

TOP LAWMAN DRAWS PRAISE AFTER FIRST YEAR ON JOB - Correction Appended

The Press Enterprise (Riverside, CA.)

October 2, 2008, Thursday

Correction Appended

Copyright 2008 The Press Enterprise, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Section: A SECTION; Pg. A01

Length: 1510 words

Byline: DOUGLAS QUAN, THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Body

Exactly one year after he was sworn in, Riverside County Sheriff **Stanley Sniff** still hasn't had a chance to hang his Civil War art collection on the walls of his largely unadorned office.

He has been too busy visiting community groups and trying to rebuild a department, he says. In some eyes, the department was in tatters and weighed down by backroom politics when his predecessor, Bob Doyle, abruptly resigned to take a position on the state Parole Board.

Supporters credit Sniff for boosting morale, making smart promotions, pushing jail expansion and improving recruitment and training.

They also praise his handling of the aftermath of back-to-back officer-involved-shootings on the Soboba reservation near San Jacinto - even if some county officials thought the bluster was a bit excessive.

There are some disagreements. District Attorney Rod Pacheco wants jail expansion to move faster. The sheriff's union doesn't agree with Sniff's position that the names of officers involved in shootings should be released to the news media. And an organization representing the county's rural residents grouses that many deputies are not giving residents enough face time.

But even those who disagree with Sniff praise his leadership in the next breath.

Sniff, 59, a former assistant sheriff and retired colonel in the Army Reserves, took the helm of the department less than a year after Doyle fired him.

Some county officials speculated Doyle viewed Sniff as a threat to Doyle's handpicked successor, former Assistant Sheriff (SEE CORRECTION) Neil Andrews. Doyle denied it.

Sniff said a priority has been to remove the "taint of politics" within the upper echelons of the department. In the previous administration, many executive staff members were involved in the sheriff's campaigns and fundraising.

That, Sniff said, can lead to questions of favoritism and the perception that promotions are based on whether you participate in that political network.

No one in his administration is involved in campaigning and all promotions - he has overseen more than 200 - are merit-based, he said.

Doyle said in a phone interview that previous sheriffs used executive staff members to work on campaigns, and that it was possible to make objective decisions about promotions in that environment.

County supervisors and the union that represents deputies say the department's rank and file are happy.

Under Sniff, 25 percent fewer grievances have been filed, and the number that go to litigation has dropped 40 percent, said James Cunningham, executive director of the Riverside Sheriffs' Association.

Cunningham credited Sniff for getting rid of perks, such as SUVs for the sheriff and executive staff members. Most now drive Ford Crown Victorias and are barred from using them outside of work.

"It sends a nice message to the troops: 'They're just like you guys,' " Cunningham said.

WAR OF WORDS

Sniff, who has a philosophy degree from UC Riverside, has a professorial air about him. During a 2 1/2-hour interview, he invoked several historical and military themes - even Plato - to buttress his points.

Management jargon sometimes creeps into his speech. He talked about how he had "energized a number of changes" in the training academy to increase "throughput" - the number of people going through the academy.

That's not to say that Sniff can't be a straight shooter.

That was clear this summer in the escalating war of words that followed the shooting deaths of three people on the Soboba reservation.

Tribal Chairman Robert Salgado accused deputies of engaging in a policy of "shoot first and ask questions later."

Sniff said tribal leaders needed to take control of a "small lawless element" within the tribe.

TOP LAWMAN DRAWS PRAISE AFTER FIRST YEAR ON JOB - Correction Appended

After Salgado and Sniff signed an agreement aimed at improving cooperation and communication between the department and the tribe, tensions flared over differing interpretations of Public Law 280 - the rule that allows the Sheriff's Department to enforce state law on the reservation.

Salgado said tribal security had the right to question deputies about the nature of their business before allowing them to enter the reservation, unless the deputies were responding to an emergency.

Sniff said such questioning prevented deputies from doing their work in a timely manner.

In late July, Sniff called for the federal government to shut down the Soboba Casino. He contended that the tribe's conditional access to the reservation threatened public safety.

The tribal council issued a statement saying deputies had never been denied access to the reservation.

While that's true, some deputies were slowed down, Sniff said.

