

SHERIFF 1. If elected, what are the goals for your term as sheriff? Denning: The obvious goals are the completion of the New Century jail expansion, to allow the cessation of “farming” inmates to other counties and the development of a new, up-to-date crime lab to keep Johnson County current with the most modern and effective crime-fighting techniques.

Less obvious from the outside is what we’ve begun with staff development. We need to continue the changes that we began regarding the management of the Sheriff’s Office. The office is home to an extremely talented cadre of the most highly trained professional men and women working in law enforcement today. Many are nationally recognized experts in the fields of detention, forensics, firearms and tactical operations. We have established an atmosphere of collaboration across our ranks and must continue the development of the future leaders.

Smith: Reduced spending, streamlined operations and accountability to the people of Johnson County. I will operate the Sheriff’s Office within its budget while returning the high level of morale the current administration drove away.

I will also put forth initiatives to drive down the escalating crime and recidivism rates. Studies show that jails offering basic drug- and substance-abuse programs boast recidivism rates 20 percent lower than those without. Most of these programs can be conducted at no expense to taxpayers, yet none currently exist.

Inmates will also be punished, as much as legally possible, to give them a reason not to return to our jail.

2. How do you plan, or what initiatives do you have planned, to reduce crime in Johnson County?

Denning: The Sheriff’s Office has as its primary patrol responsibility the cities of DeSoto (pop. 5,700) and Edgerton (pop. 1,700) as well as the unincorporated areas of the county. About 3 percent (15,000) of the estimated 530,000 population lives in unincorporated Johnson County. The office takes a proactive approach in the areas of Internet crimes, DUI reduction, drug interdiction and truck-weight enforcement and works with all of the municipal police departments in the county to conduct warrant sweeps, deliver crime lab and CSI services and training for their officers. As the Sheriff’s Office, we are charged with special responsibilities servicing the District Court, the county treasurer, the county assessor and several other county departments and facilities.

Smith: A major paradigm shift is required to fight crime in Johnson County. The reactive style of law enforcement employed by the old guard is no longer effective. This is evident in the 500 percent increase in violent crimes in rural Johnson County. I guarantee a proactive force responsive to the needs of the community. With real-time intelligence, we will actually catch criminals before they commit their crimes. In lieu of being politically correct, I will enforce the law and deport illegal immigrants. They are having a profound impact on our schools and county resources, and will cripple our county if we don’t take a stand.

3. What professional experience qualifies you for the position of sheriff?

Denning: I have 29 years of service with the Johnson County Sheriff’s Office, holding every rank from deputy recruit through lieutenant and undersheriff while working in the detention, patrol, narcotics and investigation divisions. I am currently the sheriff, nearly completing my first term.

I also served for six years as chief of police in Roeland Park, Kan. This experience gives me an unmatched set of qualifications and a unique understanding of the purpose, workings, authority and responsibilities of the Sheriff's Office.

Smith: My decade of experience has been in dealing with real criminals and real problems.

After serving our country in the U.S. Marine Corps, I began my law enforcement career with the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department. I chose to further my career by enrolling in night school in pursuit of a bachelor's degree.

In 2003, I was appointed to the Mission Police Department, where I have risen to the rank of lieutenant. I again returned to school and earned a master's degree in business administration. I am a graduate of the FBI Executive Development Program as well as the FBI National Academy.

4. Why or why not is the quarter-cent sales tax renewal necessary to fund ongoing construction and the development of new facilities to keep Johnson County residents safe? If not, what are the alternatives?

Denning: I believe the sales tax renewal is necessary first and foremost because the crime lab will not be pursued right away, pushing a critical need out for several years. The current lab is actually operating in its fifth remodel of outdated, undersized, inadequate space. It's about a fifth of the recommended standard for labs serving the population that we serve with the full range of forensic services that we provide.

In addition, other long-neglected criminal justice needs must be addressed. The juvenile justice facilities that handle our children are literally falling apart in some instances. Others have outlived their usefulness or are approaching obsolescence due to changes in therapeutic approach and methods for the delivery of services.

Smith: It's regrettable that the new jail was proposed, approved and currently under construction.

The sheriff lied to the people of Johnson County because he believes the office exists to serve him. Inmates can be outsourced for less than half of what it costs to house them internally. The quarter-cent sales tax is not necessary.

There are many alternatives to reduce inmate population and recidivism, but none of them include building unnecessary new jails. A proactive Sheriff's Office coupled with a resurgence of a partnership with local law enforcement, as well as the community, is the only answer.

5. If the sales tax renewal is approved by voters, because it won't expire, how would you recommend those funds be directed for future public safety projects?

Denning: This process will be determined by the County Commission in its annual budget-development process. The sheriff is subject by state statute to the fiscal policies and procedures of the county. In short, I present the needs of my office, and the commission, as the sheriff's only revenue source, determines how to fund those needs. Some needs are less discretionary than others. For instance, an expense dealing with the health and welfare of inmates is something that typically must be paid. Other items are examined carefully and prioritized first by my office before submission and then by commission as part of the overall budget process.

Smith: I believe in the people of Johnson County and have faith in their ability to make the right decision.

The sales tax initiative will not be approved. Can anyone compare the prevailing crime and recidivism rates and say, "Keep up the good work." Can anyone look at the constant

budget and tax increases and say, "Let's have four more years of this?" I believe the good people of Johnson County are going to answer these questions Tuesday, and their answer will be, "No! We've had enough." My name is Ken Smith, and as your sheriff, I'll restore order and keep you safe!