Officers - 2008

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Adams County

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The Colorado Sheriff
Volume 28, Number 3
Spring 2008
Published three times a year
by the County Sheriffs of Colorado, Inc.
Paid for by the CSOC H.M. Fund.
No Taxpayer dollars are used.

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ON THE COVER

PRESENT AND FUTURE: The newly sworn-in CSOC officers and directors pause for a photo opportunity at the winter sheriffs' conference. From left: Sheriff Joe Pelle, Past President; Sheriff Craig Webre, NSA President; Sheriff Fred McKee, Director; Sheriff Fred Jobe, Director; Sheriff Don Krueger, Director; Sheriff Jim Casias, Director; Sheriff Joe Hoy, Secretary/Treasurer; Sheriff Chris Johnson, President; Sheriff Doug Darr, 1st Vice President; Sheriff Rod Johnson, 2nd Vice President; and Sheriff Stan Hilkey, Director.

In early October I had both of my knees replaced, and it made me reflect on the changes that have taken place in medicine as well as law enforcement. My knees are stronger and less painful than they have been for the last 10 years. Similarly, the technological changes in law enforcement during my career have reduced the average number of officers killed each year by about 10 per month or 120 per year. Bullet resistant vests and portable radios have been large contributors to the reduction.

My dad was a Minnesota game warden, and I can remember when he got the first radio in his car. Until that time, officers were islands and required to be totally self-sufficient. If he needed help, he would need someone to find a phone and make a call for help. I can remember with my first law enforcement agency, we would have to go to the car to make a radio call or to respond to calls from dispatch. Regardless the nature of the call, we would have to find a phone or go to the car to talk with our dispatch and fellow officers. At times this was very dangerous. Today almost all officers have portable radios with multiple channels to determine the nature of their needed communication, and a seamless network to support all of law enforcement. The ability of officers to determine the needed information about people and situations has greatly improved the officers’ safety. Cell phones have also added to officers’ ability to communicate.

The vest alone has saved thousands upon thousands of officers, and I am sure military personnel also. The first vests were very large, thick and heavy. This acted as a deterrent to the officers wearing them. Today the technology in the material has improved in all areas. I know of officers who will not put on a uniform without a vest. During a career, that choice only needs to prove itself once to recognize the wisdom of that choice.

In addition, training of officers has increased so substantially over the past 30 years that it is a marvel how some of the early officers survived the situations they handled. Training has been a large contributor to the reduction of officers hurt or killed in the line of duty. The areas of training are vast and all have contributed. The officers of today are so much better physically and mentally prepared to handle the variety of issues in today’s society.

Firearms’ training has also had large technical advancements. We in Colorado were very fortunate in 1986 to be given a parcel of land by Mission Viejo, subsequently Shea Homes, for the development of a training facility, including classrooms and shooting ranges. Currently 2,500 officers a month are trained at that facility, using some of the latest tactics and equipment.

Currently, a very large problem is driving training. Accidents account for one-third of the officers killed in the line of duty. Many officers never shoot their weapons in the line of duty, but they drive on a daily basis. The development of a driving track is very expensive, and not considered acceptable in most neighborhoods. The few facilities in the state that have existed for a long time are now threatened due to housing being constructed next to them. This brings pressure to close the facilities as improvements to the neighborhoods. Finding the area and money to develop a new driving track that is centrally located to several agencies is almost impossible. A large area is needed because the track has to have a skid pan, intersections, speed track and evasive maneuvering capabilities. Therefore this training is high on the priority for law enforcement agencies.

There have been many changes in law enforcement over the years, but the one thing that has not changed is the desire to serve the community and help people. That desire has existed since ancient time; if it is lost so will the society be lost.

Donald E. Christensen
Executive Director
As the new president of the County Sheriffs of Colorado (CSOC), I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. Sheriff Joe Pelle referred to me as ‘he who can block the sun.’ I am rather tall, about six-foot-seven inches, and I can provide shade to those around me who may need it.

I began my career in law enforcement in 1979 as a patrol officer with the sheriff’s department, was promoted to undersheriff in 1984, and elected sheriff in 2003. Our department has a staff of 22 dedicated men and women who serve the 20,000 residents of our county.

I have two terrific children. My daughter, Sarah, is a junior at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, and my son, Ryan, is a junior at La Junta High School. My wife, Monica, is a middle school principal in Rocky Ford.

