

Public Safety Issues & Topics

Living in northern Arizona is a truly wonderful experience that affords us an enjoyable, vibrant lifestyle; however, there are complex challenges facing our community, but with cooperation, hard work and creativity we will continue to prosper and successfully resolve the issues with which we are confronted. I believe in the human spirit, the ability of people to achieve and overcome under extraordinary circumstances. I think the people of this community expect a better quality of life and we must be dedicated to doing everything within our power to fulfill these expectations.

Organizational Concerns & Management Priorities

I have great faith in the people who serve our community in the Public Safety arena and particularly, the men and women who represent the various Law Enforcement agencies throughout northern Arizona. These dedicated professionals are bright, motivated and talented people, who do more with less every day. They overcome the challenges presented in the course of their work and they consistently achieve great things through their perseverance, enthusiasm and professionalism. We need to take care of the people who are charged with taking care of this community and its public safety needs.

The dedicated people of the Coconino County Sheriff's Office deserve competitive benefits and wages, progressive management practices and state-of-the-art equipment and technology. They have a right to expect an administration that is receptive to their input and acts upon the issues that are important to them. They should be empowered to affect progressive policy implementation that makes them more efficient in the manner in which they conduct their business and they should be given the opportunity to utilize their talent and creativity to solve problems.

The Coconino County Sheriff's Office needs to make recruiting, hiring and retaining the best caliber employee we can find our most important initiative. You should expect your Law Enforcement professionals to be the best and brightest, however, if we do not resolve the issues of importance to these people, they will leave our agency. *Caring for the needs of our employees has to be priority one.* Your Sheriff's Office has become a training ground for other agencies, which raid our ranks daily to acquire top-notch people to serve their communities. Our people are extremely marketable because of their record of quality performance, training and expertise. If we want to keep these highly skilled professionals, we must create an organizational environment built on progressive management principles, and a department that is competitive at all levels with other Law Enforcement agencies in the state and region.

The consequences of failing to nurture and care for our organization has enormous detrimental effects that will ripple through our community. Some of the more prominent issues include diminished customer service, ineffective response to emergency calls, impaired case management and investigations, staffing shortages, degraded morale, safety compromises, increased liability and numerous other potential problems. We are at a pivotal juncture in our organizational history and the opportunity is before us to choose our path. We can move forward in a progressive, pro-active manner, seeking solutions to the issues facing our community and this agency, or select the alternative course, based upon a pursuit of the status quo, lacking positive direction or energy, resulting in a continued downward spiral and a degradation of the quality of your Sheriff's Office.

Inter-Governmental Collaboration

We need to enhance inter-agency cooperation and collaboration regarding the issues facing the future of public safety agencies within Coconino County. We must work, as stakeholders in our system, to better coordinate the services we provide to the citizens of this community. These professional services include Law Enforcement agencies, Municipal and Rural Fire Departments, Emergency Medical Services and all the support entities that provide vital services to these agencies and the public.

This community deserves an enhanced system of justice via the Courts and services we, as taxpayers, subsidize. Coconino County has the ability to be a model Criminal Justice system, however, it will take a great deal of collaboration and communication to effect the positive changes required to streamline the criminal justice process. We need more effective management and disposition of criminal cases, in a timely manner, at all levels of the system. Currently, there exists very limited resources to administer counseling and rehabilitative services or provide for alternative case dispositions, such as probation and community service. We have to address these issues with a progressive model to effect positive outcomes in these cases.

The system of revolving door justice has got to be corrected and a process to aggressively deal with repeat offenders must be pursued. These repetitive, and often violent offenders continue to plague our community with little or no effective intervention strategy in place. These criminals deal drugs on our streets, hold power through intimidation and threats and have no fear of reprisal by our system of justice. Once identified, these criminals need to be dealt with in an effective, assertive manner, through aggressive prosecution and heavy sentences through our courts. We must develop a Repeat Offender Program, perpetuating the tactics employed in other communities, to address this pervasive public safety problem.

