

A Look at the Past

In 1951, Olin (better known as “Swede”) Johnson graduated from Northeast Missouri State Teachers College (now Truman) with a Bachelors of Science in Education in Industrial Arts.



Shortly after finishing college Swede became a night sergeant for two years at the Kirksville Police Department, a municipal judge for two years, and then Sheriff at the Adair County Sheriff’s Department in 1957 when the jail was undergoing much scrutiny for lack of security and escaped prisoners. Sheriff Johnson said “the jail was so bad that tobacco cans were nailed over rat holes.” Sheriff Johnson did much to improve the condition of the jail by removing steel doors that would not close and by converting them into bunks he was able to increase the capacity of the jail. The Sheriff’s duties brought great stress to the entire family. They lived in the jail, the wife cooked everyone’s meals, and the Sheriff had to personally care for the prisoners at night.



In 1965 Swede became a patrolman for Northeast at the Division of Maintenance Services that included departments of engineering, custodial, gardening, landscape, and security patrol. Security Patrol consisted of a Chief with six patrol officers at which Swede served as one.

In the late 60’s and early 70’s great unrests and revolts to authority on college campuses were occurring nationwide. Due to threats to the president’s house Northeast established the Office of Safety and Security in 1970 where Olin became it’s first acting director. The security patrol consisted of five officers, commissioned by the Kirksville Police Department, and three non-commissioned night watchmen.

As the need for criminal justice education was on the rise Swede received his Bachelors of Science in Law Enforcement in 1975 when the program was averaging over 100 graduates a year in the mid to late 70’s. The program started offering courses in the fall of 1970 and now called Justice Systems averages 37 graduates a year.

Swede was sometimes called “Old Dad” on campus. He made the Office of Safety and Security department feel like a family and claimed the university’s students as his own kids. "If an individual ever found a slot in life, I did. I have been blessed with a whole group of young people," he said.

Swede also served as Assistant Director and third Director for several years in the department before retiring in 1987. Swede believed in the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. He stated, "If you practice that in everything you do, you're going to be a good communication officer."