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Sheriff Mark J. Dannels

Cochise County, AZ



In November 2012 and again in 2016, Mark J. Dannels was elected by the good citizens of Cochise County to serve as their 26th Cochise County Sheriff since 1881. I continue to be Humbled, Honored and Dedicated to my oath of office for this incredible opportunity to serve you all with my personal commitment to sustain your Quality of Life as you would expect and your Freedoms and Liberties as scribed in the United States and Arizona Constitutions.

Sheriff Mark J. Dannels is a 36-year veteran of law enforcement. He holds a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice Management from Aspen University and is a Certified Public Manager from Arizona State University. He has over 3000 hours of law enforcement training in his portfolio. He attended Disney's Leadership and Executive Training programs and is a graduate of the Rural Executive Management Institute. He began his law enforcement career in 1984 after serving a successful tour in the United States Army. He progressed through the ranks with the Cochise County Sheriff's Office to the position of Deputy Commander after working numerous specialty assignments and leadership roles to include an appointment by the Arizona Governor for his dedicated efforts directed toward highway and community safety.

Sheriff Dannels is a long time member of the Fraternal Order of Police, appointed member of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Advisory Council, current member of the National Sheriffs Association where he serves as the Border Security Chairman, Southwest Border Sheriffs, Western Sheriffs Association, Arizona Sheriffs Association where he serves as the past-President, Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training Board, Arizona Homeland Security-Regional Advisory Council, Alliance to Combat Transnational Threats, Border Security Advisory Council, High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area and serves on several community service groups; San Pedro Kiwanis, Just Kids Inc., CASA, Sierra Vista Elks, the Boys and Girls Club of Sierra Vista, the Varsity Wrestling Coach at Buena High School, and teaches at Wayland Baptist University and Cochise College. Sheriff Dannels participates in many community outreach programs such as Project Graduation, Sizzle, Stocking Stuffers, Community Haunted House, Men who Cook, Kars for Kids, Miss Sierra Vista and Shop with a Cop.

Sheriff Dannels has been recognized and awarded the Medal of Valor, Western States Sheriff of the Year, Outstanding Business Person of the Year, Marquis Who's Who, Sheriff's Medal, Deputy of the Year, Distinguished Service Award, Unit Citation Award, National Police Hall of Fame, Lifesaving Award and dozens of community-service awards from service groups and governmental organizations.

Sheriff Dannels is married to Nickie, a Registered Nurse. They have three sons, Justin, a Police Officer/Corporal with the City of Sierra Vista, Ryan a Firefighter/Paramedic with the City of Sierra Vista, and Corey, an Apprentice Lineman with the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative.

Sheriff Dannels has 3 primary objectives: Organizational Development, Border Security and Community Outreach.

“A Sheriff for All the People”

Mark Dannels
Sheriff

Thad Smith
Chief Deputy

Office of the Sheriff Cochise County



Written Testimony Sheriff Mark J. Dannels Border Security from a Local Perspective

Opening Remarks

Honorable Commission Members,

I am humbled and honored at the opportunity to address you today in hopes of sharing an impressive-collective effort by law enforcement and community leaders at all levels in restoring “Quality of Life” and a sense of “Normality” back to our citizens that live on the southwest border.

My law enforcement journey serving the citizens of Cochise County for the past 36 years has been historical and eventful as the evolution of border security has directly impacted rural counties on the southwest border.

As our nation’s leaders debate the appropriate level of border security, communities throughout the United States are experiencing the direct impact of a southern border with inadequate measures, mixed messages, and outdated laws to deter those wishing to enter our country for illicit gain, leaving our southern border vulnerable to those wishing to exploit it. Criminal Transnational Organization (TNOs) have a long history of exploiting our southern border to transport illegal and dangerous drugs into our country and communities at the cost and risk to every American and their families. These TNOs exploit vulnerable humans who wish to enter our country illegally by providing false hope to these individuals only to expose them to a life of crime and modern-day slavery by trafficking these individuals for illicit and criminal gain.

