

## Our Local Warden

I was having a telephone conversation with DNR Warden Jennifer Niemeyer about a week ago. We were working out the details on me riding along with her as she went on a patrol. Part of the conversation went something, though not exactly like this:

Niemeyer: "I will need to you sign a waiver. If we get into a gunfight or something, we need to make sure you don't suit the department if something bad happens."

Me: "Is there anything in the waiver that assures that I can't be used a human shield if there is a gunfight?"

Niemeyer: "No."

Me: "Can I turn on a siren if there is a high speed chase?"

Niemeyer: "No."

Me: "Can I handcuff someone if you have to take them down?"

Niemeyer: "No and you need to quit watching so many episodes of COPS."

Me: "Hmmm, well okay. I need a story so I will sign it."

Niemeyer is one of the game wardens that serve in the Kenosha area. Actually, one warden positions is currently unfilled, so at this time, she is the only warden for Kenosha County.

Serving here since 1999, she has become a recognized and respected face amongst the local outdoors community. Ten years, according to Niemeyer, is the longest that any warden has served in this county and she is not too far away from reaching that mark.

Niemeyer earned her 4-Year Degree from U.W. Platteville then she went through certified law enforcement training after graduation. After enforcement training, she had 1 year of training from the DNR before being assigned to Kenosha County.

Typical of most people who decide to become wardens, it was her love for the outdoors that caused her, a self-described tomboy, to decide to become a warden. "I grew up fishing with my dad on the Mississippi. I loved fishing, I loved the outdoors", she said.

Unfortunately, she does not get to partake in the outdoor activities as much as she would like to; that's especially true in the fall when she works long days. Niemeyer does occasionally get out to fish and finds time to hunt for deer and waterfowl.

On the morning I rode along with her, we went down to the Kenosha shoreline to check on anglers in the marinas. I promised not to reveal any of her secrets, but I can say that she often scopes out the activities of people from a distance before checking them out in person.

“People are not going to violate in front of a warden”; said Niemeyer as she picked up a pair of binoculars.

Our first encounter was with a gentleman ice fishing for trout in the Southport Marina. He had finished up for the morning when we pulled up in her truck. Niemeyer stepped out of the truck, announced who she was, asked him some questions about his activities, and then asked to see his fishing license. He responded that he had lost his fishing license and had not gotten a replacement. That is a problem and it turns out a common violation.

Of the anglers she checked on the morning I was with her, the two violations encountered were both for people having purchased licenses, but not having that license on them.

“We see more people are not carrying their licenses”, she said.

Niemeyer said that people who lost or forgot their license often ask if the wardens can look up their license in their system. They can, but the violation is the same whether the angler never purchased a license or forgot it at home.

Over the years, she has gotten to know white a few of the local outdoors people, even the ones who have occasionally violated the regulations.

“Some of these guys I have been chasing for years. It’s a cat and mouse game”, said Niemeyer.

I ask her if she has ever been in any situations she would consider dangerous.

“Absolutely, the same people the police encounter, we encounter too”, she said. “You can never become complacent. The nice guy could hurt you.”

She has been in a couple fights while on the job and occasionally people get into arguments with her or try to run away. Niemeyer depends on the local law enforcement to back her up since there are only a handful of wardens in the region. She says that she has developed a close working relationship with the sheriff’s department since much of her work occurs out in the county.

She certainly has had a number of interesting encounters over the last nine years. “I should write a book someday. Some of these people come up with crazy ideas”, said Niemeyer.

She told me about a time she and another warden came upon a person who was using his fishing license as bait on the Pike River. When she asked him for his license, he reeled in his fishing line and showed them his pink colored license hanging on his hook.

Besides her outdoor work, she spends time talking to various groups about outdoor issues and safety. She also spends a lot of time doing follow-up work and doing paperwork.

“The more we are outside, the more paperwork we have to do”, she said. “I don’t have my own secretary.”

So besides being outdoors, “What is another benefit of the job?” I asked.

“We get a lot of cool toys”, Niemeyer said laughing.

That sounds like a good benefit to me.

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