L.A. deputies union in a rift

It has two presidents, two boards of directors, two 'official' websites

By Cindy Chang and Robert Faturechi

A high-stakes power struggle at the union representing Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies has left members with two presidents, two boards of directors, two "official" websites and, for many, too much drama.

Trouble at the Assn. for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs came to light last month when the board ousted Armando Macias, its newly elected president, citing his poor attendance.

The board installed a new president, but Macias is refusing to recognize the ouster.

Now the two sides are accusing each other of illegitimate power grabs and misusing union funds. Macias was recently sued by his rivals, who accused him of improperly tapping into the union's political funds to pay for attorneys in his attempt to reclaim his leadership post.

For its part, Macias' camp recently unveiled its own website, declaring it "the official website" of the union. At least two union officials have sided with Macias, who counters that he's being targeted by the union's "old guard" for demanding transparency in how union dues are spent.

Both sides contend the outcome could influence who becomes the next sheriff, as the union has yet to endorse a candidate in the upcoming election.

For deputies, the infighting has been disconcerting.

"It's disgusting," one said. "These guys need to put their political aspirations to the side.... All of this infighting is not helping anybody. The big victim is going to be the general membership."

[See Deputies, AA5]

L.A. deputies union locked in power struggle

[**Deputies,** from AA1]

Macias' rivals say that the rightful president for the organization, which represents 7,200 deputies and district attorney investigators, is Don Jeffrey Steck.

The group behind Steck says that the ouster was legitimate but that Macias continued to insist he was in charge, showing up at the office, shouting down his opposition and sitting at the head of the conference table.

Then, according to the lawsuit, the Macias group withdrew $100,000 from the union's political action committee while the accountant was out sick, with the intention of using the money to pay the law firm backing their attempt to hold on to power.

The lawsuit describes the withdrawal as "wrongful, a breach of their fiduciary duty to ALADS, and without ALADS's authorization, permission, or knowledge."

The Macias camp put out their side of the story in a document using official union letterhead.

In it, they point out that Macias is the union's first Latino president and his second-in-command is its first black vice president. They say they are victims of "an unprecedented attempt to steal an election by an old guard's refusal to turn over control of the board, release the multimillion-dollar campaign fund and respect the vote of the organization's membership."

They accuse the union's previous president, part of the coalition that ousted Macias, of refusing to make the organization's finances transparent and blocking the release of financial records, including his own expenses.

Neither side would comment on which sheriff's candidate, if any, they will endorse.

Steve Ipsen, an attorney for the Macias side, raised the possibility that Macias' opponents ousted him on a technicality to influence the endorsement process. He said his clients did take political action funds but are waiting for legal clarification on whether they can spend them.

The withdrawal may have been a violation of the union's bylaws but was justified to "preserve their rights under the law in an emergency situation," Ipsen said.

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ELECTIONS 2014 Tues 4-1-14 LA Times

The values of a sheriff

EACH LOS ANGELES County sheriff's deputy is supposed to carry a card at all times that sets forth the department's core values, embodied in a single sentence pledging respect, integrity, wisdom and "the courage to stand against racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and bigotry in all its forms."

The card has been variously called inspirational and plain silly, but if it's silly, its silliness lies not in the values expressed but in the notion that words on a card could, by themselves, imbue deputies with values that they do not already hold or that are not instilled in them in training and reinforced each day on the job.

News reports and anecdotal tales of inmate abuse, the hazing of new deputies and disrespect paid to the communities it is supposed to protect suggest that the department has a long way to go to make its core values more than words on a card. On Friday, NBC News reported on a lawsuit brought by a deputy who alleges that female trainees in the East Los Angeles station were expected to fulfill the "sexual needs" of training officers associated with a clique known as the Banditos. The allegations are being investigated.