In recent weeks, deputies have entered the reservation with minimal delay. Sniff said he would like the tribe's written policy changed to make it official.

Salgado said by phone that if deputies are getting through without any problems, he doesn't see the need to take further action.

"Case is closed," Salgado said.

In a recent interview, Supervisor Bob Buster said he felt there was too much posturing from both sides early on. But Buster and other supervisors said they believe Sniff took the right course of action, including appointing a department liaison to work with the tribe.

Pacheco, the district attorney, praised Sniff for taking a tough stance.

"Everyone got a good sense **Stan Sniff** is not weak."

EXPANDING FORCE

Sniff has aggressively pushed to expand the jail system in the county.

The county's jail capacity is 3,600 beds. Sniff is working with the county to develop a hub jail that will accommodate between 1,200 to 1,800 people in its first phase to be completed by 2012.

Pacheco wants at least 2,400 beds in the first phase, though he said he understands Sniff's challenge to recruit enough deputies to staff it.

Supervisor Roy Wilson said he would like to see a more comprehensive approach to tackling crime, including examining rehabilitation strategies for first-time, low-level offenders.

Sniff said rehabilitation is important, but increasing jail space comes first.

So does recruitment.

TOP LAWMAN DRAWS PRAISE AFTER FIRST YEAR ON JOB - Correction Appended

When he became sheriff, Sniff set out to recruit 1,500 deputies within three years. As of last week, the department had hired 490 deputies. About one-third will work in corrections.

Sniff tapped the county's Human Resources staff to help recruit, something the department has never done before.

The county is helping the Sheriff's Department post ads and recruitment videos on Internet job sites, YouTube, and social networking sites, said Robin Downs, a Human Resources division manager.

The county also is working out a deal with the U.S. Army that guarantees soldiers an interview once they complete their service.

Sniff said he is trying to build a smarter force. Within a couple years, he will require that captains have bachelor's degrees. He has introduced incentives for personnel to have bachelor's and master's degrees and language skills.

The Ben Clark Public Safety Training Center has also expanded under Sniff. In the past, the center held three to four six-month training academies a year. Now, there are about nine.

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

Sniff said he grappled over whether to reverse the department's policy to withhold the identity of officers involved in shootings.

The union doesn't think the names of officers should be released.

But Sniff decided that officers' names should be provided to the news media within a reasonable time unless officer safety is in question.

"It looks like you're hiding something or there's something untoward about the event," he said.

Getting the pulse of the public has been a priority.

The sheriff said he has logged 27,000 miles talking to community organizations.

Last month, Sniff spoke before a meeting of the Riverside County United Communities, an organization that represents residents in unincorporated and rural areas.

Garry Grant, the group's president, said he found Sniff personable and was glad to hear the force is expanding.

Grant said a concern among group members is that deputies often lack familiarity with the areas they patrol and aren't having enough face-to-face contact with residents.

"This creates a frustration with the older residents in the community," he said.

Sniff said he has tried to strike a balance between keeping officers in areas where they have a relationship with residents and moving personnel around to accommodate the influx of new deputies.

LOOKING AHEAD

Sniff, who is married to a forensics technician in the district attorney's office, said he has had no time to engage in his favorite hobbies, including scuba diving and competing in cowboy shooting events in which participants dress up in Old West costumes.

But he has had time to rev up his 2010 election bid.

Sniff held his first fundraiser last month at the Faulkner Winery, a \$500-a- person affair with a buffet reception.

About 110 people turned out, according to the winery.

Sniff said he prefers being in the background, but some community members - he wouldn't say who - had been pressing him for months to start campaigning.

"It's not my natural thing," he said. "I do OK I guess."

Reach Douglas Quan at 951-368-9479 or dquan@PE.com

Correction

A story Thursday about Riverside County Sheriff **Stan Sniff** misidentified the name of a former assistant sheriff. He is Mike Andrews.

Correction-Date: October 3, 2008

Graphic

(1) Riverside County Sheriff **Stanley Sniff** (2) WILLIAM WILSON LEWIS III THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE At the time of his hiring a year ago, Riverside County Sheriff **Stanley Sniff** wanted to recruit 1,500 deputies within three years. The department had hired about a third, 490 deputies, in a year. MUG ; PHOTO

Load-Date: October 6, 2008