Cochise County, a border county in southern Arizona, is a perfect example of how local community members and leaders, the Governor, and law enforcement from all levels, (local, state and federal) work together to identify and implement best-practices in securing our southern border. Where once Cochise County was the nation’s worst border region for

unlawful crossings, today we enjoy the benefit of having a border some call the safest and best it's been in 30 years.

Active Measures

The federal government has installed technology, physical barriers, and staffing within Cochise County in the vicinity of the two port of entries for the protection and security of these facilities. However, the areas between the ports of entry are left unprotected and inviting to ill-will activities of the criminal TNOs.

Working with stakeholders, Cochise County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) set out to strengthen these areas and reduce unlawful border crossings. The CCSO Southern Arizona Border Region Enforcement (SABRE) unit, utilizing a cost-effective surveillance camera system, has established a surveillance network with over 700 wireless cameras strategically placed in remote unprotected areas throughout our county and beyond based on intelligence, and information from private landowners. This system provides 24-hour surveillance every day and has an unlimited growth potential. By years end, it will have increased to over 1000 cameras with several more cameras being added in 2021. Most of these cameras were purchased with private funds in a collaborative effort by citizens working with our Arizona State Legislative members and their local Sheriffs.

This effort is supported by a dedicated prosecution team from Cochise County Attorney's Office who has vigorously prosecuted every drug smuggler apprehended with the aid of the surveillance network. To date, we have maintained a 100% conviction rate for all cross-border drug smugglers, to include juveniles. This collaborative effort has dramatically changed the landscape of the smuggler's world in Cochise County. Word of the surveillance system and vigorous prosecution has spread throughout the TNO's. We know this from post arrest interviews of smugglers and other sources, who readily admit smugglers are legitimately fearful of being discovered by the surveillance system and subsequent prosecution. So much so, they now seek alternative entry and travel routes in neighboring counties purposely avoiding Cochise County.

The CCSO Financial Crimes Unit was implemented to identify and seize the illicit financial gains by the criminal TNOs. This unit, with federal/state partners, is deeply rooted into our financial institutions building relationships for the purpose of targeting top tier TNO members responsible for organizing, financing, and profiting from the organization's criminal activities. FCU's efforts are having a major impact on TNOs along the border and throughout the State for that matter. The close collaboration

between FCU and SABRE has allowed investigations to be taken to new heights throughout the State and Country.

The CCSO Street Crimes/K9 Unit was designed to work street level narcotics throughout Cochise County. Teaming up and sharing intelligence with federal/state partners has resulted in some major arrests and drug and asset seizures that have impacted TNOs not only in Cochise, but adjacent counties was well.

The recent Intelligence Analyst program supported by DHS/DOJ has proven to be very beneficial in the sharing of all illegal activity from the border region to the interior law enforcement organizations throughout the United States and vice versa. This inoperability within law enforcement is vital to our continued and sustained successes.

Summary

Moving forward, the lessons learned from the efforts occurring within Cochise County, Arizona, can, in some form or another, be applied throughout the border regions of the country with success. I am proud to report that we can secure our borders in a way that the people we protect and serve would appreciate and respect. Currently, our efforts and programs have been introduced to the border Sheriffs in Arizona and New Mexico along with our local-state and federal partners as we come together for the good of our citizens in a multi-badge, one mission application.

No law enforcement agency can do it alone, but shared efforts and missions only serve to enhance our abilities to dismantle these TNOs and discourage others from engaging in this illicit behavior. Citizen on both sides of the border benefit from this effort and program reflecting our solemn Oath of Office for those we serve and protect.

I propose we take the efforts of Cochise County and continue to regionalize our successes along the southern border with my fellow sheriffs and beyond into the interior of our country by sharing our efforts at a regional level with other programs supported by intelligence sharing among all law enforcement for the good of those we serve and the oath we all proudly take.

Capitalizing on achievements of others is an ingredient of success that creates goodwill for law enforcement and reasonable consequences for those who choose to harm Americans and our way of life.

Sincerely,

Mark J. Dannels

Sheriff Mark J. Dannels
Cochise County Sheriff's Office
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