

CITY BEAT

City of Valdosta

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2021



STORIES COMPOSED BY CITY OF VALDOSTA PUBLIC
INFORMATION OFFICE

IN THIS ISSUE



03-08

Behind the Badge



09 - 12

**New VPD K9
Handlers**



13-15

**New City Marshal
Josh Hunt**



16-17

**Public Works
Mulch Yard**



18-21

**Learn the Sounds
of Fire Safety**

CHECK OUT OUR

PODCAST



Listen on
Apple Podcasts

Spotify



LET'S TALK VALDOSTA!!

CHECK OUT THE CITY'S NEW WEEKLY PODCAST.

Stay updated with all city news, events, and community projects/programs.

The Let's Talk Valdosta Podcast is recorded every two weeks, highlighting the latest news and events within the city and welcoming a special guest from the community.

They are generally published on a regular schedule and contain a variety of content.

Subscribe to the audio show through your favorite podcast streaming service or watch the video show on Metro 17, Mediacom Channel 17, or Youtube!



"With various ways to obtain information from the city, this podcast will offer a unique option to hear about what's going on in the city on the go, without looking at a screen of some sort."

- Ashlynn Johnson Valdosta
City PIO

BEHIND THE BADGE



*Get to know
the Men and
Women
Serving in
our Public
Safety
Departments*



LIEUTENANT MARCUS HAYNES

A CALLING: PASTOR AND
FIREFIGHTER, LT. HAYNES
SERVICE TO HIS
COMMUNITY NEVER STOPS

Though most emergencies are difficult to plan for, there is comfort in knowing help is available through our Public Safety Departments. Behind the Badge aims to showcase the courageous men and women serving in these departments by introducing the public to a new member from our Police and Fire crews in each issue of City Beat. In this issue, we sat down with Fire Lieutenant Marcus Haynes and Police School Resource Officer Devonta Battle.

The Valdosta Fire Department has a long history of taking aspiring firefighters and promoting them through the ranks, creating a career of life long service. Fire Lieutenant Marcus Haynes says for him, Valdosta will always be home. Born and raised in this community there was no doubt in his mind that the Valdosta Fire Department was where he wanted to end up after graduating Valdosta Technical College in 2007.

Haynes says when he was younger he realized that he had the drive to help people and wanted to give back to his community, ultimately leading him to the fire service. Now, as a 14 year veteran he serves the Department as the Accreditation Manager. Lt. Haynes is tasked with managing the assessment and evaluation of department past, present and future service levels/performance to ensure compliance with professional standards and accreditation requirements. He also assists with maintaining the department's ISO Class 1 rating. Lt. Haynes enjoys this role because it allows him to make sure that the Valdosta Fire Department continues to offer the highest level of service to residents in the community.

"I love the people; I love the guys that work here. I grew up in Valdosta so its more sentimental to me to be able to stay within the city I was raised in and provide quality service to the residents here," said Haynes.



Above
Lieutenant Marcus Haynes at Fire Station 1

For Lt. Haynes, his service to the community never stops. Haynes serves as a Pastor of Providence Missionary Baptist Church in Hahira. Haynes is able to offer a unique perspective to his colleagues at the fire station whenever they need it. "It's good to be able to be someone that my coworkers can talk to if they want to. It's good to provide that service if you would call it that, pastoral duties really never stop."

Aside from his duties at the Church and Fire Department, Haynes says spending time with his family is one of his favorite things to do. Haynes and his wife have a 10 year old son and twin boys (5 years old). He says they enjoy fishing, hunting or anything else outdoors!

Through his 14 year career at VFD, Haynes has shown his commitment to the department through numerous awards and professional designations. Most recently Lt. Haynes was recognized for receiving the professional designation of "Fire Officer" (FO). Lt. Haynes is now one of only 555 FOs worldwide.

"My reasons for being in the fire service is because I like to see things come together. I like to see people working together for the citizens of our community," said Lieutenant Haynes

COMMITMENT TO SERVICE



The designation program is voluntary and is designed to recognize individuals who demonstrate excellence in seven measured components, including experience, education, professional development, professional contributions, associated membership, community involvement, and technical competence. In addition, all applicants are required to identify a future professional development plan.

"Not only did I want to do this for myself, but I wanted to do it for the Fire Department because I feel if we can improve the core of the organization, then we can provide a better service," said Lieutenant Haynes.