I am deeply committed to continuing to bring the state of Colorado online with the new victim notification system (VINE). In April, Don Christensen and I will be traveling to Washington, D.C., to attend the SAVIN conference, which is the federal funding source for the VINE system. As this letter goes out, my county, along with Adams and Arapahoe counties, will be instituting the new system. The phase-in for the other counties in the state is on-track and progressing as planned. A priority in the coming months will be to secure a permanent funding source for the statewide VINE system. I am confident that the permanent funding source will be secured.

I have noticed over the years in speaking with fellow sheriffs that we all share the same problems, just on different scales. Membership in CSOC provides opportunities for sheriffs from large and small counties to share experiences, resources, and professional support.

The diversity of the Executive Board represents the membership of CSOC. Sheriff Doug Darr of Adams County is the first vice president, and Sheriff Rod Johnson of Grand County is the second vice president. Secretary/treasurer for this year is Sheriff Joe Hoy of Eagle County. Further rounding out this year’s officers are the tested and ready Board of Directors comprised of Sheriff Jim Casias of Las Animas County, Sheriff Stan Hilkey of Mesa County, Sheriff Fred Jobe of Custer County, Sheriff Don Krueger of Clear Creek County, and Sheriff Fred McKee of Delta County. The immediate past president is Sheriff Joe Pelle of Boulder County. Don Christensen, our executive director and the staff of the County Sheriffs of Colorado do a great job of the day-to-day business of the sheriffs.

County Sheriffs of Colorado has a strong active and honorary membership. Our reputation for excellence has made us effective in influencing legislation that has supported law enforcement and improved public safety. I am honored to have been elected to serve as this year’s CSOC president. The collective knowledge and expertise within the executive board is impressive, and I look forward to working with all of them.

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<th>Sheriff Name</th>
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<td>Sheriff James Biecker</td>
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YUMA
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In the mid 1800’s a United States Cavalry soldier with a dragoon unit was riding through the western end of the Kansas Territory when he died and was buried in a wooden box near the banks of the upper Arkansas River. He was buried with his Great Coat made of dyed-blue wool, with brass buttons that had the U.S. Cavalry eagle and the letter “D” on them. There he silently stood guard over the river and the people who would later travel by his unmarked grave on the Leadville Stage Road, and then later on Colorado State Highway 24 south of Leadville, Colorado. He watched numerous fishermen travel by his silent sentinel’s position until July 18, 2007.

On this day Brock DeWalt from Chaffee County was on the Arkansas River fishing when he observed a human bone near the banks of the river. DeWalt contacted the Lake County Sheriff’s Office where he dealt with, now Lieutenant, Aaron D’Mize. Deputy D’Mize went to the site with DeWalt who showed him the exact location. D’Mize located the femur bone on the ground of a slope that had eroded away. He started to dig around the area and located the pelvic girdle, then other bones lying just under the ground. Thinking he had a crime scene, he photographed and documented the evidence as he unearthed it. Soon he came across the rotted remains of the wood casket. Then he found a remnant of a dyed blue piece of wool. Then he found the square iron nails and brass buttons that were corroded and barely recognizable. Once the scene had been cleared of all retrievable evidence and the body turned over to Lake County Coroner Debra Bailey, the research began.

Through an anthropologist, Coroner Bailey determined that the remains were of a white male between 35 and 45 years old. Communications Supervisor Diana Holte carefully cleaned the buttons until they could be recognized, then she and Deputy D’Mize spent several hours on the internet and telephone tracking down the information that was available to them. They learned that the buttons were from a Great Coat worn by U.S. Cavalry soldiers. The coat was made of wool which was dyed blue. They also discovered that the letter “D” stood for a dragoon unit which was part of the U.S. Cavalry from about 1833 to 1861. They learned that it was a common practice for soldiers who were leaving the military to sell their uniforms to incoming soldiers so they could then buy civilian clothes to return home. There were no homesteads in this area at the time and no cemeteries either, so they were pretty sure it was a field burial. Records from the time are difficult to locate, if they exist, and so the identity of the soldier was not determined.

