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Criminals 'can't run' from helicopters

By Chris Green**RRSTAR.COM***Posted Aug 23, 2009 @ 09:14 PM*

ROCKFORD — Omarrian T. Jones, a 24-year-old man wanted in connection with the July 8 double homicide before Rockford police captured him at gunpoint.

During that time, Jones twice eluded police. They made sure there wouldn't be a third when they deployed r and two sets of trained eyes in the air.

"They got all their assets in place, and they made sure we were airborne," said Randy Olson, chief pilot of th -ONE helicopter program. "That's not untypical, but what's good for us is that they are now including us as a

Rockford police and law enforcement agencies throughout northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin are freq operations and are reaping the benefits.

Two LEAC helicopters are equipped with 30-million-candlepower spotlights bright enough to illuminate a foo infrared camera for night vision, all of which are operated by a tactical flight officer.

"Rockford has a no-chase policy," said LEAC senior Tactical Field Officer Rick Concepcion. "We don't have how to react to a helicopter. They can't run from it. You can't hide from it."

Olson said, AIR-ONE is a "different tool" available at all times to any law enforcement agency and fire depar

Not cheap

The five-year-old nonprofit, all-volunteer agency provides no-cost air support to law enforcement and fire de fleet of four helicopters — three Bell OH-58s, or "Kiowa," and one Bell UH-1V, or "Huey" — were obtained th program. The Winthrop Harbor Police Department provides 24-hour dispatch services for all LEAC helicopte

LEAC operates on a \$500,000 budget. Operational expenses include flight fuel, maintenance, parts and equ "One-hundred percent of what we receive goes back into the program," Olson said.

UPS sells fuel to LEAC at cost, now about \$1.60 per gallon. Still, the cost to keep a helicopter in the air is nc Kiowa burns fuel at a rate of 20 to 30 gallons per hour.

Because of fuel costs, Olson said LEAC limits it services primarily for felonies and burglaries in progress, los

Rockford police Lt. Christine Bishop said LEAC has been an invaluable resource.

“So far this year, AIR-ONE has assisted us with suppression details, our summer crime initiative, and the AI honest, they have been extremely helpful. They are excellent people to work with.”

Winnebago County Sheriff's Sgt. Anthony Miceli said the department takes advantage of AIR-ONE's ability t amount of time.

“We have used them for missing children, searches for fugitives, they assist the dogs and light up the fields.

Federal assistance

In addition to assisting local agencies, LEAC last week signed an agreement with the Federal Emergency M for AIR-ONE to be at the disposal of FEMA and ready to assist in natural or man-made disasters within a six

Olson said FEMA would also use AIR-ONE for what he called “advance work.”

“If Chicago gets the Olympics, they'll want to do a flyover of the city to search for any potential areas that co of rain and it looks the like the Rock River or Mississippi River is going to flood, they'll do a flyover to see wh the county.”

After the floods of 2006 and 2007, AIR-ONE was used to document the flood damage with aerial photos tha Emergency Management Agency.

“We were able to get a bigger reimbursement from FEMA,” said Olson, a Winnebago County Board member (Christiansen) really liked that.”

Staff writer Chris Green can be reached at cgreen@rrstar.com or 815-987-1241.

ABOUT LEAC

The Law Enforcement Aviation Coalition, a nonprofit agency, provides air support to law enforcement and fir

The agency uses helicopters equipped with a 30-million-candlepower spotlight that is bright enough to illumi and a night-vision camera.

How to help

To send a donation by mail, make checks payable to “LEAC Inc.” and mail to: LEAC Inc., 830 Sheridan Roa

To make a donation through the Internet, log on to airsupport.org.

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