

TWO PATROL RECRUITS BECOME FIRST IN NEW PROGRAM AT WHITFIELD SHERIFF'S OFFICE

By MITCH TALLEY

Whitfield County Director of Communications

Meet Edgar Corona and Michael McClure, two groundbreaking recruits for the Whitfield County Sheriff's Office.

They're the first recruits chosen for Sheriff Scott Chitwood's new Deputy Training Program and left April 7 to begin 11 weeks of state-mandated training at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center in Forsyth.

While Corona and McClure took different paths on the way to their new careers, both men share the same basic reason for joining the Sheriff's Office – a strong desire to serve their community.



New recruits Micheal McClure (left) and Edgar Corona stand next to a Whitfield County Sheriff's Office vehicle the day before leaving for mandate training in Forsyth. (Photo by Mitch Talley).

A first-generation American who grew up in Dalton as the son of Mexican immigrants, Corona says he knew he wanted to join law enforcement as a young child. After graduating from Southeast Whitfield High School in 2016, he earned a degree in Criminal Justice from Dalton State College in December 2020.

Corona then received his first taste of real-world law enforcement duty during a five-week internship with the Sheriff's Office, where he spent the first and last weeks with detectives and a week each with Patrol, Detention, and Court Services.

"I've always found it interesting to work for law enforcement, I guess since I was 6 or 7," he said. "Nowadays, police officers as a whole are sometimes seen as intimidating, but to me, I have always thought they were the good guys. My parents always taught me to respect the law, to always abide by the law."

McClure, meanwhile, wasn't as sure about his career path after graduating from North Murray High School in 2014, first working in carpet mills before deciding to sign up for a four-year stint in the Air Force at age 21.

Once his time was up, McClure says it was the lure of family and friends waiting back home that led him to Whitfield County.

"You're in a different world out there by yourself," he said of his military days that included time in Texas and California, "and you're missing holidays and birthdays and nieces being born. I have a big family, and they are really important to me."

In years past, the two recruits wouldn't have gone straight into the Patrol Division, instead having to join the staff at the Whitfield County Jail, "almost like paying your dues," before being approved to attend the Police Academy and become a patrolman, says Lt. Juan Martinez, training officer.

With the current struggle to find enough Patrol officers, though, the department decided to scrap that method and begin the new program that Martinez believes will put two new patrolmen on local roads by the end of May.

Because the state requires all participants in the mandate training to complete a grueling physical fitness test within two minutes and six seconds, Whitfield County constructed a similar course that local participants must first pass before even being able to join the Deputy Training Program.

"Two weeks ago, they went down and took the test at state, and both of them actually improved their times here by 20 to almost 30 seconds," Martinez said. "With McClure's military background, of course, he smoked it. And Edgar had really been running and prepping for it. There's a big ol' dummy that weighs like 150 pounds that they have to move, simulating an officer down and dragging them out of danger. Edgar had been practicing getting himself ready for that, and he smoked it, too."

Corona is quick to point out that he believes the actions of a few bad apples highlighted by the media don't reflect all lawmen. "You can't let the bad things overshadow the good things," he says. "I feel like law enforcement gets a bad rap. But in reality, I mean, who else are you going to call when something goes down?"

During his internship, Corona says he came away impressed with the professionalism, courtesy, and respect displayed by his fellow officers. "What I saw with my patrol officers, they treated everyone with respect. Yes, the suspect might have committed a crime, but they're still people at the end of the day and deserve respect. It's truly amazing that these officers can put

up a straight face, take the scrutiny, put on the badge, put on the boots, go to work. That's something I want to do. I want to help somebody, at least change one mind."

McClure says joining the Sheriff's Office was a natural leap for someone who's already been in the military.

"I couldn't think of anything else that I would rather do than help people," he says. "And, you know, I've seen it on the big scale where you're serving your country as a whole and you don't really get to see the return on what you're putting in on an everyday basis. But I feel like when you're working for your community, you can see all those little things you do on a daily basis that help people."

He's excited about the opportunity to take the mandate training. "I can't wait to get down there and start going through it and learning," he said. "I want to be a sponge when we get there. I just want to absorb everything I can."

Martinez encourages other local residents interested in a law enforcement career to visit wcco.com.

"I can personally tell you, from my experience, it's not the career path I thought I might take," the 11-year veteran said, "but it's one that I'm very glad that I did. I love my job. I think everybody that works here at the sheriff's office, they do it because this is our community and we want to take care of it."