What started as a crime scene turned into a history lesson. It just goes to show that an officer of the law must keep his eyes and mind open all of the time because you just don’t know what you are going to find. The remains of our Kansas soldier were re-interred on January 25, 2008, in the Colorado State Veteran Memorial Cemetery in Grand Junction, Colorado.
I have been fortunate to be selected to follow in Dean Curd’s footsteps as training director for County Sheriffs of Colorado. Those of you who know Dean know the legacy he has created in law enforcement training in Colorado. His combination of vision and practicality is hard to match. I’m doubly fortunate that he is still working with us as training specialist, making all that experience available to tap.

Like so many law enforcement instructors in Colorado, I owe a great deal to Dean for giving me a chance to teach. If you ever wondered how law enforcement trainers are made, it is a slow process based on word-of-mouth recommendations, apprenticing under experienced instructors if you’re lucky, or learning on the job if you aren’t. Dean has always been there for his instructors to make sure we were not being thrown to the wolves.

I met Dean at one of the first Instructional Methodology classes offered back when we were lucky to have a statewide training academy. This was long before PowerPoint made everyone a brilliant presenter. Back then one afternoon of the class was spent cutting out colored images to build overhead projector slides. Way back there!

In 2001, I was the field training coordinator at Broomfield Police Department when Dean asked me to teach in the CSOC Field Training Officer (FTO) Development course. I must have done okay in that course (those first students may disagree!) because he soon invited me to teach in the same Instructional Methodology course where I had cut-and-pasted as a young officer. That opportunity to teach a class I had previously taken reminded me of the teenage attitude, “When I become a parent, I’m not doing anything like my parents did!” Well guess what! I pulled out that old manual and studied it like the lifeline it was. You know, those old guys knew what they were doing. Although the class has changed a great deal, you still can see the bones of the old class — and we still don’t teach PowerPoint!

By the time I was teaching those two classes for CSOC, I was the training manager at the Broomfield PD. In that capacity, I coordinated both the FTO training and in-service training for the officers and civilian employees. As I gained experience in that job, I came to realize that there is nothing more important to law enforcement than good training. Last year, there were 181 officers killed in the line of duty; nearly half of them in vehicle crashes. (http://www.odmp.org/year.php) There is no question that training could have prevented some of those deaths.

Most of the skills that keep officers alive have to be practiced again and again in the most realistic circumstances that time and budget allow. Unfortunately, that is where we struggle the most in law enforcement, finding the time and the money to provide that training. Thanks to people like Dean Curd, we have many excellent instructors in agencies large and small around the state. Maintaining that cadre is an on-going priority with CSOC, and our partner in training, Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police. But finding the time and the money is an on-going struggle of the agencies we serve.

In the months to come, I hope to keep you informed of the efforts we make to train the law enforcement community in Colorado. In that way, we hope that you will be inspired to work with your local sheriff’s office to encourage its training efforts. Your partnership in this effort will ensure the highest quality of law enforcement service.
The law enforcement community lost an understanding and compassionate man on November 27, 2007, with the passing of Sheriff Roger L. Benton at age 56. “Roger was that man who would in fact give you the shirt off his back, a ride to your destination, or encouragement during difficult times,” shared a friend at Roger’s memorial service.

Roger graduated from the Trinidad State Junior College Police Academy in the early 90’s and began an extended and accomplished career in Costilla County law enforcement. Roger maintained many positions with the local Sheriff’s Office including sergeant and undersheriff. Roger received extensive on-going training, and received many awards and commendations. Ultimately Roger ran for sheriff and was elected into office. He led the Costilla County Sheriff’s Office for six years leaving office in January of 2007. Roger was grateful for the opportunity to serve the community he loved so very much.

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2008 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- CSOC Summer Sheriffs Conference
  June, 2008
  Hosts - TBD
  www.csoc.org

- CSOC Fall Sheriffs Conference
  September, 2008
  Hosts - Eagle County
  www.csoc.org

- CSOC Annual Golf Tournament - Inverness Golf Course
  September 18, 2008
  Hosts - CSOC
  www.csoc.org

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Golf with the Stars

September 18, 2008
Inverness Golf Course
200 Inverness Drive West
You’ve learned about an issue or a piece of proposed legislation being considered at the state capitol. You want to make your concerns known to the people you elected to represent you, but you aren’t sure how to do that.

Let’s start with the basic information you need. If you cannot remember who represents your municipality or county in the state legislature, call the county courthouse and ask for the county clerk’s office. Once you have reached that office, tell the person answering the phone that you want to know the names of your state representative and state senator. In larger offices you will probably be connected with an employee in the elections division who will ask for your name and address. That is all the information the clerk’s office needs to tell you the names of your representative and senator.