We need to bolster the work and support the efforts of our METRO multi-agency task force, a team currently understaffed and overworked. This unit has a record of effectiveness that should be emulated and is the most effective resource currently in place at interdicting violent street crime and the people who manufacture and sell drugs in our neighborhoods. Through the interdiction activities of this unit, we have been successful at applying effective consequences to the perpetrators of violent and drug related crimes including sanctions that crush their criminal enterprises, seize their assets and effectively take them off our streets for long periods of time. The Sheriff's Office currently has no personnel assigned to support this invaluable unit and this situation must be corrected immediately.

We must work to improve cooperation among other governmental agencies, which hold legitimate jurisdiction within our County including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service and the Tribal Law Enforcement organizations of the Navajo, Hopi and Havasupai governments. These enterprises could include regular briefings and consultations among agencies, sharing of resources and information, cross-training and improved mutual aid agreements. Each of these organizations has their individual and unique issues to address and the Sheriff's Office must be a more responsive and supportive public safety partner.

The management of warrants must be effectively addressed and a strategy for pursuing offenders implemented. We currently hold a huge backlog of nearly 10,000 warrants in our system, for a variety of offenses. Flagstaff Municipal Court assigns two warrant officers to pursue offenders, however, there exists no coordinated warrant task force or enforcement effort within our local Law Enforcement agencies. We are not out there actively looking for these offenders or holding them accountable for their crimes. These people are being let off the hook from paying fines, serving sentences, or completing community service after being sentenced by our courts. Many of these offenders fail to appear for their court hearings and the only method to hold them accountable is the chance they might have a future police contact that reveals their warrant. We need a more assertive, coordinated warrant interdiction strategy that tracks these people down and makes them accountable for their offenses.

Your Sheriff's Office needs to reinstate the Domestic Violence investigative unit that has been dismantled due to a lack of internal support and resources. This investigative team managed more than 300 cases of domestic violence per year prior to being cut and was credited with prosecuting several serial, violent offenders during its tenure. We need to have a continued focus on the issue of Domestic Violence in this community and a coordinated effort with the service providers who support the victims of these violent crimes.

We must attempt to identify and allocate resources geared toward gang intervention in our neighborhoods. Our state funded task force has been dismantled and the problems associated with the proliferation of violent street gangs will go unchecked. The consequences of leaving this important mission unfulfilled are immense.

Our Law Enforcement agencies must work in a more productive and close collaboration with our Probation department to identify problem offenders and hold them accountable. There needs to be improved communication between our agencies, a task force oriented approach and a sharing of resources to manage convicted offenders. The Probation department has been grossly neglected over the years and we must be better at helping our Probation Officers do their important job more effectively.

Jail Growth & Management

Our community will soon be forced to face the tough issues regarding our future management of the Jail District, which has a troubled history. The bond funded Jail has experienced significant problems including fiscal management, staffing shortages and operational inefficiency since it's opening in July of 2000. In the first two years of operation under the previous administration, the Jail District used more than \$1.8 million in repair and replacement reserve funds to subsidize its operation and currently has no money in reserve for emergencies or extensive repairs.

The Jail is now leasing beds to other agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the Arizona Department of Corrections, to generate revenue in an effort to balance the books. This strategy has had some success, however, as local inmate population continues to rise, the ability of the Jail to continue this leasing tactic will become very limited. The most likely scenario indicates that local inmate population will go up, operating expenses will escalate, bed rental revenues will fall off and staffing and morale issues will worsen. The idea of more inmates, less staff and limited funds or resources to address these issues makes for an unpleasant and potentially volatile scenario.

There currently exists no long-term strategic plan to address the growth and management needs of the Jail. There is no on-going, internal organizational dialogue to anticipate and manage the issues we know are emerging and which will result in significant Criminal Justice system impacts over the next several years. We need to begin the process of assertive Jail management now and develop a vision for the future growth and expansion of Jail services in the short and long term.

