

New Sheriff In Town?

BUCKEYE CHIEF OF POLICE DAN SABAN WAS THE ONLY CANDIDATE WHO CAME CLOSE TO KNOCKING SHERIFF JOE ARPAIO FROM HIS THRONE. NOW, AS THE 2008 ELECTION LOOMS, HE'S PREPARING FOR ROUND TWO.

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT - when Dan Saban enters the room, you'll know. He says he hasn't missed many meals in his life, and his 6-foot-2-inch, 250-pound, barrel-chested frame shows it. His ego is healthy, his confidence blaring. It is easy to feel intimidated at the sight of him.

You would never suspect that a man like this has clouds and soaring angels painted above his dining room table, cries every time he watches the movie *Rudy* and has three ankle-biting Chihuahuas as pets.

What you might remember, instead, is that Saban was the one candidate who brought current Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio the closest to suffering defeat during his 14-year reign, garnering 44 percent of the votes in the 2004 Republican primary.

As the 2008 election looms, enter again dangerous (at least for Arpaio) Dan - only this time, stage left instead of stage right. Last year, Saban disaffiliated himself from the Republican Party in what he calls a "value decision." This time, he jumps into the ring as a Democrat, and with accomplishments to show that he just might be able to pull out a victory.

SITTING IN A T-SHIRT AND SHORTS in a recliner in his Gilbert home, where he is surrounded by reminders of God and family, Dan Saban doesn't look so intimidating, after all.

He easily acknowledges the challenges he has faced since the last election, when he was recruited as the Buckeye Police Chief.

He inherited a mess. Serious understaffing problems; years of evidence thrown into drawers and stacked in corners; thigh-high piles of papers and files lining the hallways; a multitude of allegations of officer misconduct - so much of a mess that the 32-year veteran of law enforcement was not sure he could fix it.

"I came home that first day, and I told my wife that this is beyond even what I know. I don't think I can do this," he says, holding his head, his eyes widened in disbelief at the disaster he found there in April 2005.

"I am more disappointed than anything else for the employees in the Sheriff's Office that I couldn't help."

BUCKEYE CHIEF OF POLICE
DAN SABAN >>



When offered the position, he made it clear to Buckeye Town Council members that if another viable candidate was not in the running to face Arpaio in 2008, he would. All they asked from him was a promise to stay on until then and turn their police department into something respectable, instead of the good-old-boy system that it was.

He kept his promise, and to date, Saban has conducted 10 criminal investigations resulting in two criminal indictments and 63 administrative investigations in the Buckeye Police Department.

"I don't think there is anyone else [who] could have done what he has done in Buckeye," says Buckeye Police Commander Jon Terpay, who attributes the success to Saban's leadership style.

"He gives employees freedom, but not in a bad way," Terpay says. "He is wonderful to work for, but hard."

Saban talks with his hands, and they soar and gesture when he speaks of Buckeye. Mention Arpaio, however, and he just might bounce out of the chair. Suddenly he can't sit still - his legs bounce, he shifts constantly in his seat, his hands go from open motions grasping at concepts in the air to tightly wound gestures of frustration.

"I do this for a living. Professionally, I don't agree with the way he runs that operation. As a professional, I am frustrated. He is ineffectively and inappropriately using the resources of that organization," Saban says.

DAN SABAN FEARS ONLY TWO things in life, but Sheriff Arpaio isn't one of them.

"I fear God and I fear my wife. That's it," he says.

So off to the races he goes, and he knows it will not be a clean fight. "I am prepared for

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shenanigans,” he says. He has been in this ring before, and it resulted in a second fight that will culminate this month in a showdown of a different sort when he faces Arpaio in another arena: Maricopa County Superior Court.

He can't say much about the pending litigation, but he doesn't have to. His message comes across in the way his spine stiffens, his muscles tense and his eyes burn when the subject comes up.

On April 30, 2004, the lead story on the evening news revealed allegations that Saban, as a teenager, had raped his adoptive mother, Ruby Norman. Norman hurled the claim at MCSO officials, who then interviewed her and leaked the report to the media before turning the accusations over to another agency to investigate because of the conflict of interest (a concept Arpaio openly admits he does not perceive in his deposition for the case). When they did turn it over, Pima County law enforcement officials promptly dropped the charges, which were beyond the statute of limitations.

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Saban filed a lawsuit against Arpaio for civil rights violations in the release of what he says are false allegations. (A request sent to MCSO's public information office for an interview with Arpaio went unanswered.)

“This lawsuit is about conspiracy, a violation of civil rights. I have to stand up to this man because he is wrong. I am not going to turn and run like he wants me to. I will not change my character to match up with his – he does not intimidate me,” he says flatly.



Saban greets constituents as he prepares to run for Maricopa County Sheriff.

He shifts positions in the chair again, and stiffens. His leg bounces faster.

In his deposition, Saban testified that, as a teenager, there was one instance of sexual intercourse between him and Norman, but that it was not rape, it was sexual abuse of a child. Norman had beaten and abused him as a child, he claims. He and his two brothers long ago cut Norman from their lives because of the abuse, according to depositions and evidence produced in the case, which goes to trial August 20.

Saban firmly believes that if Arpaio takes the stand to testify this month, voters will see exactly what he is.

“He has orchestrated political hits one right after the other,” Saban says, referring to a number of MCSO employees who were transferred and shifted about after the last election because of their open support for him in the campaign.

Despite that, revenge is not why Saban is running again. The lawsuit is personal, but the election is about something completely different. His last loss was disheartening for him, but not in the way you might expect.

“I am more disappointed than anything else for the employees in the Sheriff's Office that I couldn't help,” he says, shaking his head.

Saban started his career in the very orga-

nization that he now seeks to head. In 1975, he became a reserve deputy sheriff with MCSO. In 1977, he was promoted to a full-time deputy. Two years later, in 1979, Saban went to work as a police officer for the Mesa Police Department, where he worked his way from officer to commander until his 2004 retirement.

This was not where Saban had envisioned himself ending up. He never wanted to be a cop.

“I wanted to be a cowboy,” he says.

Now he is both – even wearing his boots to work. In one corner of his kitchen sits his cowboy collection – belt buckles, photos, a saddle, all from his time as a roper. In 1997, Saban and his family founded Kops and Kowboys for Kids, a non-profit organization that hosts a yearly team-roping event to raise money for various charities.

When he speaks of his family, he lights up. Suddenly his legs are relaxed, his muscles soften and his gestures are open-armed. The armored law-enforcement shell melts, and a smile spreads across his face as he describes his first “alone outing” with his 3-year-old granddaughter, Riley, and their game of taking turns placing a small rubber ball under their chins and holding it there.

“That is what it is all about,” he says.

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