After you have that information, there are several ways to find out how to reach your legislators at the capitol in Denver. If you have access to the internet, you can log onto the legislature’s website at www.leg.state.co.us and click on the legislative directory. Even more information is available through Project Vote Smart. You can reach that project at www.votesmart.org. After either entering your zip code to find your elected officials or clicking on officials, you can navigate to the Colorado Senate or House of Representatives where clicking on the name of your senator or representative will give you phone numbers, e-mail and regular mail addresses and biographical information. If you do not have access to the internet, you can call the Colorado Legislative Council at 303-866-3521 and ask for the phone numbers.

The legislature is normally in session from the second week of January through the second week of May. During the rest of the year and on the weekends, legislators are usually at home in their districts. You can obtain their home phone numbers by calling the Legislative Council, the appropriate local political party office, or using directory assistance for each legislator’s home town.

During the session, legislators are normally overwhelmed with messages. Nevertheless, most of them do pay attention to messages from people who live in their districts. During the week when they are all at the capitol, call their capitol phone number. If the senator or representative does not answer, leave a brief message.
Follow that voice message with a more detailed e-mail or regular mail message describing why the senator or representative should take some specific action on an issue or a piece of legislation. If you have it, include the bill number in your message so there will be no doubt about which matter is of concern to you, and always leave your office and/or home phone numbers.

You may also choose to correspond with your legislator(s) solely by letter. The mailing address is State Capitol Building, 200 East Colfax Avenue, Denver, CO 80203. Please remember that the volume of mail legislators receive is overwhelming so this is not the best way to address action on a bill that will be occurring relatively immediately.

An even better way to reach your senator or representative during the legislative session is to call them at home on the weekends when they have more time to listen to the concerns of the hometown folks.

The ideal time to get to know the legislators who represent you is when the legislature is not in session. They are all spending most of the time in their districts rather than at the capitol. Consider issuing invitations to meet you and your friends, neighbors or co-workers for a cup of coffee. Don’t be afraid to ask a legislator to meet with you. Just remember that they all want to do a good job of representing you because that is the way they get people to vote to re-elect them.

If you are very concerned about a bill being considered by the House or the Senate, you may want to come down to the capitol and testify when the bill is being considered by one of the legislature’s committees of reference. You may ask your senator or representative to alert you to when the bill is scheduled for hearing and tell you how to find the room in which the bill will be heard. Testimony from members of the public is welcomed; however, hearings are conducted using parliamentary procedure. A person wishing to testify must sign in and provide: name; mailing address; organization the person is representing, if any; and position on the bill.

The hearings routinely begin with a presentation by the bill’s sponsor on the provisions of the bill and the reasons why it should be enacted into law. Following the sponsor’s introduction, the committee chairman will begin calling on the persons who have signed up to testify. When your name is called, you move up to the front table where the sponsor is seated and take the chair next to him or her. You must begin your testimony by stating your name and who you represent. For example, “Mr. Chairman, my name is Joe Smith and I am here today representing myself.”

After introducing yourself, you can begin telling the committee why you support the bill, oppose the bill or wish to have it amended in some specific way. Your testimony should be as brief as possible while still clearly conveying your position. Written testimony and supporting documentation may also be submitted. If you are submitting such documents, a copy for each member of the committee and the committee staff person should be handed to the staff person either before or after your testimony.

Once you have finished stating your case, it is customary to complete your remarks with, “I would be happy to answer any questions.” At that point, the committee chairman will recognize the committee members indicating that they have questions for you. Since the hearings are being broadcast and also taped, you must wait to be recognized by the chairman before responding to each and every question. This allows the listening audience to know who is speaking. The only exception is when the chairman says that you are free to dialogue with a committee member.

Once testimony is completed, action may be taken on the bill or delayed to the next committee meeting. Committee members may amend the bill, recommend it for consideration by the Committee of the Whole (the entire membership or the House or Senate), refer it to another committee, table it for consideration later in the session, or postpone it indefinitely. All committee amendments and votes are public, and a record of them may be accessed on the internet or obtained from the committee staff person.
During an attempted warrant arrest of a drug trafficker, I entered her residence to arrest her. The suspect was not there, but her son confronted me and a physical confrontation occurred. During the encounter he bit me on the arm and shoulder. Another officer arrived and we were able to get him under control and arrest him for assaulting a police officer.

