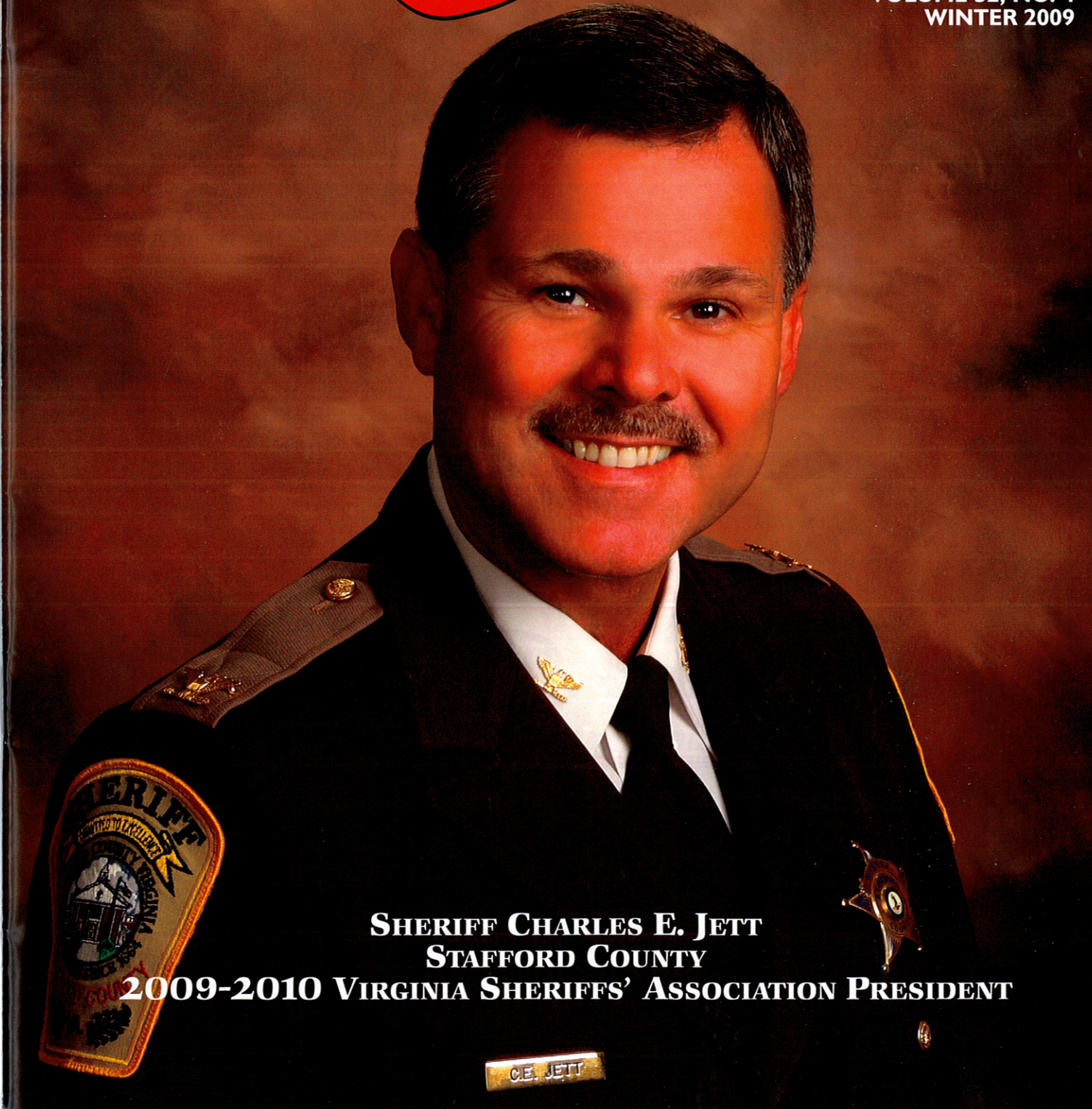


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**SHERIFF CHARLES E. JETT
STAFFORD COUNTY**

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Newport News Sheriff's Office Is Committed To Fighting Identity Theft

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If Ben Bernanke, Chairman of the Federal Reserve, can fall victim to identity theft, anyone can. Last August, Bernanke's wife, Anna, was at a Capitol Hill coffeehouse when her purse was stolen. It contained personal checks, credit cards and other personal information. Unusual bank transactions were reported soon after. It turns out that the Bernanke family was one of 500 separate instances traced to one crime ring.

