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FEATURED

## Sheriff Judd featured speaker at chamber luncheon

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Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd was the featured speaker at the Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce monthly member luncheon on Aug. 18 at the Tom Fellows Community Center in Davenport.

The Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce monthly member luncheon was held Aug. 18 at the Tom Fellows Community Center in Davenport.



Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd was the featured speaker as he provided an update to the sold-out crowd of members in attendance.

“He’s sheriff for life and probably the most popular and well-known person in the state,” said Davenport Mayor H.B. “Rob” Robinson. “We just had two new people come to our church. They just moved here. They moved to Polk County because of Grady.”

The August luncheon was sponsored by Haven Coffee Roasters, Mahalak Auto Group and SouthState Bank and was catered by Colon Bakery.

“Good things are happening all over Polk County and you know that,” said Judd in his opening remarks. “Unfortunately, they don’t call us to good things. We are good in this county because of you.”

Judd began his update by addressing how his department utilizes technology.

“Technology is really important,” Judd said. “We’ve instituted something called Live 911...This industry has gotten better with technology and sometimes it has slowed us down and sometimes it’s sped us up.”

Judd then used his past to set up the picture he was trying to paint of the present.

He explained that in 1974, he was delivering subpoenas on the night shift in Mulberry.

Judd said that when calls would come in for assistance, all of that detailed information was quickly relayed to the responding officer.



However, he said that over time, the amount of information provided to the officer prior to arriving at the call had lessened over time as the technology utilized in the calls changed over the years.

“We found a small company in California,” said Judd. “This small company was working with a small police department. They had figured out that when you call 911, they can geofence it and send it through and the dispatch can hear the live 911 call as it is happening.”

Judd said that they have started beta testing it in Polk County and that it has already helped save two lives and that the beta testing is expanding.

Judd also told a story about a recent encounter that his department had with a visitor from New York.

The visitor did not heed the deputy’s instructions not to enter the area and instead pushed into the officer in efforts to continue past him.

“In Florida, you don’t go around pushing on the police, so we introduced him to the pavement,” Judd said. “We can do it because of the community that we have. Haines City and Davenport, you elect the right people that are not going to allow for their people to be robbed, to be shot at, to be stabbed.”

Judd continued to give examples of crime stories and approaches from other regions that he said just doesn’t work for Polk County.

“We correct and warn without arresting more times than we arrest,” said Judd. “The criminal justice system is a great thing. It keeps us safe. The criminal justice system is the one thing that can make people do things against their will.”

Judd then tackled the topic of school shootings.

“We don’t want to find the active shooter when he walks on campus,” Judd said. “We want to have processes in place so he never walks on campus. We’ve been proactive in Florida. We train and we train and we train in this county to respond to the active shooter.”

Judd doesn’t want those trainings and processes to be viewed as cause for added concern.



“Ultimately, you need to understand that the safest place for a child to be is at school,” said Judd. “Statistically, the chance is practically zero.”

In the unfortunate event that a school shooting were to occur in Polk County, Judd believes his team is prepared to handle the emergency situation.

“The key is not to engage in a gunfight on a campus,” Judd said. “We will do everything possible to keep our kids safe.”

However, Judd was very clear regarding his instructions to his deputies if they found themselves faced with an active shooter at a Polk County school.

“I told them directly if someone comes to the school, I want you to shoot them,” said Judd. “I want you to shoot them a lot. I want you to shoot him so much that we are on the national news.”

Judd explained, however, that his department does everything possible to try to avoid such an incident from ever occurring at a Polk County school.

“We won’t give up and we won’t close our eyes,” Judd said. “Our children are safer in schools right now than they have ever been in Polk County. But nothing is guaranteed...At the end of the day, we are safe here in Polk County.”

Judd then talked about the recent shooting in Uvalde, Texas.

“Were y’all just crazy mad they just stood there?” Judd said to the crowd regarding the Uvalde police’s slow response, adding that he and his fellow law enforcement officers were even more angry at the poor response. “Which one of us would gamble our child’s safety against that? Not me.”

But again, Judd moved to comfort any concern from the crowd.

“It’s different here,” said Judd. “And it’s different because of you. I’m thankful that I live in a community where the people are wonderful. They are tremendous.”

He then explained that it takes everyone working together to keep the county safe.



“Good things don’t just happen,” Judd said. “Good things happen with great leaders and great supporters. We will continue to keep your children safe and your crime rate low but we need your support. We want to make a positive difference.”

Judd then talked about mental health and substance abuse.

“This year, I added a Director of Mental Health Issues position to the sheriff’s department,” said Judd. “Society has been in denial about the drug and alcohol abuse problem.”

Judd then said that when he came to work in Polk County 50 years ago when he was only five years old (he was actually 18 at the time), there were mental health facilities to take inmates that needed that level of care, but that such facilities no longer exist.

“We don’t have mental health hospitals in Florida or in the nation,” Judd said. “News flash, none of that’s working. I now run the biggest mental health facility in the county. It’s called the county jail, and we’re doing all we can to help them.”

It’s an issue of priority for the department.

“At the end of the day, there’s not a person in this room that doesn’t know someone that has mental health issues,” said Judd. “We’re gonna lead the charge to get them help.”

Judd then told a final story that helped to illustrate how it takes everyone working together to get those needing assistance the help they need, while also keeping our streets safe and crime levels low.

“The Bible tells me that we are our brother’s keeper,” Judd said. “We have to do better. And we will in this county. God bless you.”

Judd received a standing ovation following his remarks, then stayed for several minutes afterwards talking, shaking hands and taking pictures with everyone in attendance who wanted a few seconds with the law enforcement giant.

“Grady Judd is America’s sheriff,” said Davenport Commissioner Tom Fellows.

Judd’s popularity at the event was unmistakable.



“Grady’s been a mentor of mine since I was a deputy at 20 years old,” said Haines City City Manager Jim Elensky. “He helped me get through the ranks. He continues to be a mentor today. Not only does he care about rank but he cares about family. That’s what makes him unique.”

The next monthly chamber luncheon will be Sept. 15 at 11:30 a.m. at Lake Eva Event Center in Haines City and will feature the graduation of the Chamber’s Adult Leadership Class XII.

