Officer Tom Murphy Retires—Tuesday, March 1, 2011, marked the official retirement of Tom Murphy from the Owatonna Police Department after almost 26 years of service to the citizen of Owatonna. During those 26 years, Tom served the department and the community in several different roles on the department. Congratulations Tom and enjoy your retirement!!

Vehicle Pursuit—During the summer of 2010, the Owatonna Police Department sent all of our officers to a pursuit intervention course at the Highway Safety Center in St. Cloud. The purpose behind this course was to train our officers in technique called the Pursuit Intervention Technique (PIT). The PIT technique was developed as a viable, safe alternative to end vehicle pursuits. On Thursday, March 3rd, Owatonna Officers responded to a female party in the drive-thru of Taco Johns that was “huffing” a substance and was now slumped over the steering wheel. Officer located the vehicle in the parking lot of Walgreen. After making brief contact with the driver, she backed out of a parking stall and fled from the officers in her vehicle. A short pursuit ensued out onto eastbound Hwy 14. Owatonna Officer Joe Swenson saw a safe opportunity to end the pursuit quickly and used a PIT technique on the vehicle, disabling the vehicle in the ditch. Officers took the female into custody and transported her to the Steele County Detention Center. Dawn Marie Sullivan, age 35, was formally charged in district court with Fleeing a Police Officer in a Motor Vehicle, 3rd Degree DWI, Abuse of a Toxic Substance, Reckless Driving and Failing to Stop for a Stop Sign. Ms. Sullivan’s vehicle is being held for forfeiture.

Synthetic Marijuana—On March 1, 2011, it was reported in the FEDERAL REGISTER that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has issued a final order which details the amendment to the controlled substance section of the Federal Criminal Code. The amendment details (5) current synthetic cannabinoid substances that are applied to plant-like products currently marketed by tobacco shops, convenience stores, and other outlets, as herbal incense or plant food under the trade name such as “K2”, “Spice” and “Bonsai”. These products are typically labeled as “Not Safe for Human Consumption” but it has been determined that the products are perceived as “legal” alternatives to marijuana and being smoked in similar fashion, particularly by juveniles and young adults. This amendment is temporary until it is officially approved by congress, but it extends the DEA ban on the sale and use of these products which was issued last year. There is similar legislation being considered on the State level and it is anticipated that not only will the Minnesota controlled substance schedule be amended, but the criminal code will contain a new statute banning the sale, use and possession of these products. With that being said, the Federal amendment allows us to continue to perform compliance checks on businesses that may sell these products to ensure they are not on their shelves.