

# Sheriff hopes to expand posses

Arpaio plan harkens back to Wild West

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The Associated Press

Raising images of the Wild West, Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio says he wants to mobilize a posse of civilians to stem the rising crime rate.

"The Arizona frontier was violent, made so by outlaws and gangs who outnumbered and outgunned peace officers," Arpaio said Tuesday. "The sheriffs of the time used posses to even the odds against criminals and maintain law and order. The situation today is very similar — too many lawbreakers, not enough lawmen."

There are more than 1,600 reserves and members of present volunteer posses who do such chores as search and rescue, communications and booking prisoners. Arpaio said he wants to expand the posse to 2,500 by the

end of the year.

He also wants to give posse members more responsibilities, such as fighting drug trafficking and gangs.

Arpaio refused to discuss details of his plan, saying he'd present a formal proposal in two months.

The department uses 90 unpaid volunteers as reserve deputies who carry guns and have full law enforcement responsibilities.

About 270 members of current posses are permitted to carry guns and exercise law enforcement powers if they're supervised by a sheriff's deputy or reserve officer.

The armed posse members get three weeks of training in use of their weapons.

Posse members range in age from 21 to past retirement. The oldest is 89 and distributes food at command centers for other posse members, Arpaio said.

"This is not a vigilante force," he said. "These people are well-trained and have undergone FBI

checks."

Kelly Michaelson, executive director of the Arizona Law Enforcement Officer Advisory Council, said he couldn't comment on the legality of Arpaio's plan until he saw the proposal and knew what training posse members had received and what prerequisites they had met.

Michaelson's council is responsible for certifying anyone who performs the duties of a police officer, other than an elected sheriff, Michaelson said.

Arpaio said the Arizona Constitution allows a sheriff to enlist posses, and he said he needs the help.

About 430 deputies patrol 9,200 square miles of Maricopa County, with another 55 in training, Arpaio said.

"We're living in a violent county," he said. "I don't have the manpower to do the job. I need more deputies, and I will use this very effective volunteer force."