The Newport News Sheriff's Office (NNSO) is committed to fighting identity theft. We know there are high-tech methods of fraud, and we alert citizens to the newest scams. However, we also know that old-fashioned thievery still goes on. The practice known as "dumpster diving" is when thieves rummage through trash looking for personal identifying information. They will use that information to assume your identity and begin to rob you blind.

Thieves can rent an apartment, obtain a credit card or establish utility accounts in the victim's name. The victim may not discover the theft until they are

contacted by a debt collector.

NNSO Community Resource Officer Vickie Gaffney accepts invitations across the city to talk about identity theft and how not to fall prey. "I suggest they tell their family they want a shredder for Christmas," Gaffney said. Shredding paperwork is one way to safeguard personal information.

You could say Gaffney gave the public an early Christmas present. She organized a Shred Day event on August 20, 2009. For three hours, hundreds of people lined up and took advantage of the free opportunity.

Stealth Shredding, Inc., donated their services. The Home Depot provided the convenient location and personnel to help with the set-up. The Foodbank of the Virginia Peninsula benefited from the North District Summer Food Drive kickoff that coincided with the shredding campaign. Even the Mariners/Oyster Point Lions Club got in on the action by providing free eyesight exams along with hearing tests and diabetes screenings from their mobile clinic.



The public lined up to have their confidential documents shredded.



Sherry Thomas, pictured center, drove from Williamsburg to take advantage of the free event organized by the Newport News Sheriff's Office.

The event was hugely popular and a big success. Skeeter Barnes operated the shredding truck and kept track of how much paper was destroyed. He said, "The truck will hold 12,000 pounds. I loaded 37 containers, which weigh about 250-300 pounds apiece." The belly of the truck was full by the end of the event. More than 11,000 pounds of once confidential documents were reduced to nothing more than confetti.

Sherry Thomas, a Williamsburg resident, was happy to learn about the event. She said, "I have had these two bags of mail for over a year now. So I just had to grab them and come on out. I have known third party about people who have had their identity stolen. They tell me once it happens, it's so hard to get their name cleared." Newport News resident Bill Garlette agreed, "I burn up shredders all the time because I try to keep my ID safe. Anything I get in the mail that's a solicitation with my name on it, it goes into the grinding pile." He went on to say he does his banking online so as not to worry about checks coming through the mail and getting stolen from his mailbox. "You can never be too careful. I check my bank accounts and credit card accounts online every day because I am concerned. I have never had a problem ... knock on wood!"

Gaffney often talks to senior citizens about the modern convenience of direct deposit and its benefits. It stops criminals from stealing and forging their checks. "If the 15th is a Monday, you get the money on the previous Friday. You won't have someone reaching into your mailbox stealing your check." Some seniors are apprehensive about

having their Social Security check and SSI payment go directly into their bank account. But with the reassurance of someone in law enforcement, they are more likely to take advantage of the program. The U.S. Department of the Treasury and the Federal Reserve sponsor the "Go Direct" program, and it is supported by the National Sheriffs' Association.

The chair of the Federal Reserve and his wife were lucky after their personal information was swept up in an elaborate scheme. Arrests were made in the Bernanke case and, ultimately, they didn't lose any money as a result of the theft.

If you suspect you may be a victim of identity theft, Gaffney says file a police report, cancel your credit cards and immediately notify your financial institutions.



Stealth Shredding employees Norma Facenda and Skeeter Barnes.



Bill Garlette brought non-perishable food items for the Foodbank of the Virginia Peninsula in addition to paperwork he wanted destroyed.



The popular three-hour-long shred event drew hundreds of people.