

CANDID CAMERAS

Sheriff partners with businesses and residents to create Operation Watchdog video surveillance network

By Cynthia Scott and Ted Freeman



Monmouth County (New Jersey) Sheriff Chaun Golden announces the Operation Watchdog initiative.

Merriam-Webster defines “watchdog” as (1) a dog kept to guard property, and (2) one that guards against loss, waste, theft, or undesirable practices. Monmouth County (New Jersey) Sheriff Shaun Golden is applying the latter definition by partnering with business and residents to help solve crimes through his office’s new Operation Watchdog initiative.

The program invites and encourages business owners and residents to register their video surveillance systems with the sheriff’s office in an effort to assist in, and expedite, criminal investigations. Through participation in Operation Watchdog, businesses and residents with video security systems can help local law enforcement take a bite out of crime.

Monmouth County is the first county in New Jersey to offer Operation Watchdog. The Monmouth County Sheriff’s Office credits the Toms River Police Department

(formerly the Dover Township Police Department) for initiating the program at the local level. Sheriff Golden served with the Toms River Police Department before he joined the Monmouth County Sheriff’s Office (MCSO).

Operation Watchdog is a voluntary program that provides law enforcement with information on the locations of registered video surveillance cameras. The information is safe, secure, and is not made public; police don’t ask for direct or live access to a surveillance or security camera. Instead, they reach out to the registered businesses or homeowners in the vicinity of a crime. Such video surveillance may capture evidence that might be helpful in an investigation and in solving the crime and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

“This is an extremely beneficial partnership from all ends, since it increases safety and helps solve and reduce crimes

more efficiently and effectively,” Sheriff Golden says. “Surveillance cameras are crime-fighting tools, and registering them through Operation Watchdog saves members of law enforcement time when it comes to determining the location of video cameras that may contain valuable footage of criminal activity.”

“Operation Watchdog makes sense for everyone because it assists law enforcement in the development of evidence for criminal investigations,” says Monmouth County Prosecutor Christopher Gramiccioni. “The program also helps local businesses and citizens protect themselves—a natural interest for our residents who want to help ensure the safety of their neighborhoods. It’s like an electronic Neighborhood Watch program and requires no funding for implementation.”

Registration is free, easy, and takes only a few minutes to complete. The registrant provides his or her contact information,

along with the location of the cameras. Upon completion of an application, a member of law enforcement follows up to confirm the information. Information that may not appear to mean much now could be very useful should a crime occur. To view the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office Operation Watchdog site, visit mcsnj.org/operation-watchdog.

Joining Operation Watchdog is a simple three-step process:

- **Registration.** Participants provide their contact information and tell MCSO where their security cameras are located. There is no cost for registration.
- **Confirmation.** Once the application is completed, a member of the local law enforcement agency follows up to confirm the information.
- **Call for assistance.** The law enforcement agency contacts the participant if

there is a criminal incident in the area of their security cameras. Police personnel may request a copy of any video captured by security cameras that may be pertinent to the investigation.

There are five terms and conditions registrants must follow:

- Any video collected by a law enforcement agency relating to criminal activity may be used in the investigation and as possible evidence.
- Video footage provided to a law enforcement agency is reserved for official use only.
- Under no circumstances shall registrants construe that they are acting as an agent/employee of a law enforcement agency through the Operation Watchdog program.
- When necessary, the law enforcement agency will contact participants directly

using the information provided to obtain security camera footage.

- Registrants agree not to release any video footage or still images to the media without first consulting the local law enforcement agency.

In Monmouth County, the first businesses to sign up for the program were iPlay America and Rook Coffee. "iPlay America is proud to be a part of Operation Watchdog," says owner Bob McDaid. "One of our core values as an organization is safety—not just within our facility, but within our community, as well. This program allows us to further enhance our community involvement." ★

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