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Midway through his term, Loudoun's sheriff highlights progress and goals

By [Caitlin Gibson](#), Wednesday, January 15, 1:45 PM

Two years after taking office as the leading law enforcement official in one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation, Loudoun County Sheriff Michael L. "Mike" Chapman said the agency has steadily become more efficient, more professional and more effective at keeping Loudoun residents safe from crime.

Chapman highlighted a list of his office's accomplishments at a presentation Friday before the Loudoun Crime Commission. He was joined by other top local authorities to discuss the state of law enforcement in the county.

Those accomplishments, he said, include the expansion of the county's Drug Awareness Resistance Education program to county middle schools; the establishment of a countywide training program that aims to educate parents about Internet safety and drug awareness; the first active shooter training conducted in a Virginia school, involving teachers, law enforcement and rescue personnel; an online crime reporting system for minor offenses that allows deputies to use their time more productively; and statistics showing a reduction in violent and non-violent crimes since 2012.

"We've done a lot," Chapman said in an interview, "but of course, there's always more to be done."

Chapman, a former Drug Enforcement Administration agent who unseated longtime incumbent Sheriff Stephen O. Simpson in the [November 2011 election](#), ran an aggressive campaign that promised to boost the sheriff's office's use of technology, make operations more efficient and restore the office's reputation, which had been [called into question](#) during the previous administration.

When he took office, Chapman drew up [a list](#) of tasks to address quickly, starting with basic steps such as a daily meeting for his top leadership team, he said. In the months that followed, the department created its online crime reporting system, which officials said has saved more than \$145,000 so far by allowing deputies to use their time more productively. The office's organizational structure was adjusted; a new unit focused on reopening cold cases was formed; regular community outreach meetings



were scheduled; and the agency's hiring practices became more rigorous, he said.

"We had a very proactive agenda, and I think in some regards it may have created a little whiplash here," he said. "There was a lot that we did right away."

Since 2012, the rate of violent crime across Loudoun has fallen by 9 percent, and nonviolent crime rates have dropped by 13 percent, according to law enforcement officials. Those numbers reflect both a national trend and heightened local efforts, Chapman said.

"It's part of a larger pattern across the country, but it's also our efficiency and operations," he said.

Although violent crimes appear to be decreasing, other types of crime — such as Internet and financial crimes — are on the rise, Chapman said. The prevalence of online crimes against children led the sheriff's office to expand a program to educate parents of public school students about the risks of Internet and social media programs. This year, the [popular program](#) also added a session on drug awareness that focused on prescription and synthetic drug abuse.

Although the sheriff's office has enjoyed a positive response to such outreach efforts, Chapman has also encountered his share of challenges: In March, he [came under fire](#) from county officials who were concerned that the sheriff's office was on pace to exceed its budget by more than \$2.5 million. In May, the sheriff's office was the target of criticism from community members and regional organizations after a deputy [fatally shot a knife-wielding woman](#) with a history of [psychological problems](#).

Chapman said the sheriff's office ultimately reduced its budget overrun to about \$500,000, in part by successfully appealing to the county to reduce the number of mandated position vacancies within the agency and cutting the amount of overtime pay used to fill those empty roles. "We really clamped down on expenditures, and we now have monthly meetings [with county officials] to make sure we're all on the same page," he said.

He said the sheriff's office has also focused on mental-health awareness and training programs to help avoid tragedies such as the May shooting. More than a year ago, the organization initiated a crisis intervention team program for deputies to educate them about how to respond to someone who might be mentally unstable. Although only a few dozen deputies have been trained so far — each class involves 40 hours of instruction, Chapman said, making it a challenge to schedule — dispatchers have been told to contact a crisis intervention-trained officer if a caller indicates a history of mental health issues.

"We aim to have a CIT person available to respond no matter where they are in the county," Chapman said, "and we are still trying to get as many trained as we can."

Last month, the sheriff's office was recognized by the Loudoun County Friends of Mental Health for its support of the mental health community. "That was big, that meant a lot to us," Chapman said.

As he moves into the second half of his term, Chapman said he plans to keep finding ways to improve the sheriff's office's effectiveness and its connection with the community it serves.

"I feel great about the things our staff is doing," Chapman said. "We're always looking to improve the service that we deliver. ... I feel comfortable and confident about where we are and where we're going."