

With 'COPS' in Montgomery County, contract eases liability

By Jay R. Jordan, jjordan@hcnonline.com Published 1:21 am, Sunday, September 24, 2017



Photo: Michael Minasi, Photographer

With the crews riding along with some of the county's finest, officials with the Sheriff's Office administration signed a contract with Langley Productions, which produces "COPS," making sure county officials have control over what can and cannot air, according to Lt. Scott Spencer.

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office started hosting a camera crew from the famed reality TV show "COPS" Tuesday in hopes of making it on air for the show's 30th season. With the crews riding along with some of the county's finest, officials with the Sheriff's Office administration signed a contract with Langley Productions, which produces "COPS," making sure county officials have control over what can and cannot air, according to Lt. Scott Spencer. Sheriff Rand Henderson signed the contract in August, weeks prior to the first day of production.

The Courier filed an open records request with MCSO for a copy of the contract Friday, but it was unavailable by that afternoon. County Attorney J D Lambright said his office reviewed the contract prior to its signing.

"We're looking out for the county's liability, which is a significant concern with these kinds of things," Lambright said. "We put in that contract all the language that we could see to try and protect the county's liability in every way, shape or form". "It's always concerning when you have the cameras rolling. People act differently."

The last time a production crew rode along with law enforcement officers in Montgomery County, the county was slammed with a lawsuit – although the allegations centered around law enforcement activities more than the camera crew's presence.

In September 2011, a production crew with "Texas Takedown" was filming with Precinct 4 Constable Rowdy Hayden and his deputies as they raided a home they thought to contain a massive amount of marijuana. Deputies found the marijuana and arrested a man on felony marijuana possession charges.

"Suddenly you had a TV crew inside this private residence," Lambright said. "Law enforcement was lawfully there, but it put us in an extraordinarily difficult position."

Two years later, homeowner Perla Carr turned around and sued Montgomery County, Hayden, his deputies and District Attorney Brett Ligon, claiming the law enforcement officers wrote false and misleading affidavits in order to obtain a search warrant. The county wound up settling with Carr in 2015 by paying her \$100,000, Lambright said.

With "COPS" on scene, Lambright said he feels comfortable with the contract in place. "I feel good about the contract," Lambright said. "There's no way to ever protect against everything, but we feel good about the contract."

As far as MCSO deputies, Spencer previously told The Courier they are ecstatic about their prospects of being showcased on a national stage. "We believe our deputies are professional," Spencer said. "All of our vehicles are equipped with cameras which are utilized during citizen contact. This will be no different as our deputies are always use to their actions being recorded and viewed."

Crews from the show will be riding along with deputies for five days a week over the next two months.