Community Social Services & Programs

As a community and as a public safety system, we need to address the problem of acute alcohol abuse and the societal concerns associated with this issue in a pro-active and effective manner. We currently spend hundreds of thousands of dollars and tons of public and private resources managing the problem of intoxicated individuals in our community. This is an often controversial and contentious topic, but one that must be worked through effectively due to the serious and potentially negative impact it presents. The discussions of a detoxification center and treatment services have been facilitated by a dedicated group of community-minded stakeholders, but these meetings have produced no tangible results or solutions to date. These forums should continue, but move toward better collaboration and a solution-oriented approach. There needs to be a direction established and resources applied to this critical, quality of life community issue.

The response to the plight of the mentally ill and the resultant impact on Jail population, criminal activity and other community concerns is an issue not unique to northern Arizona, but is problematic to our nation as a whole. We have a group of responsive and compassionate professionals in our community who work hard to deliver services and treatment to these members of our society, but they are hampered by a multitude of obstacles including bureaucratic red tape, lack of resources and inadequate funding. We need to be creative in eliminating the barriers that prohibit the effective delivery of resources to those with emotional disorders and seek out alternative sources of funding to enhance the services we can provide.

We must initiate a program of violence prevention and education within our Jail facility to address the issues of Domestic Violence and other forms of abuse. We have many people incarcerated from our community for offenses of this nature and we currently have no internal program in place to begin the process of rehabilitation for these perpetrators. Models exist throughout our nation's Jails that can be replicated or modified to meet our local needs and make a positive impact on this issue.

We need to expand basic educational opportunities for inmates at the County Jail, including reading, writing, and G.E.D. tutoring. Numerous studies have proven that advanced levels of education tend to reduce the incidence of recidivism among offenders and promote positive ideals and esteem by program participants.

We must subsidize and expand the delivery of Probation services as alternatives to incarceration. There are a multitude of models available to emulate including day reporting centers, counseling and treatment services, work furlough programs, community service opportunities, pre-trial services and electronic monitoring of non-violent offenders. These innovative and creative programs can be implemented in our community, however, to be effective we must make a commitment of improved funding and staffing for our Probation department.

Community-Oriented Initiatives & Programs

We must genuinely adopt a community-oriented policing philosophy, encompassing all the components and responsibilities associated with these strategies. We must use effective problem identification and resolution models to address community quality of life issues. We are obligated to assess community concerns through citizen committees, meetings and feedback about the problems unique to their neighborhoods and the methods they believe will result in resolution. We must have greater collaboration and involvement with the citizens we serve and establish partnerships to solve problems and promote positive community relationships.

Your Sheriff's Office must implement the concepts of strategic-oriented policing to allocate our resources more effectively to prevent crime, solve community disorder issues and establish a pro-active presence in our neighborhoods. We must use neighborhood-oriented models to facilitate positive police/community interactions and cooperation.

Your Sheriff's Office must be committed to working cooperatively with other government entities including the County Board of Supervisors, Public Works, Health, Animal Management, Planning and Zoning and Parks and Recreation departments to enhance the quality of life in our community and promote progressive, solution-oriented responses to your issues.

We must use inmate labor more effectively and appropriately to provide resources and services to the community and other governmental organizations. We have a wealth of untapped labor literally sitting idle in our County Jail and we must develop creative and responsible opportunities to utilize this work force. Under appropriate supervision, inmate labor could be used to support community-minded service and charitable organizations, clean up parks and neighborhoods, eradicate graffiti or complete any number of community projects that currently go unattended due to a lack of funding or resources. We should encourage offenders in our custody to give something back to our community by allowing them to make a difference in the overall quality of life we value in northern Arizona.

Your Sheriff's Office must develop and implement a more effective public information approach to provide our citizens with the most accurate and timely information relevant to their concerns. We have an obligation to keep the community informed about topics of importance, including crime trends, safety issues, or to solicit their help in resolving problems. We are woefully inadequate at the present time regarding this capability.

Your Sheriff's Office must perpetuate and expand the effective programs we currently have in place. These include our Citizen Volunteer Patrol program, Citizen Emergency Response Team training, Search and Rescue, Jail Volunteer program and the Citizens Police Academy conducted in a cooperative effort with the Flagstaff Police Department. These invaluable programs do much to support the operations of the Sheriff's Office and promote positive community interaction with our agency.