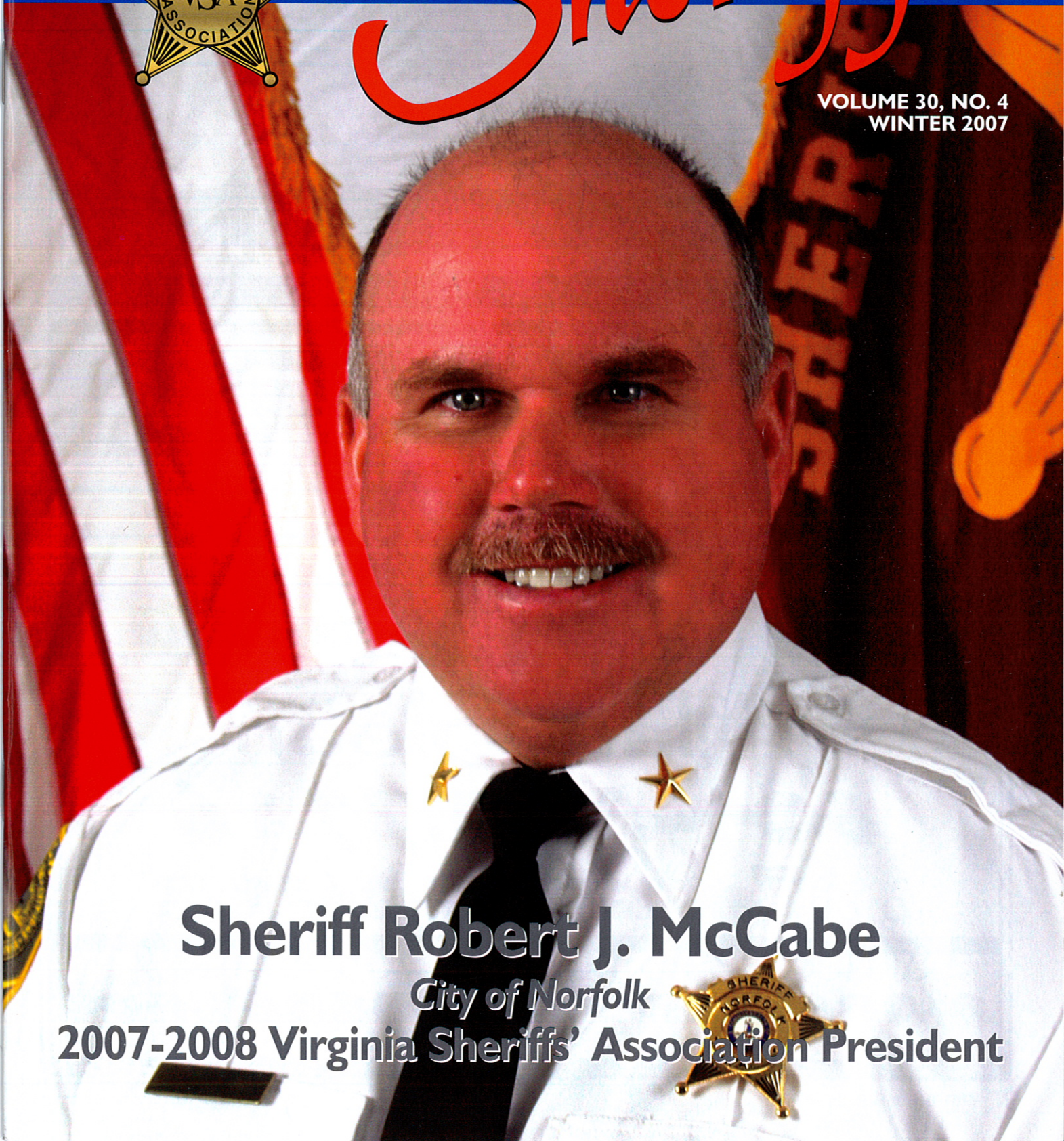


VIRGINIA Sheriff



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Sheriff Robert J. McCabe

City of Norfolk

2007-2008 Virginia Sheriffs' Association President

Newport News Sheriff's Office Building A Solid Foundation

LT. KATHLEEN CAREY, PIO

Sheriff Gabe Morgan has taken another step in providing inmates with a tool to help them reintegrate into society upon their release from jail. That tool is a trowel.

In July, the Newport News Sheriff's Office began offering a brick masonry class. Through education, people can improve themselves. That is as true for those behind bars as it is for society in general. Without a legal way of making a living, many ex-inmates return to a life of crime.

"I believe hard skills, particularly a trade, represent the best chance of success. Also, there is less bias in the construction industry when hiring people with a criminal record," said Sheriff Morgan.

The ability to earn a livable wage and finding an employer willing to offer a second chance is what turned Charles Williams' life around. He spent 11 years in prison on a bank robbery conviction. In prison, Williams learned the trade of brick masonry. Now he is giving back as a volunteer at the Newport News City Jail. "Brick masonry was the foundation for me to start my life on the right tracks," said Williams. "It was instrumental in stabilizing my life when I was making the transition from incarceration to society."

Williams volunteers to teach two classes weekly. Each class size is

limited to six inmates and lasts eight weeks. In that short time, the emphasis is on teaching the basics. They gain enough knowledge to appeal to an employer looking for an apprentice. The inmates are very eager to learn, Williams said, and they catch on quickly. "The men want to grab onto something to enrich their lives. They really want to break that cycle."

David Barrett was the very first inmate to sign up for the brick masonry class. He said before the city jail's class, his future looked dim. The 24 year old has two young children. "I believe it'll help me stay away from the streets," he said of learning a trade. "I never knew another way of getting money than drug dealing. I believe it (brick masonry) will help me take care of my kids the way I'm supposed to."

Barrett discovered jail was a blessing in disguise. "It sobered up my mind. I could see more clearly. I could think straight. Jail helped me focus on what was real and what was important—being a role model for my kids," he explained.

With a keen eye, Williams watched his inmate-students construct a wall. "Stand over here and take a look at this line," he instructed. He pointed to a slight variation in the line of bricks. "See how they're off? Not by much. But a 40-foot wall is going to lean."

The guys laughed at their mistake and fixed it.

Following the repairs, Williams inspected the wall again. This time he said, "The wall is exactly plumb. It can go up 40 feet and still be plumb."

No one misses the symbolic nature of that wall. If you keep climbing vertically and pay attention to detail, your life will stay on the straight and narrow.



Sheriff Gabe Morgan



Inmate inspects wall



Instructor Charles Williams demonstrates brick laying to class



Inmates learn proper way to hold trowel