***LT. HAYNES AND FAMILY
RECOGNIZED AT MAY 20
CITY COUNCIL MEETING***



OFFICER DEVONTA BATTLE

Like Lt. Haynes, Valdosta Police Department School Resource Officer Devonta Battle is a Valdosta Wildcat through and through. Born and Raised in Valdosta, he knew he always wanted to protect and serve this great community.

Battle began his career with the Valdosta Police Department in June of 2015. Officer Battle started out in the patrol unit, as an officer on the road and then transitions into his current role as an School Resource Officer (SRO). School Resource Officers are responsible for assisting school staff in ensuring the safety of the school staff and students. They also investigate crimes committed on school grounds and assist in directing school traffic.

Officer Battle says his age coupled with his experience of also being a VHS Graduate helps him relate to students. "I think it gives me an advantage, I just turned 29 so I'm not as old as some of our other officers so when the students say certain things or talk about classes I am able to understand more because I was actually there, sometimes with those same teachers. I am able to give them advice on schoolwork or even daily life as a high schooler."

Battle recalls many occasions in which he told his mom as a child that he wanted to be a police officer one day. As he grew up, he remembers seeing Valdosta Police Officers riding around his neighborhood, some of which are still with VPD today.

Officer Battle is the definition of an extraordinary Police Officer. He constantly goes above and beyond to a role model both on and off the clock. "I can remember how stressful life was for me in high school. I remember the feeling of not being able to see past those years. I can relate and build a positive relationship with the students. Kids know when you are being genuine with them. If you say, 'hey give me a list of your games and I will try to make one, they are going to know if you actually show up' or when I check up on their grades, or attendance in class. It is all about following up and showing them our commitment to their success." Officer Battle always goes beyond the job duties of an SRO. He protects the students, offers them life advice, interacts with them, and motivates them all while maintaining his professionalism.



“The relationships that I have been able to build with other officers is second to know. Everyone says it’s a brotherhood or sisterhood and that’s true. I have both a home family and work family – it’s very special,” said Battle.

If you know Officer Battle, you know he always has a smile on his face and is always laughing making him more relatable to anyone he encounters. “I was always able to use my connections from growing up here and meeting so many people while I was on the road. I would go out to a scene and pull up and people would say ‘Hey that’s Devonta’ making it easy for me to ask them more about what happened and how we can help.”



OFFICER BATTLE HELPS WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S D.E.F.Y. PROGRAM. HE HELPS EDUCATE YOUNG ADULTS ON HOW TO BE OUTSTANDING STUDENTS IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL.

TAKING NEW REINS

MEET THE VPD K9 UNIT'S
NEWEST HANDLERS



Residents in Valdosta will soon notice two new Valdosta Police Department K9 Handlers on the job. Officers Joshua Abercrombie and Jason Louie recently completed more than eight weeks of training to join the specialized unit and have officially hit the streets of Valdosta with their new K-9 partners.

Officer Abercrombie joined the Valdosta Police Department four years ago and said he was initially interested in investigations but quickly learned that the K9 Unit might be a good fit for him. "I always loved dogs, so once a K9 Spot opened up, I put in for it and kept doing so until I got it," said Abercrombie.

Officer Abercrombie was assigned K9 Ziggy, who has not only been a great partner but a great companion as well. Abercrombie and Ziggy have already worked on nearly four cases together since the officer began working on the unit only two weeks ago. In addition to their workload, the handlers and their K9s complete specialty training every two weeks totaling 16 hours a month.

This, of course, is on top of the standard training that all officers must complete for the Department. Luckily, working with a partner like Ziggy helps to lighten the load. What Abercrombie enjoys most about working with Ziggy is his mellow temperament. "He's calm; he just has a calm demeanor," said Abercrombie.

Although the paring with Ziggy has gone well, the transition into the unit still took some adjusting for the officer. He says that he got used to doing things like clearing a building or other tasks independently during his previous four years in law enforcement.

"Having already been with the Department for four years, I was used to doing everything by myself. It is so different working with a K9 because I am focused on the dog and watching what he is doing, his reactions to things. Just trying to learn the dog and learn what he is seeing based on his body language," said Abercrombie.





Now, Abercrombie relies on the non-verbal cues given to him by his K9 before he reacts. For example, he was wagging his tail fast or jerking his head when he picks up a scent.

When the two are not at work, Officer Abercrombie says Ziggy stays inside the house most of the time as he plans to continue the previous handler's habits.

Like Abercrombie, Officer Jason Louie was also interested in the K9 Unit and kept applying until he got the position. Like Abercrombie, Officer Jason Louie was also interested in the K9 Unit and kept applying until he got the position. "I was usually the guy going with someone or trying to get out with the K9 Officer. I like going and finding people from our investigative cases," said Louie.

