

The Toughest Sheriff

- **Shimon Rosenberg**

His modus operandi resembles that of a KGB director. He is infamous for his treatment of illegal aliens and prisoners. Yet, he is extremely popular among voters in Arizona as is evidenced by the four times he has been elected. Meet Joe Arpaio, the toughest sheriff in the west (and the east, north and south)...

It is not for naught that Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio has been nicknamed "Hitler" by the prisoners in Maricopa County. His strategies include incarceration in scorching desert tent camps, near starvation food rations and forced labor under very harsh conditions. Prisoners beaten by his prison guards have died as a result.

Sheriff Joe does not take kindly to criticism. Just ask those who had the nerve to start up with him. And he is not intimidated by anyone, even the President of the United States. When the Obama administration decided to go after the belligerent sheriff and challenge his activities, Sheriff Joe launched a campaign to prove that President Obama was not born in the United States.

A word of advice to anyone contemplating any criminal activity: Stay far away from Maricopa County, Arizona, where the notorious 80-year-old county sheriff, Joe Arpaio, rules with an iron fist.

JOSEPH M. ARPAIO

Sheriff Joe's motto is, "If you don't want to do the time, don't do the crime." Joe Arpaio, Sheriff of Maricopa County in Arizona, hates criminals to the point of obsession and is consistently contriving new schemes to make his prisoners' lives even more miserable. They have long been chased out of their air-conditioned cells and relocated to flimsy tents erected in the arid Arizona desert, unprotected from the elements. Their rations have been cut to two daily meals. Rumor has it that if he could, he would happily ration the number of breaths the prisoners are allowed to draw at any given time.

Yet, to many of his constituents in Maricopa County, he is nothing less than a hero. They wholeheartedly approve of his policies and hope that he remains at his post forever.

In recent years, since illegal immigration became a hot issue, Sheriff Joe's popularity grew by leaps and bounds. At the same time, his hard stances against illegal immigrants made him the nemesis of liberal groups. Now, however, new revelations about him and his tactics have threatened to widen the net of his enemies.

Sheriff Joe's Rise to Power

Maricopa County is not a nondescript little county in the backwaters of America. It is a thriving and vibrant county that encompasses several large cities in Arizona, including the capital, Phoenix. It spans more than 9,000 square miles and has a population of close to four million.

Arpaio has served as sheriff of Maricopa since 1993. Short and with his potbelly protruding over his belt, he is in charge of the sheriff's police force and the entire county prison system. He has 4,000 deputies under him, as well as 3,000 volunteers. Like the majority of sheriffs, he was elected to his position and is now finishing his fifth four-year term, and is preparing to run for a sixth term.

Arpaio was born in 1932, in Springfield, Massachusetts, to struggling Italian

immigrants who – as he likes to point out – entered the United States legally through Ellis Island. His father owned a grocery store. His mother died when he was born, and Joe was raised by extended family and friends. Since early childhood, he dreamed of becoming a policeman.

When he turned 18, he joined the army, and when he finished his tour of duty he embarked on his career as a policeman in Washington DC. Later, he worked as a Federal Drug Agent in Turkey, Mexico, and then in Arizona. Finally, he opened a travel agency in a village near Phoenix.

In 1990, Arpaio decided to run for sheriff against the incumbent who was plagued by scandals. He was not an eloquent speaker, but the statements he issued to the media were always sharp and to the point. He promised to crack down on crime and to be only a one-term sheriff.

He won the Republican primary, which, in this heavily conservative county, meant that he was almost certain to win the general election. Although he wasn't a seasoned politician, it turned out that Arpaio had good political sense, and knew which buttons to push. He also turned out to be a publicity hound. He has a public relations department that employs five full-time workers.

The most significant of the sheriff's responsibilities is undoubtedly the maintenance of the prison system. When he was first elected, voters had opposed the county's attempt to finance the erection of additional prison facilities to ease severely overcrowded conditions. Sheriff Joe promptly announced that as long as he was in charge, no prisoner would be freed due to lack of space. He had an excellent solution – one which would cost the taxpayers next to nothing. He would purchase a number of surplus army tents, set them up in the hot desert regions of Maricopa County, near Phoenix, and surround them with barbed wire.

And that is what he did. Suddenly, the county had a solution to its housing shortage for prisoners.

The Phoenix desert region is like a



Sheriff Joe set up "tent cities" in the arid desert to house inmates.

furnace most of the year. Temperatures inside the tents frequently reach as high as 135 degrees. (Daytime temperatures have been reported as high as 150°F in the top bunks!) When reporters come by, Arpaio whisks out a thermometer and proudly shows off the high readings.

Most of his constituents, especially the conservative majority who voted him in, support the "tent city jail," as it is referred to. The sheriff kept adding more and more tents to the "city" until it hosted as many as 2,500 prisoners. Adding insult to injury, Sheriff Joe then hung up a huge motel-style sign proclaiming "VACANCY" on top of the watchtower in the camp. The sign could be seen for miles.

In 2003, when a heat wave caused temperatures to hover around the 140 degree mark, and prisoners complained about the unbearable heat, Sheriff Joe responded blithely, "It's 120 degrees in Iraq and the soldiers are living in tents, have to wear full body armor, and they didn't commit any crimes, so shut your mouths."

As time went on, Sheriff Joe's rules became increasingly more restrictive. He forbade cigarettes, then newspapers, then movies. Eventually, he made the decision to ban coffee too. When the inmates complained, they were told, "This is not the Hilton Hotel. If you don't like it, don't come back...."

Ultimately, he stopped serving hot lunches and then did away with the salt and pepper. According to his calculations, he has saved taxpayers over \$30,000 a year just by eliminating the spices. In due course, the decision was made to serve only two bare

bone meals daily. On many days, the meals consisted of stale bologna. Under these circumstances, most prisoners lost a lot of weight, some to the point of emaciation.

At the same time, Arpaio stated how proud he was that he had cut the cost of feeding the prisoners to a mere 30 cents per meal per prisoner. He even boasted to the media that it cost him more to feed the police dogs than the prisoners. "After all, the dogs didn't commit any crimes," he declared, "and they earn their keep!"

On another occasion, Sheriff Joe justified his philosophy this way: "A prison is not a vacation resort. My goal is to make it the most fervent wish of every inmate never to come here again."



The "toughest sheriff" in America in his office amid signs and posters proudly proclaiming the harsh conditions inmates can expect.



Critics have called Sheriff Joe's methods "brutal" and "medieval." Indeed, some prisoners have died as a result – the victims' families successfully winning lawsuits for millions of dollars. Arpaio preparing a press release.