Later, while monitoring phone calls from the jail facility where he was incarcerated, he tearfully related the story to his mother. She then began singing to him, “I bit the sheriff, but I did not bite the deputy,” to the tune of “I shot the sheriff.” Even though I was the recipient of the attack, I found her sarcasm to be humorous, and had to share a chuckle with her.

A number of years ago I was participating on an oral board panel to assess dispatcher applicants. We posed a hypothetical question to the applicant about being a new hire who is temporarily left alone in dispatch. A female calls and frantically reports that her child has quit breathing. The caller is hysterical. The applicant was asked to explain how she would handle the situation. Her response: “I would tell her to hang up and call 911. ” Do you think maybe she really hadn’t done her homework on what dispatch was?

Sheriff Jim Alderden
Larimer County

When I was a sergeant, a man came into my office and produced a baggie of marijuana. He told me he wanted to trade it for some of the good stuff we had in investigations as his wasn’t potent enough. After a quick check of his marijuana, we determined it was potent enough to charge him. He was arrested and his baggie of marijuana was seized.

Sheriff John Cooke
Weld County
I was sworn in as the new Pueblo County sheriff on January 9, 2007. On the evening of January 10th, I was called at home around midnight and told that two inmates had escaped. On my way into town, because I live in a rural area south of Pueblo, I hit a deer on the highway.

The next morning, I was scheduled to give my first press conference and to brief the county commissioners on the escape. Shortly after leaving my residence, I slid off into a ditch and got stuck in a snow drift. I had to get one of my deputies to pick me up and take me into town for the press piece and briefing. The deputy didn’t have room in the front of the vehicle, so I was transported behind the cage into the office. It wasn’t funny at the time, but it sure is a good story.

Sheriff Kirk Taylor
Pueblo County

During interviews to hire an emergency manager, we asked everyone if they had ever participated in a “Table Top Exercise.” After one of the females turned very red and responded that she didn’t want to answer that question, we had to remove the question from our list.

(For those of you not in law enforcement, a table top training exercise is an office simulation of a problem that might occur in the field. The exercise is usually conducted around a table...ed)

Sheriff Gerry Oyen
Bent County

We have an extended family group in Delta County that resides in several trailers on about a half-acre lot. Between them they have a considerable number of dogs. These dogs are a continuous source of irritation for neighbors for many miles and generate numerous requests for service for our deputies.

After one incident that involved a child being mauled and the sheriff’s office spending many hours conducting an investigation and rounding up dogs, we fielded a call concerning a dog bite at the compound. A young deputy just off of a Field Training Officer, FTO, program responded, took the call and filed a report.

The next morning, right after a budget hearing, the report crossed my desk. After glancing at the cover sheet, I angrily sent it back to the deputy and instructed him to immediately go and issue the family member a summons and impound the dog if necessary.

The young deputy did exactly as instructed. He went and issued the oldest member of the family (the grandmother) a summons for harboring a vicious dog, her Chihuahua (thankfully he did not impound it).

I read reports a little more carefully now. Needless to say, the defense attorney that the family uses was looking forward to watching me squirm while defending my instructions. This time I was glad to see the district attorney dismiss a case.

Sheriff Fred McKee
Delta County
Winter Sheriffs’ Conference and Vendor Show

Sheriffs, Undersheriffs and Chiefs of Police converged from throughout the state to attend the 11th annual winter sheriffs’ conference and vendor show from January 7th through the 11th. This year is the first time that the training conference, which was held at the Four Points Sheraton in Denver, was attended by both the sheriffs and the police chiefs together.

The week began with training for the undersheriffs on search and rescue, followed by a presentation by CSOC’s new training director, Janet Larson, on issues involving Field Training Officers (FTO’s) in the undersheriffs’ respective offices. The first day of undersheriff training concluded with an update on the status of the new victim notification system, CO-VINE, that will be up-and-running in all the sheriffs’ offices over the next several years. They were also briefed on the ability of their detention officers to take an on-line detentions class that CSOC has developed.

