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Sheriff's Office, greed is good.

Jun. 12, 2013

Greed is one of the seven deadly sins. But for Maryland's Anne Arundel County Sheriff's Office, greed is good.

The state's General Assembly enacted a law last year that withholds a state tax refund from anyone with an outstanding warrant for five more years. To get their refunds, those on the wanted list must clear the warrant first.

"Some people were very skeptical, but I just had a gut feeling that greed being a motivator for people, it would be a factor for people to turn themselves in," said Sheriff Ron Bateman, who created the program.

Deputies are asked to serve 500 to 800 warrants every month, rounding up those wanted by the court system for failure to appear in court and violation of probation, Bateman said. Bateman, elected sheriff in 2006, has made improving warrant service a centerpiece of his department.

"The issue of warrant reduction is always on my mind," he said.

The tax-refund-withholding program — a partnership with the Governor's Office, the Motor Vehicle Administration and the state Comptroller's Office — had a successful trial run. In its first year, 417 letters were mailed to people with outstanding warrants who had tax refunds. Out of those, 249 warrants were cleared — 194 by arrest.

"These people are turning themselves in," Bateman said. "That means my guys don't have to fight them, and chase them," Bateman said. "I knew that when they filed

their taxes they were going to give the tax guys a good address because they want the

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There are some exceptions to the program. A person must file his or her taxes individually, cannot be current or former military and must be an adult. A law already exists that withholds tax refunds from people who owe child support, so this program does not apply to those individuals.

Bateman said the people who have surrendered are turning themselves in without weapons, and are also in an environment that does not put a deputy's safety at risk. He said he hopes the whole nation will seek these benefits of the program.

"I've been called by the sheriffs office in Nebraska. I have other counties interested in it," Bateman said. "It's a cost-effective way to take care of the criminals."

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