

By Clay Latimer

The turning point in his career was only minutes away, and Tyler Kamp didn't even realize it.

A Phoenix cop for 21 years, he moved to Ghana in 2021 to lead an investigation into human trafficking for a non-government organization.

One of his first assignments took him to Lake Volta, a hub for child traffickers for generations, where six-year-old boys worked brutal days on fishing boats.

But as his boat raced across the water at a breakneck pace, gaining more speed by the second, Kamp began to worry about a bigger problem, one that would eventually convince him to run for Maricopa County Sheriff this year.

"We're driving through the lake, and I'm seeing boats with young kids scattered in different parts of the lake. I'm not seeing any police. And as we're driving faster, I'm also thinking to myself, 'How fast are we allowed to drive in this lake? Is there a speed limit?' The guy kind of laughed, and said: 'What do you mean?'"

"There were no police; no police anywhere. So why would anyone refrain from speeding? That really hit me hard."

Kamp returned to the U.S. after a year, still ruminating over the erosion of public safety he'd witnessed in Ghana and vowing to prevent it from occurring in his hometown.

"You can have the best education programs in the world," said Kamp, who announced his candidacy for sheriff last October. "You can have the best healthcare, the best jobs, and the best entertainment in the world. But people can't experience those things unless they feel safe and protected. I spent 21 years working for the Phoenix Police Department and never realized just how important this is until I went to another country and saw it firsthand."

"(Maricopa County) is where I come from: it's where I live. I want my kids to grow up in a place that's safe and secure, a place where they can thrive and businesses can thrive."

"If we don't do that, we could end up like Ghana. And once you get there I think it's extremely hard to get it back."

Four Republicans are running for Sheriff, including Jerry Sheridan, the former Maricopa County deputy sheriff and Arpaio's long-time right-hand man. Sheridan lost to Penzone in the 2020 general election after narrowly defeating Arpaio in the Republican primary.

Kamp knows the territory. A fifth-generation Maricopa County resident, he graduated from Peoria High and Arizona State, then went to work for the Phoenix Police Department. "I'm a local kid. I love all the local teams. That's kind of my makeup," said Kamp, who is married with four kids.

Over the next two decades, Kamp worked as a shift commander, gang enforcement sergeant, and homicide detective. “I had a passion to go after the most hardened, violent criminals. I constantly investigated drive-by shootings and murders. It was very intriguing to me. And I was pretty good at it.”

As sheriff, Kamp says he’d continue the work of Paul Penzone, who ran as the anti-Joe Arpaio in 2016.

During his 24-year tenure, Arpaio was infamous for abusing prisoners, grandstanding on TV, and arresting Latinos on shaky pretexts. He brought back chain gangs, forced prisoners to wear pink underwear, and denied many of them proper medical care. In his most notorious act, Arpaio established a tent city, keeping men and women locked up in canvas tents in triple-digit desert heat.

But his enduring legacy remains his notorious immigration sweeps and defense of Arizona's SB 1070 law targeting illegal immigrants.

It came at a high price.

About a decade ago, a federal judge found that the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office racially profiled Latino drivers in a 2008 class-action suit filed against former Arpaio. Even now, the department remains under federal oversight by a court-appointed monitor and still isn't in compliance with court orders. The case has cost Maricopa County taxpayers more than \$250 million — and counting.

The financial hemorrhaging probably won't end anytime soon, contributing to serious staffing shortages for a department already shorthanded from the pandemic.

“The (lawsuits) are suffocating the office,” said Kamp. “Part of my plan is to get out from underneath the oversight to free up more funds.

“Part of the problem was the poor morale (under Arpaio). They didn't have the trust of the community. It was difficult to recruit deputies to work for the Sheriff's office.”

Because of staffing shortages, the department responds slowly to many calls, especially in outlying areas.

“It's probably the number one question right now,” Kamp said. “It's a staffing issue. The reality is that the staffing problem isn't going to end anytime soon. It's a process. We have to recruit better and we have to retain better.”

Hiring volunteers is an option. But that comes with a problem: Arpaio's mobilized his 2,200-member volunteer posse, 800 of whom strapped on side arms and Stetsons to join deputies in crime-fighting sweeps across the Phoenix valley. Latinos were often targeted, creating bitter feelings that persist today.

“That’s another topic,” Kamp says.

Other priorities for Kamp include:

-Cracking down on fentanyl dealers and gun traffickers. “The flooding of fentanyl affects everybody,” he said.

-Improving recidivism rates with programs like Mosaic, championed by Penzone, which provide inmates with tools and resources to succeed outside of prison.

-Launching an online Public Safety Resource Website that provides training material and information for everything from first aid to the latest crime trends.

Over his career, Kamp has carved out a reputation for creating innovative, unconventional programs.

In Phoenix, he helped spearhead “Operation Guardian”, a multi-jurisdictional initiative that identified gang members and offered them alternatives to gang life.

In Ghana, he launched an academy to train police to combat and investigate child trafficking on Lake Volta. He also set up an airport task force to crack down on international trafficking at the point of attack.

Expect more of the same if he’s elected sheriff.

“When I look at the office of Maricopa County sheriff, it needs to be the person at the right place at the right time. I think that’s me.

“I’ve got the energy, I have the support of my family. And I think have the experience from my experience with the Phoenix Police Department and from working abroad.

“In many regards, the Maricopa County Sheriff is one of the most powerful law enforcement officials in Arizona. We cannot afford to allow the abuse of power or any attempt to turn the office into a celebrity.

“The role of the Sheriff is protection.”

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