On Wednesday and Thursday, while the training continued, 80 vendors set up 113 booths packed with different items of interest to people in law enforcement. The vendor show included inmate phone companies, com-

SHERIFFS ATTEND EN MASSE: Most of Colorado’s sheriffs were in attendance at the 2008 winter conference. Heavy snow in the mountains and a few search-and-rescues in process kept the attendance from being record-setting.
puter aided dispatch, officer uniforms, public awareness information, light bars, radios, vests, vehicles and lots of other products and services.

A significant portion of the training offered to the sheriffs, chiefs of police and undersheriffs was presented by FBI Instructor Penny Parrish about crisis communication and media relations. Her sessions featured a variety of helpful tips and strategies on working with the media. The topics included:

- The business of news (who they are and what they want – brief overview)
- How to conduct an interview, including practical exercises with suggested scenarios
- How to create messages
- The importance of a public information officer (PIO) and a media policy
- Handling the media in a crisis
- How to conduct a news conference
- The importance of leadership in high profile situations, both external and internal

Other sessions with the sheriffs and chiefs together discussed legislation, emergency management, cold cases, the law enforcement memorial and several other topics.

Wrapping up the week, the Social Security Administration gave an informative talk about how the sheriffs’ offices can secure inmates’ social security benefits while they are being housed at taxpayer expense. Then John Kammerzell, director of Peace Officers Standards and Training, POST, updated the group on POST rules, funding, and law enforcement training options available through POST. Other training topics presented were courtroom security and registration of convicted sex offenders.

UNDERSHERIFFS: The undersheriffs’ conference was also well-attended.
INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS: Sheriff Craig Webre, National Sheriffs’ Association president, swears in CSOC’s new president, Sheriff Chris Johnson of Otero County. He also installed the new slate of officers appearing on the cover.

WITH GRATITUDE: Daniel Predovich, Mary Predovich and Daniel J. Predovich pose with U.S. Senator Ken Salazar after Daniel J. Predovich was presented with an award in appreciation of his lifelong dedication to law enforcement in Colorado.
Sheriff Don Krueger, Clear Creek County, tries on a flashy little 4-wheeler for size.

Sheriff Larry Kuntz, Washington County; Sheriff Rod Johnson, Grand County and Sheriff Gerry Oyen, Bent County, far right, chat with Rocky Mountain Microfilm and Imaging owner Roger Gudenkauf, center, at the vendor show.

FBI Instructor Penny Parrish teaching a class.
January Conference and Vendor Show

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W
hen I was a boy in Trinidad, Colorado, the title of Sheriff seemed very close to me. From as far back as I can remember I could look at my Poppa’s badge that was pinned upon his left breast pocket. Filbert Garcia (Poppa) had lived among the camaraderie of law enforcement since his father, Felix Garcia, was appointed Sheriff of Las Animas County when Ray Marty died in 1945. But to tell you my story, I must first tell you about them.

Our home town, Trinidad, lies just southeast of the legendary Spanish Peaks, twin mountains that jut to elevations surpassing twelve to thirteen thousand feet. The lone, flat-topped sentinel of Fishers Peak, Raton Mountain, rises just south of town toward Raton Pass. The name, Trinidad, was chosen at a meeting of the first settlers when they decided to dedicate the place directly to the Holy Trinity. The Santa Fe Trail not only attracted farmers and ranchers, but it also made Trinidad a center of commerce. As Trinidad’s role as a regional hub grew, so too did the historic fabric of its buildings and streets. The brick streets that remain are a defining feature of Trinidad’s historic downtown district. One of the most prominent of early Trinidad’s families was that of Dolores and Felipe Baca.

A savvy business family, the Baca’s farmed, raised sheep and cattle, ran a lumber mill, and owned substantial acreage. Dolores encouraged her cousin Felix Garcia to homestead in Bon Carbo, where the established family ranch remains today under the direction of my Grandfather Filbert.

Great Grandfather Felix Garcia

My great-grandfather Felix Garcia was perhaps the most colorful of the family legends. Choosing not to become part of the sprawling coalfields, Felix watched as families lived in camps like Sopris, Starkville and Cokedale (all within a few miles of Trinidad). Miners lived dangerous and physically exhausting lives. Felix was 25 years old.
when the violent clash between striking miners and company guards prompted the famous Ludlow Massacre.

