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ACSO repeats as champs in blood drive challenge

Fighting crime may be the No. 1 job for the staff at the Alachua County Sheriff's office, but they showed they also know something about saving lives, repeating as champs in the annual Guns & Hoses Battle of the Badges blood drive competition.

ACSO earned the award for most donations with 53, topping second place Gainesville Police Department that had 26 donations.

This year teams representing both Guns & Hoses earned top honors, with Levy County Fire Rescue winning the award for highest percentage of donors, with 60 percent of the staff participating, edging out 2009 percentage champs the Florida Highway Patrol, which finished with 54 percent participation.

Every June in North Florida firefighters, emergency medical responders, deputies, police officers and troopers engage in the fun lifesaving battle, and bragging rights are on the line.

"This year we had the participation of 15 different agencies and the competition helped bring in nearly 200 units of blood," said LifeSouth Community Blood Centers' North Florida District Director J.D. Pettyjohn. "The people in these agencies know from first-hand experience just how important donating is, and they came through at the beginning of summer when we face a challenge of keeping up with the demand."

Meeting that challenge is no easy task because it takes nearly 1,000 donors every week just to meet the needs of the hospitals in North Florida. In the summer when the college student population drops significantly, high schools are out and regular donors are traveling, the challenge can easily turn into a shortage without additional donors stepping up. It marked the second straight year ACSO responded to the call to donate in award-winning fashion.

The victory was welcome news to Alachua County Sheriff Sadie Darnell, who personally challenged other agencies to participate. She credited ACSO's blood drive co-captains Sandi Hayes and Kristen Allfrey for their passion and hard work on the June blood drive and the department's quarterly blood drives.

"They know first-hand the importance of these events. I'd like to personally thank the other law enforcement and public safety agencies who participated in my challenge. Giving blood saves lives, and that's what our work is all about," said Darnell.