Officer Louie was paired with K9 Epic. The two quickly bonded over their love for the job. Louie describes Epic as being very driven and excited to go to work to the point where he is upset when he must stay home.



"If we have something going on like if I have court and he doesn't come to work with me, he gets upset. He started winning because he wants to go to work. He loves being in the car. On training mornings, he is up dragging me out the door, ready to go to work. I love his drive," said Louie. The officer enjoys his new partner's energy and says that it helps the two work well together.

Though they have only been partners for a few short weeks, they developed a great repour with one another. Louie says, "It is amazing how quickly you can grow attached to something. He depends on me essentially. He has my back, and I have his back. It's pretty cool.".

Officer Louie also enjoys how this new position allows him to interact more with the community and other law enforcement agencies in the area. Strengthening these relationships is not only satisfying to Louie, but it also helps the Department with their cases. "That's how we find offenders and solve crimes or lower crimes if we can be building strong relationships with the citizens in the community," he said. The position has allowed Louie to get out and see more of the city and further his skill set. Which for Louie has been a rewarding experience as he considers himself to be someone that goes above the minimum expectations.

This mentality has served Officer Louie well, as the K9 Unit consists of only seven positions and is very selective. Though it may be difficult, he urges anyone considering a specialty unit never to give up, saying, "If you are interested in something like this, keep trying if you don't get selected the first time. You have to keep putting in for it and talk to the folks in the unit. That is what I did, I spoke with some of the guys, so I knew what I needed to do, what to expect, and how hard I needed to train to make it in a specialized unit."



MEET VALDOSTA'S NEW CITY MARSHAL JOSHUA HUNT



In September, the City of Valdosta Neighborhood Development and Community Protection Division welcomed its newest City Marshal, Joshua Hunt. Hunt has been a city employee for nearly two years, transferring to the Community Protection Division from Public Works.

“I was looking for another way of serving the community. I came from Public Works, so I was already used to being out in the community, but this new position is something I’m proud of,” said Hunt.

Hunt was born and raised in Valdosta. He comes from a Military family as his father is retired from the US Army, so their family moved around a lot growing up, but Valdosta is where he knew he always wanted to end up. Hunt says the city’s benefits package along and the opportunity to have a career, helping residents in Valdosta is what convinced him to apply with the City of Valdosta initially.



Hunt will now be a part of a five-person City Marshal Team, one that has welcomed him with open arms. “It is like a close-knit family, they have made sure I had everything I need and full understanding of the position,” said Hunt.

THE COMMUNITY PROTECTION DIVISION PROCESSES MORE THAN 5,500 CASES ANNUALLY

The Community Protection Division is responsible for ensuring compliance with city codes and ordinances relating to the use of property, zoning, sanitation, and housing. Other duties include conducting searches of deed records to locate property owners as necessary, testifying in municipal court proceedings, and verifying that businesses within the city limits have proper occupational tax certificates. Common issues addressed by City Marshals includes overgrown yards, abandoned or junked motor vehicles, heavily littered property generated by the existence of open and vacant structures and substandard houses.

After a few weeks of training and officially being sworn in on September 21, Hunt says he is ready to get to work. “I want to make an impact; I am happy to be here and be a part of this team. I want to help keep the city clean and do my part.”



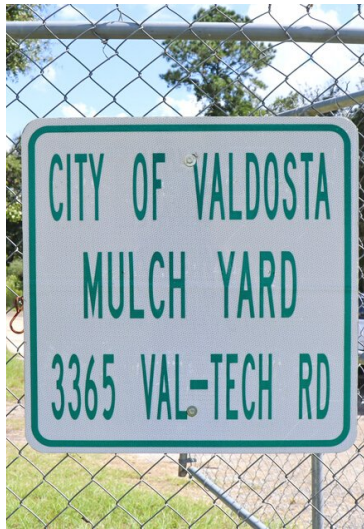
Public Works Mulch Yard



ORGANIC MULCH

In alignment with the City of Valdosta's goal to promote recycling, the Public Works Department has taken the yard debris collected from their daily sanitation routes and repurposed it into an all-natural organic mulch that residents can access free of charge.

At 3365 Val Tech Road, the city owns a 70-acre lot that has partially been converted into an inert land field where the collected yard debris is transported, ground, and stored as an organic substance until it is ready to be used as mulch. Though this is not a new service, it may be one that residents are unfamiliar with. "This is one aspect of our recycling program that a lot of folks may not know about. Most residents are aware of the yard debris collection that is included in their monthly sanitation statement, but rather than take that material to the land field, we wanted to repurpose it," said Public Works Superintendent Anthony Musgrove.