Felix became a deputy sheriff in 1935, serving under the administrations of Elmer Marty, and later his son, Ray Marty. When Ray suffered a fatal heart attack in 1945, Felix was appointed sheriff by the board of county commissioners. The following year, he was elected to the office of sheriff and served as county sheriff for 27 years. And so began the family stories about the legendary Grandpa Garcia. During the 1940's Felix was asked for the most agonizing sacrifice; his sons to help with World War II. Filbert and George served in the armed forces while the remaining four children helped the war effort at home in Trinidad.

A POW camp for German prisoners was built east of Trinidad in early 1943. The first prisoners arrived June 6 of that year. Waste was taboo. “Use it, wear it out, make it do, or do without” was the philosophy of those years. Grandpa and Grandma Garcia moved their family into the designated sheriff residence on the second floor of the County Court House. The prisoners were one floor above.

Grandfather Filbert Garcia

In 1946, Filbert returned from Great Britain having served in the European theater as part of the U.S. Air Force 65th Fighter Wing. The highlight of Filbert’s military service was Alice May Bayley, my beloved grandmother, whom he met and courted in Saffron Walden, England. She arrived in Trinidad one year later to become his bride. One of the largest snowstorms ever to hit Trinidad started on April 15, 1947, and continued for 50 hours leaving two feet of snow on the level and drifts of five to ten feet— their wedding day!

My grandfather Filbert returned home to Las Animas County to pick up the broken pieces after World War II. He did not take advantage of the GI Bill to attend college; he was happy to start his career as a police officer for the City of Trinidad. He walked a night beat that covered downtown, one of the roughest parts of the city—and he never wore a duty side arm. Never one to shirk responsibility, he worked as a law officer full time and helped Felix maintain the family homestead in Bon Carbo. Filbert and Alice contributed two boys to the baby boom, John in 1949 and...
Michael in 1952. By the time my father John was born, Poppa had been promoted to captain.

On May 18 and 19, 1955, Trinidad suffered what probably was its greatest disaster. A 48-hour rainstorm changed the usually placid Purgatoire River into a raging demon, with the river rising 30 feet at the height of the flood. All traffic into the city – railroads, bus and highways – was suspended. Public Health officials ordered everyone in the city to have a typhoid shot and to boil all water used for drinking or cooking. On Friday, May 20, the bright sun beamed down on a ghastly scene of wreckage and ruin along the flood-widened river. Damage ran into the millions of dollars. President Eisenhower allocated $100,000 for flood relief. Filbert recalls those sleepless hours as one of the most challenging of his police career.

In January 1957, Filbert accepted an appointment as probation officer to the County Court of Las Animas County at a salary of $280 per month with a mileage reimbursement of 8 cents per mile. With a bone-crushing hand grip and great personal charm, he devoted himself unselfishly to a host of humanitarian causes. Filbert found the time and the energy to serve, to work and to lead, shouldering countless burdens with unfailing good humor and grace. Then in 1960, a career move changed his duties to that of investigator for the District Attorney’s Office.

Beginning in 1962, and through six succeeding elections, Filbert was “the Sheriff” of Las Animas County. My grandfather ran unopposed in four of the six races in which he was elected. Always humble, when I have asked him, “What makes a good leader?” he is shy about expressing the great service that he rendered to the community. But I know what he modeled in his life: courage and loyalty, understanding, initiative and vision, and a saving sense of humor. As one of the many in whom he evokes the keenest admiration and respect, I call him a true gentleman.

One of the proudest moments of my life was when, as a youngster, I rode beside him in the sheriff’s car with lights flashing and my finger on the siren button. I knew that the citizens of the community saw me sitting next to the most respected and honored of men.

My father, John E. Garcia

Trinidad began experiencing a downward spiral in its economy in the 1960’s. The unemployment rate reached 12.2%, and only the Allen Mine remained open, employing about 300 men. In December 1965, the Food Stamp Program started, Peace Corp volunteers came to town and the Vietnam War escalated. As the war became more unpopular, young people took part in protests that often became violent and draft cards were burned.

Some young men who would have been drafted left the country or went to jail.

Peace loving flower children, better known as hippies, arrived in Trinidad preaching a new and better lifestyle. They dressed in weird fashions and let their hair and beards grow long. Five miles east of town four college graduates founded a commune which acquired the name Drop City. Buildings were constructed in a geodesic dome style, using stripped car tops salvaged from junk piles as building material.
Nearly everyone who lived there were college graduates practicing a philosophy that would avoid all non-creative and compulsory work.

