metal and concrete block building features a large meeting room fitted with the latest technology, along with a kitchen, offices, restrooms, and storage rooms.

The site also still includes the firing range, the old training building, and the shooting house where instructors can oversee activity – all of which were also refurbished with funds seized from criminals. Construction and renovations totaled about \$300,000, officials said.

A highlight of the ceremony came when a sign outside the new building was uncovered, revealing that the facility was being dedicated to Capt. Rick Swiney, a 43-year veteran of the Sheriff's Office.

"I was totally shocked when I saw the new Sheriff's Office Training Center and Firing Range was being dedicated to me," Swiney said. "It was a total surprise, and a very humbling experience. It is a day and experience that I will always cherish. I appreciate Sheriff Chitwood and Major (John) Gibson for thinking of me and selecting me for such an honorable award. This administration has always been supportive to me and all the other employees of the sheriff's office."

Swiney said he has enjoyed his 43 years with the sheriff's office, calling it a "very rewarding experience."

"I work with a great group of officers who are very dedicated to their work," he said. "They make coming to work each day an enjoyable experience."

He also thanked his wife, Cathy, and other members of his family who were at the ceremony. "Cathy has always been by my side," he said, "and supported me during my career at the sheriff's office."

His wife and a select few who knew about the honor were sworn to secrecy by the sheriff, "and it was the hardest thing to keep a secret from him," Cathy admitted. "They didn't tell me till last week because I can't keep a secret. To look at him all weekend, I had to turn my head."

She said the whole family is proud of him. "He's a humble man and doesn't like attention," she said. "We've been blessed, and it's an honor."

Sheriff Chitwood pointed out that he and Capt. Swiney are the only two remaining officers in the sheriff's office to have worked in the old jail on South Hamilton, the old jail on Waugh Street, and the current facility.

"He's been with me for 25 years," the sheriff said. "Eight elections if I counted right that he has survived – that is unprecedented. He's got 43 years – and I'm not hinting for him to leave – with not only the sheriff's office but with Whitfield County. He's the fourth most senior employee of Whitfield County."

The sheriff's office has been using the old training facility for about 30 years, including for the annual Old Timer's Shoot where retired lawmen from throughout Georgia earn their federal concealed weapons carry permits.

One such retiree who attended last week's dedication is Mike Key, a retired lieutenant with the Dalton Police Department.



***Sheriff Scott Chitwood addresses the large crowd that gathered June 14 for the dedication ceremony for the new Whitfield County Sheriff's Office Training Center and Firing Range. Standing to the right of the sheriff are Maj. John Gibson and Bishop Reuben Graham, one of the chaplains at the jail, who delivered a prayer of dedication. (Photo by Mitch Talley).***

“I did firearms training up here for many, many years with the police department,” Key said. “This new facility is state of the art - a super thing for not only the Whitfield County Sheriff’s Office but law enforcement in the region. There’s a lot of people who come here and train – very convenient. It’s just got good people, good instructors, good facility, a very rare combination of things that came together – the donation of the property, the labor and the buildings, and the use of drug forfeitures to build it.”

In the 1980s, local businessman Jim Boring and former Sheriff Jim Stafford reached an agreement that the old training facility and shooting range could be built on Boring’s land, for \$1 rent each year.

“Last year, Jim’s son, Marcus Boring, was kind enough to sign the property over to us, so now this property belongs to the sheriff’s office,” Chitwood said, noting that transfer allowed the county to make improvements to the facility. “Marcus, thank you very much. He’s certainly a great friend and great supporter not only of me but of law enforcement in general, so again, Marcus, we thank you very much.”

The sheriff also praised the efforts of Maj. Gibson, calling it “almost a personal dream of his to have a training facility to train officers – he was very, very involved.”

Chitwood likewise lauded the work of Sgt. Tracy Davis, who did much of the construction work himself with the help of inmate work crews and the county Public Works department.

“After the concrete slab was poured, after the beams went up, after the steel went up on the building, it was basically turned over and Tracy brought the trustees up here,” the sheriff said. “It is amazing the talent, the skills that this guy has. He put the fence posts up, got the sod and laid it, planted the shrubbery, did the insulation, the wiring, the carpet, the tiles in the bathroom and kitchen, got the cabinets done, remodeled the old building, remodeled the shoot house out there. We got a real good deal with this guy over here – Tracy, thank you.”

Chitwood also applauded the Mashburn Foundation, which made a “very, very generous donation” that will pay for a decision-making / shooting simulator that will be installed in the coming weeks at the old training center. “This will highly, highly enhance the training of our officers for many, many years to come,” he said.