Over the course of the last few months, the department has been receiving reports of counterfeit $100 bills being circulated in the city of Owatonna; similar incidents were also being reported in neighboring jurisdictions from northern Iowa to the south metro area to Olmsted County to Blue Earth County. The South Central Drug Investigative Unit became involved in the case, partnering with the Rice County Sheriff’s Office, Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and the United States Secret Service once suspects were identified in the case. The investigation cumulated on Tuesday, June 21st when simultaneous search warrants were served in Freeborn County, Rice County and the city of Owatonna and five people were arrested in connection with manufacturing, distributing or passing counterfeit currency. In all, it is estimated that $30,000 in counterfeit currency was manufactured and distributed in the area as a result of this group.

As we reported last week, former Corporal Investigator John Petterson’s resignation from the department created a void in the Investigation Division. As a result of this opening, Patrol Officer Joel Hunt has been selected to fill that void. Joel has been with the department since March of 2006 working exclusively as a patrol officer. Joel has also served the department working as an Explorer Post Coordinator, board member for the Steele County Safety Comp, evidence technician and most recently as a field training officer. Joel will be working general investigations through the summer months and then working as the Junior High School resource officer during the school year. Congratulations Joel!

On Thursday evening, a citizen of Owatonna had just entered the trails in Kaplan’s Woods to take a walk when he observed a vehicle pull into the parking lot with four young occupants. As the occupants got out of the car, he heard a sound of what appeared to be cans of spray paint being shaken. The occupants entered the woods and the concerned citizen investigated further, finding a map sign that had wet paint/graffiti on it. The citizen contacted the police department and the four occupants were eventually apprehended in the park, still carrying cans of spray paint; all admitted to their involvement in damaging city property. The occupants, three eighteen year old males and one seventeen year old male were charged with 4th degree criminal damage to property or aiding an offender in criminal acts.

Steele County Safety Camp occurs each year in June. Children from throughout Steele County who have completed the third grade are invited to spend a few days learning about safety. This year there was a fantastic turnout with 196 kids participating. Owatonna officers Andy Seifert, Brady Vaith, Joel Hunt and Sergeant Andy DeVinny participated as camp advisors.