

# NORTHWEST HERALD

## As most localities' DUI arrests drop, Bull Valley's soar

Published: Saturday, Aug. 23, 2014 10:54 p.m.

By CHELSEA McDOUGALL - [cmcdougall@shawmedia.com](mailto:cmcdougall@shawmedia.com)

BULL VALLEY – There's a perfect storm brewing in Bull Valley.

Geography, diverted resources, and low call volume have allowed the village's police department to write more DUIs last year than any other McHenry County department.

A department with 12 officers – three full time and nine part time – for a roughly 9-square-mile village with 1,077 residents. A town with no taverns, no restaurants, and liquor licenses at its only businesses: two golf courses. The uptick for Bull Valley came at a time when other larger municipalities have been posting significant declines in DUI arrests.

So what exactly is happening in the tiny village?

Timing wise, the uptick began in 2013 when Police Cmdr. Jim Page took over after former Police Chief Norbert Sauers died.

That year, according to data provided to the Northwest Herald by the McHenry County Circuit Clerk – summary

suspensions jumped from 62 in 2012, to 155 last year. In contrast, the McHenry County Sheriff's Office filed 127, Crystal Lake filed 98 and McHenry filed 63. Countywide, there were 1,027 summary suspensions filed last year, according to data from the Clerk's Office.

A summary suspension is the civil process of suspending someone's driver's license after they've been pulled over for a suspected DUI. The majority of DUI arrests are followed by a summary suspension.

The length of the suspension is based on a person's prior history of driving under the influence, and whether or not they submit to or refuse a breath test or blood draw.

For example, an individual stopped for a first-time DUI who does not submit to a breath test at the police station could lose his license for up to a year. It's a six-month suspension if they do submit, although DUIs without a breath test result are harder to prove at trial, defense attorneys said.

Geographically speaking, an uptick in Bull Valley makes sense. Its city limits butt up to Crystal Lake, Woodstock, Wonder Lake and McHenry. So in essence, the vast majority of those driving drunk in Bull Valley don't live there and are driving through.

"We're right in the center of all the bars," Page said.

Page says under his direction, and with backing from the Village Board, the Bull Valley Police Department shifted its focus from a notorious speed trap to increasing its DUI enforcement.

"There's nothing unfair about targeting drunk drivers because they're the ones who would kill your family," he said in an interview with the Northwest Herald. "The biggest deal is getting them off the road, and that night, they're off the road."

Page was the No. 1 DUI writer for the village in 2013, according to the Alliance Against Intoxicated

Motorists. He netted 71, and the officer who nabbed the second most drunken drivers arrested 11.

Those critical of the number of DUIs coming from the small village are questioning the motivation to shift its law enforcement focus to heavily target drunk drivers, believing it to be a money grab on the backs of those traveling through the village.

“To me there’s no traffic offense that will net more money for Bull Valley than DUIs,” McHenry and Kane county defense attorney Matt Haiduk said. “They have no sales tax base and they don’t want to raise their property taxes ... quite frankly the people of Bull Valley should be ashamed of their police department.”

Not so, says Bull Valley’s trustee who serves as a police liaison to the Village Board. Peter Helms said any money the village receives from DUIs is just a “fringe benefit.”

“We don’t want to arrest anyone for drunk driving because we don’t want anyone driving drunk, but if they choose to do it, we’re going to enforce it,” Helms said. “Does that make us money? Yes, it does. But that’s not our primary reason for doing it. The primary reason is to get the drunk driver and the people with suspended licenses off our roads.”

The money rolling in from police activity makes up more than a quarter of Bull Valley’s revenue, according to an annual report filed with the Illinois Comptroller. In 2013, \$348,310 was tied to police activity, the village’s second highest revenue stream behind property taxes.

Bull Valley is also part of a growing number of municipalities to implement an administrative towing, or impound, fee. When a driver is arrested in connection with driving under the influence, driving with a suspended or revoked license, an outstanding warrant or other charges where the car is impounded, it can be retrieved for \$500.

Once in the court system, Bull Valley’s DUIs are handled by its municipal prosecutor Justin Hansen, who evaluates each case on a variety of factors and determines the relative strength of a case before decided to offer a plea deal, take it to trial or drop the charges all together.

“As a prosecutor, I evaluate the strength of any DUI case, if I think it’s a case I’m not likely to win ... I plead to something else,” Hansen said.

Targeted enforcement of DUIs is slowing only slightly this year, Page said. As of Aug. 12, there were 55 summary suspensions filed, and to date, Bull Valley has fallen behind Crystal Lake and the sheriff’s office.

Page and the department will continue targeting drunken drivers, he said. They have invested in more in-depth training so officers can recognize impaired drivers, and hired staff that enforces that directive.

And they have full backing of the village administration.

“We are 100 percent in support of the work our police department does in keeping our roads safer for our residents,” Helms said. “...DUIs and suspended licenses are probably more of a danger for our residents and people traveling though our village than somebody going 10 miles over the speed limit.”