



Real-Time Impact of Blog Posts

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I received a letter this week from Eddie Caldwell, the Executive Vice President and General Counsel for the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association. Eddie is a long-time and impressive public servant who has worked with us for many years in a variety of different positions. He was a police officer in Carrboro, served as legal counsel for Speaker of the House Joe Mavretic, and has been in his current position for many years. I'm going to quote extensively from Eddie's letter because it is much better to hear the story in his own words.

Eddie wrote that he was driving to Watauga County on a Saturday when he received a text message from a western North Carolina sheriff "whose county is dealing with the out of control forest fires and he needed some immediate legal advice." The sheriff was on his way to a meeting with local government officials to discuss the potential for an emergency evacuation of county residents. "The group of local officials asked the sheriff to be prepared to talk about whether or not an evacuation could be mandatory and to describe the legal authority the sheriff has to enforce an evacuation order."



This is not the kind of legal knowledge that even a first-rate attorney like Eddie would likely know without doing some research. It also was time sensitive and he was in his car. But Eddie knew that our own Norma Houston is “North Carolina’s resident expert.” And he remembered that she had written several blog posts on this area of the law.

“I exited the interstate, pulled into a parking lot and accessed the SOG website on my mobile telephone. In a matter of seconds I found the exhaustive article that Norma had written on her blog post that fully describes this area of the law in great detail, with great clarity and precision.

“I sent the link to Norma’s article to the sheriff and advised him that Norma was NC’s recognized expert on this area of the law. I also sent the sheriff a message with a couple of sentences providing an overview of the article and suggested that he read Norma’s article thoroughly for all of the details.”



Within 15 minutes of receiving the sheriff's initial inquiry, "and on a Saturday," Eddie was able to provide the sheriff with "all of the information that he could possibly need for the meeting that he was enroute to attend."

That is so great. And that kind of just-in-time assistance happens all of the time in many different ways. Or in Eddie's words: "This is one small but very important example of the tremendous asset that the School of Government and its faculty are for North Carolina sheriffs and other public officials. Please accept my thanks and the thanks of North Carolina's 100 sheriffs for the outstanding job you and the School's faculty do in service to the public officials and citizens of North Carolina."

We have talked a lot about the demand for advising in recent months and how overwhelming it can be for some faculty members with heavy advising loads. For the officials who are asking the questions, it is important—and often time sensitive. And they always are grateful for our assistance. I especially love that Eddie was able to access the information through one of the School's online resources at a time when we were not open for business. Hopefully we can encourage even more officials to help themselves by using our online resources. At the same time, however, we need to remember that our advising is valuable for public officials who want to have access to the best possible information when they make decisions. Thanks to all of you for your hard work for North Carolina's public officials. It makes a major difference and they appreciate it—and so do I.

The other obvious takeaway from this story is that Norma is awesome. No surprise there, of course.