It was during those turbulent years that my father, John, was attending high school where he was a cadet colonel in ROTC. My dad was, and still is, active in all sports. He was on the wrestling team, played varsity football and baseball, and helped my grandfather at the family ranch. After graduation, he continued with academics at Trinidad State Junior College where he was part of the police cadet program.

Then in October 1969, a most unwelcome envelope for John arrived at the family home, with a draft status of 1-A enclosed. He reported for his physical examination in Denver and returned home to Trinidad to wait for his enlistment date in December. The draft lottery started in January 1970, and my dad was spared a tour of Vietnam by the high lottery number of 330.

While the Watergate scandal kept local people, along with the rest of the nation, glued to their television sets, the U.S. celebrated its bicentennial anniversary and Colorado and Trinidad celebrated their centennials. My dad chose the road less traveled. He worked for the National Forest Service at Arapahoe Forest at Dillon, served as Dillon Town Marshall, and enjoyed life in the bunk house with other like-minded young men. It was there in the Rocky Mountains among the magnificent view of Lake Dillon that he met a waitress at the Arapahoe Café, my mom, Mary. They
returned to Trinidad in 1972 when my dad was appointed as the Clerk of the County Court. I arrived in February 1975, followed by my sister Christine in 1978.

My dad was appointed as municipal judge in 1984. Although he does not have a law degree, he has been re-appointed by the City Council to twelve consecutive two-year terms for a total of 24 years. During these years, he continued employment in the Third Judicial District as clerk of the combined courts and then as court administrator. Dad retired from Colorado Judicial in 2005 but remains as our municipal judge. He holds court Thursday mornings, maintains the family ranch, and serves on numerous community boards.

I remember visiting my dad in his office on the third floor of the court house and looking up at him with admiration and respect for his devotion and allegiance to the State of Colorado. Like his father and grandfather before, he is a quiet and reflective person, slow to speak and quick to understand human shortcomings.

My Story

Typical of young men who grew up in rural Southern Colorado, I learned how to hunt with my father and grandfather, brand cattle and ride horses at the family ranch, and appreciate the beauty of the mountains. Almost every person who has chosen law enforcement has an imprint from a previous generation. As I grow older and my travels grow wider, I find my ancestral home is law enforcement.

My first badge came from the Colorado State Parks in 1997. After graduation from CLETA at TSJC, I accepted an entry-level position at Trinidad Lake State Park. From there, I advanced to park ranger at Lake Pueblo State Park. By then, my need for knowing about the law and how to apply it was deep, and I applied to the Colorado State Patrol. Now as I write this family history, I am a sergeant with the Colorado State Patrol’s Homeland Security Section. From 1997 to today, there is a brief ten years in which I have worn a badge. The best I can do here is to express gratitude to the Garcia men before me who have helped me feel that I was in the company of “law men.” The fact is, my life would be very different if there had never been a sheriff badge to admire, or Grandpa Garcia stories to listen to, or if I had never experienced freedom to explore the court house.

In May 2006, the new jail facility in Trinidad, Colorado, was named the Felix Garcia and Filbert Garcia Justice Center by the Las Animas County Commissioners. Current Sheriff James W. Casias and Deputy Elliot Grubert were instrumental in researching and then asking that the justice center be dedicated to the father and son. My father stated it best in his speech on the day that it was dedicated when he said, “I remind you that you follow in the footsteps of fine men who have gone from their duties in law enforcement and have won well-deserved public recognition and acclaim. You have a rich heritage, preserve it well.”

The span of service to the community by fathers and their sons extends for 73 years, and the combined length and time in the office of sheriff by the Garcia family totals 52 years. That totals 129 years and still counting in law enforcement. It is a small wonder that the community of Trinidad gathered to pay tribute to the past and present generations of my family. I am mindful of the reputation that has been established. Yet, I have complete confidence, despite my own limitations, that I will strive to measure up and will carry forward the banner of the Garcia law enforcement traditions.
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        Dark Green
        Light Stone
        Burgundy
Sizes/Price
Men’s:  M-XL – $25.00
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Sizes/Price: S-XL – $26.00

MEN’S HEAVY WEIGHT FLEECE VEST
Premium fleece vest with 2 zip pockets, sweat patch, lycra bound sleeves and taped contrast collar, oversized cut.
Colors: Black
       Charcoal
       Forest
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Sizes/Price: M-XL – $30.00
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