



## St. Tammany Parish Coroner's Office

**As I finish the special term of office and begin a new full term of office I want to recap for the public some of the highlights of our accomplishments over the last 2 years. This list is not exhaustive. As always, if you have any additional questions feel free to call the office at (985) 781-1150.**

### **Accomplishments of Coroner's Office May, 2014 to May 2016**

To appreciate the accomplishments of the Coroner's Office it is important to remain cognizant of the scope of our duties. The Coroner is responsible for **Death Investigation, Mental Health Evaluations, Sexual Assault investigation and Office Administration.**

Below are bullet point of some of the major accomplishments, this list is not exhaustive.

#### **Death Investigation.**

Restructured investigator's schedule so 2 death investigators are working at the same time which gives us the ability to cover multiple scenes simultaneously.

Additionally strengthened the chain of command by establishing a Chief Investigator and Deputy Chief investigator that support the investigators in the field.

Created an Informational Pamphlet to be given to family members to answer frequently asked questions when a loved one dies.

We hired part time investigators to help cover PTO time without incurring overtime.

Rebranded the investigators by issuing new badges which led to a heightened sense of Esprit de Corps

The Coroner personally appears on death scenes letting the investigators and other agency know that I take their work seriously.

Modernized equipment with new vehicles for the investigators increasing safety and reliability ( old units typically had over 150,000 miles)

Modernized equipment with the addition of a pneumatic stretcher making lifting bodies easier on the investigator and decreasing the likelihood of injury to the investigator.

Sponsored a Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Investigation (SUIDI) class at the coroner's office which was attended by our investigators, investigators from other coroner's offices and area law enforcement officers.

Took the cooler out of storage and constructed it in the morgue to increase the capacity in the morgue and to separate “in” cases from “out” cases.

Established Pharm Link account to account for medications seized in an investigation from the time of taking custody to third party documentation of destruction.

Established a single point of contact case coordinator who works with the family to keep them informed of the process and answers questions.

Produced a co-sleeping Public Service Announcement to educate parents about the danger of unsafe sleep environments

Established a volunteer Chaplaincy Program to assist at death scenes

### **Mental Health Evaluations**

Created a Mental Health frequently asked questions informational brochure.

Instituted the use of a computer based data base MH Log to build a database of mental health activity through our office.

Moved quickly to establish a fulltime Director of Mental Health who is an experienced psychiatrist.

Hired independent contract psychiatrists so that every evaluation for an involuntary psychiatric admission via a Coroner’s Emergency Certificate (CEC) is performed by a competent psychiatrist (previously these exams were often done by the pathologist or an orthopedist).

Added checks and balances to the process for an Order for Protective Custody (OPC) that included a faxed back receipt from the sheriff’s department

Have personally participated in a “No Knock OPC” where a subject of an Order for Protective Custody was barricaded in her apartment, after I tried to convince her to come out and get help, we obtained a court order to enter her residence and she was taken into custody and transported for treatment without incident.

I participate in the St. Tammany Parish Behavioral Health Task Force and host the meetings at the Coroner’s Office. When grant money for the task force ran out, the Coroner’s Office partnered with the Parish to fund the coordinator so that critical progress would not be lost.

I participate in President Brister’s Safe Haven Task Force aimed and recapturing resources from the old South East Hospital campus to establish a one stop shop for people with behavioral issues or substance abuse issues as an alternative to being warehoused in the ER or jail.

I sit on the jail diversion committee chaired by Judge Peter Garcia with participation from the District Attorney’s Office, the Sheriff’s Office and jail personnel as we try to develop criteria and mechanism to identify citizens that would benefit more from treatment than incarceration.

I am a member of the "Know your Child" work group chaired by Senator Sharon Hewitt and supported by the Slidell Junior League which has developed an educational program for parents to alert them to early signs of mental illness, substance abuse, bullying or inappropriate internet activity.

Have delivered multiple Know your Child presentations to PTA and church groups.

### **Sexual Assault**

We have established the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) nurse who also coordinates the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) to provide evidence based cutting edge, compassionate treatment for the survivors of sexually based offenses and to aid in the prosecution of offenders.

Establishing a corps of volunteer Sexual Assault Medical Advocates.

Have **received 1 grant from Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement in the amount of \$49,846** and are submitting 2 additional grants to hire a second SAFE nurse and provide equipment and training to our nurses and 21 additional parishes

### **Administration**

Immediately established a collegial relationship with Parish Government through the execution of a Memorandum of Understanding and a subsequent Cooperative Endeavor Agreement **saving the office money by eliminating costly litigation.**

Came into compliance with the Louisiana Legislative Auditor report including office wide inventory and passed an Enhanced Audit as well.

Established an employee handbook and policy and procedure manual.

Instituted quarterly staff meetings and case presentations /in-service training programs.

Instituted weekly meetings of the leadership team, the coroner, office administrator, chief of operations, and chief deputy coroner.

Established an expectation of honest, transparent ethical behavior in our office and assured all employees are up to date on ethics training.

Established a web site for public information.

Hired a Public Information Officer to establish open relationships with the media.

We have opened the building for community education programs including the Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Investigation, Mental Health First Aid sponsored by NAMI St Tammany, St Tammany Outreach for the Prevention of Suicide (STOPS) Safe Talk and ASSIST classes

Reached out to additional parishes to **obtain new revenue streams, (autopsies from Washington Parish, Iberville Parish and East Feliciana Parishes, use of facility by Southern Eye Bank) \$93,125**

Established **additional revenue streams for Forensic Medical Exams** from hospitals in St Tammany and Washington Parish (**\$400 per exam**)

Worked with **insurance agent to shop automobile insurance saving the office approximately \$15,000 per year.**

Realized significant **cost savings by closing toxicology lab** and outsourcing the procedures **saving approximately \$300,000 a year**

Realized **significant cost savings from restructuring benefit plan** with minimum burden to the employees saving approximately **\$108,000 per year**

**Cleared out storage facilities saving \$11,000 per year**

**Auctioned surplus equipment generating \$54,338.74 of revenue.**

**Updated PTO policy eliminating a potentially growing \$400,000 liability**

**Upgraded phone system** January 2016 **projected to save \$12,000 per year**

Participate in the Community Action Advisory board

Participate in the St Tammany Housing and Homeless Alliance

Established a working relationship with the parish Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Quarterly reports to Parish: implemented these in June of 2015

Disaster recovery plan: December 15, 2015

Added Safety glass for the front desk, and added panic buttons for increased security.

Developed Emergency Action Plan including an FBI training program for an active shooter scenario for the office.

Executed a fire drill.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles A. Preston, MD

Coroner, St. Tammany Parish