

LAKE METROPARKS POSSE

by Lisa Sintic, MOUNTED UNIT SUPERVISOR

THE LAKE METROPARKS POSSE IS A GROUP OF DEDICATED HORSEMEN who have served as goodwill ambassadors for the agency for 20 years.

In 1988, Lake Metroparks' Executive Director proposed the idea to start a volunteer group to assist the rangers in their daily activities. Mounted rangers began the process of developing this opportunity for local horsemen to take an active role with the Lake Metroparks Ranger Department. They needed to determine exactly what the volunteers' role would be, how they would look, and make sure the volunteers would not be mistaken for rangers.

Late in November 1988, the first group of volunteers began training and became the Lake Metroparks Volunteer Mounted Posse. For six months, 17 people and 15 horses met every week to learn policies and procedures, how to effectively handle encounters with the public and how to conduct themselves in emergency situations. They covered everything from basic horsemanship skills to advanced mounted police techniques, drill maneuvers and parade formations. They also completed sensory training to help the horses learn to not be fearful of common objects and to build trust and confidence between horse and rider. At the end of May 1989, this charter group of volunteers graduated.

The Posse's first official duty started the day after graduation. The new members attended the Memorial Day parade in Willowick and rode behind the emergency vehicles with the lights and sirens blaring. There was a sense of accomplishment knowing that the last six months of training with their horses had paid off. The group was very well received by the public and thus started the pride of being part of this unit.

So what exactly is the Posse's job? They are not law enforcement



officers, but they are the extra eyes and ears for the ranger department. They patrol trails and report any damage or maintenance needs, assist visitors and contact rangers when they come across anything suspicious. They represent the agency in local parades and present programs to countless children and adults about park safety, the horses and about the Posse unit. They assist with traffic control and public relations at special events and allow visitors to get up close and personal with horses when many have never had that opportunity. They are ambassadors for Lake Metroparks and bring smiles to the faces of thousands of people every year.

There are currently 45 members of the Posse and the waiting list continues to grow annually. Tryouts are held in the fall and training takes place in the winter. All members are required to volunteer 120 hours per year to remain in the unit, however most give much more. On average, these volunteers give approximately 8,000 to 10,000 hours per year to Lake Metroparks.

Throughout the Posse's history, the unit has received many honors. They have escorted the Olympic Torch and provided traffic control during visits from dignitaries like George Voinovich and President George W. Bush. They have assisted the ranger department in the solemn honor of presenting Mounted Honor Guards for fallen officers and have presented colors for many prestigious events throughout northeast Ohio.

Many other ranger and police departments have been so impressed with our Posse that they have modeled their own units after ours. As a result of the Posse's success, we have expanded our own volunteer opportunities with the ranger department. In 2002, a Volunteer Bike Patrol was started and in 2007, we began the Volunteer Companion Dog Patrol.

From very humble beginnings to becoming highly respected by departments all over the country, the Posse is truly a gem of Lake Metroparks.

SCIENCE & EDUCATION

