

SHROPSHIRE

News from and about members



One High Sheriff and her motorcycle



Above:
Celebrating
my 75th blood
donation in almost
full uniform

IT IS such a privilege to be High Sheriff. So many doors normally closed are open and the welcomes I have received everywhere have been tremendous. But what has made my year in office special? In short, the answer is the people.

I chose to celebrate the county of Shropshire with its rich communities and also to champion volunteering in all its forms. I have sought to be an accessible High Sheriff, seeking out smaller community-based events in addition to the larger ones. I had no idea how intoxicating these themes would prove to be or the joy of meeting people who never dreamed they would be talking to a High Sheriff.

Perhaps unusually for a lady High Sheriff I hold a full motorcycle licence and, with my husband, often go touring. It was great fun to turn up to some events on a motorcycle, in particular any with a motoring or vintage theme. This is another way in which I have sought to be accessible to good effect, although our police and crime commissioner was on the point of ejecting us from a police station car park before he recognised us with a degree of surprise and embarrassment!

Celebrating HM The Queen's 90th birthday provided a brilliant opportunity for parties. One organiser decided to invite the High Sheriff to a party at the village hall in remote Bucknell. She was astonished and delighted in equal measure when I said yes. The villagers did Her Majesty proud with a feast that was excellent in all respects: home baked cakes, pastries and sandwiches all to die for. But the icing on the cake was the people themselves: a vibrant community enjoying a day together with all age groups represented. Everyone was involved and contributing. Brilliant!

Shropshire is a big rural county, the largest inland county in England. Providing a fire and rescue service giving good response times is a challenge largely met through part-time or 'retained' firefighters. We have only three fire stations where full-time shift working is employed. Elsewhere there are 20 stations all staffed by part-time personnel. For this to work there is great reliance on the community and local employers being willing to release staff at a moment's notice for emergency call-outs. I had the privilege of being asked to rededicate the refurbished retained station



With Shropshire Young Enterprise winners 'Global Gourmet' of Holy Trinity Academy, Telford



Above: With Shropshire ACF cadets at summer camp in Crowborough

Below: About to set off by motorcycle to open gardens for charity in Cleobury Mortimer

at Baschurch and the camaraderie and dedication of the people I met blew me away.

Getting to know the military activity in the county has been most enjoyable. But the real delight has been the cadets from all three armed services. I had thought that they were simply a means of recruiting. How wrong I was. Although a minority of cadets progress to military careers there is no pressure placed on them to do. The cadets are brilliant youth organisations helping

to provide life skills for young people using a military setting. I came across so many stories of youngsters, some from challenging backgrounds, whose lives had been transformed by joining the cadets. The excellence of the volunteer leaders, the military discipline operated entirely fairly and the opportunity to develop skills and friendships, were all factors in the successes that I saw.

I have sought out volunteers in action across the county, often giving support services to the elderly, the sick and the disabled. I have been touched by what is going on under our noses but unseen and often unsung. Highlights include a young carer aged seven who was responsible for checking his disabled, diabetic ex-military father's blood sugar levels daily. He did not see it as anything out of the ordinary. I have also seen so many volunteers driven by personal experience to help others: Parkinson's support groups, the autism hub, and hearing- and sight-loss workers. Finally, support groups and provision for the elderly, in particular those with cruel debilitating dementia. All these and more have left me feeling tremendously proud of the voluntary work that goes on in my county.

And so, after 8000 miles and over 700 thank you letters, the year ended. I feel so privileged and humbled to have been High Sheriff of Shropshire.



◆◆ **Christine Holmes JP**
High Sheriff of Shropshire 2016-2017