As the mulch decays, it makes for a great organic material to use in flower beds and gardens, which Musgrove himself has described as magic. In fact, an acquaintance of his used the mulch on a tomato plant that sprouted so large it required buckets to support the size of the tomatoes. The secret is that it is entirely chemical-free. Local businesses, like Hahira nursery, have even partnered with the city by purchasing the mulch at only \$5 per ton.

"It helps us out because we must get rid of it somehow, and there is no better way than to offer the product to our residents and local businesses," said Musgrove.

This site is open Monday through Friday from about 7:30 am until around 3 pm. However, Public Works does not man the site as it is a self-service operation. The mulch located toward the front of the lot can be picked up by the bucket full or truckload, granted residents provide their own equipment for loading

LEARN THE SOUNDS OF FIRE SAFETY





Almost three of every five home fire deaths resulted from fires in homes with no smoke alarms (41%) or no working smoke alarms (16%).

The Valdosta Fire Department is teaming up with the National Fire Protection Association® (NFPA®)—the official sponsor of Fire Prevention Week for more than 90 years—to promote this year’s Fire Prevention Week campaign, “Learn the Sounds of Fire Safety.” This year’s campaign, October 3–9th, works to educate everyone about simple but important actions they can take to keep themselves and those around them safe.

“What do the sounds mean? Is there a beep or a chirp coming out of your smoke or carbon monoxide alarm? Knowing the difference can save you, your home, and your family,” said Lorraine Carli, vice-president of outreach and advocacy at NFPA.

The Valdosta Fire Department encourages all residents to embrace the 2021 Fire Prevention Week theme.



“

When an alarm makes noise—a beeping sound or a chirping sound—you must take action!”

“It’s important to learn the different sounds of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. When an alarm makes noise—a beeping sound or a chirping sound—you must take action!” said Sherina Ferrell, Fire & Life Safety Educator. “Make sure everyone in the home understands the sounds of the alarms and knows how to respond. To learn the sounds of your specific smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, check the manufacturer’s instructions that came in the box, or search the brand and model online.”

VFD wants to share safety tips to help you “Learn the Sounds of Fire Safety”

- A continuous set of three loud beeps—beep, beep, beep—means smoke or fire. Get out, call 9-1-1, and stay out.
- A single chirp every 30 or 60 seconds means the battery is low and must be changed.
- All smoke alarms must be replaced after 10 years.
- Chirping that continues after the battery has been replaced means the alarm is at the end of its life and the unit must be replaced.
- Make sure your smoke and CO alarms meet the needs of all your family members, including those with sensory or physical disabilities.

As part of the Valdosta Fire Department's Community Risk Reduction Program, VFD will install Smoke Alarms in homes at no cost to residents. Funding for this program comes from ten percent of the donated funds from the departments can trailer collection program through the Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation.

Smoke alarms save lives, early detection and early notification for citizens allow them to escape their homes. The National Fire Protection Association reports that 71 percent of smoke alarms that failed to operate had missing, disconnected, or dead batteries. This reinforces how important it is to make time twice a year to check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.



For more general information about Fire Prevention Week and fire prevention in general, visit www.fpw.org.



MEET OUR PUBLIC INFORMATION TEAM



Ashlyn Johnson

Public Information Officer

Email: ajohnson@valdostacity.com

Phone: 229-259-3548 Ext. 4748

Oversees entire Public Information Office

Social media and website management

Composes press releases

Coordinates with local media outlets



Marcus McConico

Media Coordinator

Email: mmcconico@valdostacity.com

Phone: 229-259-3548 Ext. 7515

Oversees video production

Social media and website management

Coordinates with local media outlets



Venessa Armenta

Community Engagement Coordinator

Email: varmenta@valdostacity.com

Phone: 229-259-3548 Ext. 4749

Oversees city newsletters

Social media and website management

Assists with press releases

STAY INFORMED



Are there any city functions, programs, or departments you'd like to know more about? Feel free to submit your ideas for City Beat features to our Public Information Office at info@valdostacity.com.

There is a possibility your suggestion can be featured in our next issue!

To make sure you never miss a Beat and to stay in the know on all city news, be sure to follow us on our website and social media platforms.

Facebook: [CityofValdosta](#)

Instagram: [cityofvaldosta](#)

Twitter: [CityofValdosta](#)

City of Valdosta Website: www.valdostacity.com