Also on Friday, The Times reported that Assistant Sheriff James Hellmold, a candidate for sheriff, was recorded disguising his voice with a South Asian accent in a mock complaint call to a watch commander. Whether the call was a prank or, as Hellmold and the watch commander assert, a rehearsed skit, it was more the sort of thing expected from a drunken and clueless fraternity member than a law enforcement officer pledged to display the courage to stand against bigotry.

There is a danger that the departure of Sheriff Lee Baca under a cloud created by his own mismanagement could be taken by those vying to replace him as an invitation to throw out everything he brought with him — the good as well as the bad, the vision as well as the often-sloppy implementation, the values as well as the card.

The sheriff is one of only three officials elected countywide to represent 10 million people, and the only one with uniformed officers acting as ambassadors to every corner of the county. They will be emissaries either for a system of gang-like cliques and frat-like pranks or for a culture of dignity and respect. It will be interesting to hear the candidates for sheriff explain not merely which set of values they choose, but how they embody them, and how they intend to ensure that their deputies do the same.

Los Angeles Times Tues 4-1-14 LATIMES.COM

Anchoring troubled lives

Camp Kilpatrick correctional facility will close, but its unique youth sports program will relocate and keep competition alive

SANDY BANKS

Theirs are not problems that can be fixed on a baseball diamond or soccer field:

My mom was really young when she had me. She was 14 and my dad wasn't around.

I was never home when I was eight years old, because I was using drugs, and I had a lot of anger issues... I used to fight a lot.

My friends were in a gang. So I ended up being in a gang.... Going into my senior [year] I got caught with a firearm.

But voices like theirs helped persuade county officials to save a storied sports program for teenage boys who've landed on the wrong side of the law.

It helped me stay out of trouble, showed me how to communicate with people I didn't get along with... We talked things out, my family came to every game... my mom cried."

The young men I'm quoting — from interviews by researchers studying the program — are former inmates of Camp Kilpatrick in Malibu, the only correctional facility in the state whose sports teams compete against public and private high schools.

Its sports program inspired the 2006 movie "Gridiron Gang." In the film, juvenile delinquents put gang rivalries aside and find redemption on the football field. In real life, the sports program was threatened with closure this spring because Camp Kilpatrick is being torn down.

Researchers were tasked with finding out whether the sports league produced positive change that lasted. They examined the young inmates' school reports, criminal records and accounts of behavior problems.

But the teenagers' lives were so layered with dysfunction, statistics can't capture the value of sports as clearly as the words of players, now young men:

Kilpatrick gave me a lot of courage from playing the sports... I don't cuss as much as I used to. I don't drink as much as I used to.... I feel more happy with myself. All around, I haven't stolen, nothing... everything's just been going smooth sailing from here.

::

When you're lugging

Los Angeles Times

JUVENILE OFFENDERS give each other support during football practice at Camp Kilpatrick. The program was the subject of the film "Gridiron Gang."

which looked at Los Angeles County probation records for hundreds of youths — offers a troubling snapshot of young lives.

Many of the boys had gang associations. Most came from unstable homes or were in foster care. Nine in 10 had substance abuse issues; almost as many had mental health problems. Almost all were failing, acting out or not showing up for school. Two-thirds had been in trouble with the law before. Their most recent offenses included robberies, assaults and weapons violations.

The study was not able to prove that the athletes did better in the long term than youths who were not on the teams. But there was a clear improvement in school attendance and performance. However when it came to returning to crime, or recidivism, the athletes did better only for the first six months of freedom.

"Clearly, there's a positive impact," said Cal State L.A. professor Denise Herz, the research team leader. "But the key is, they go back into the same environment... without much support."

The interviews with former athletes described

there, where there was no discipline at home. The coaches... they worked with us, they tried to keep us motivated, I mean I still call them to this day.

To have that male figure around you that can give you a man's perspective, and to hear a man's voice. You know what I'm saying? It's priceless.

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Does the Kilpatrick sports model inoculate young men against the lure of the streets? Certainly not. But it can clear vision muddied by history and teach important life skills.

Probation department officials recognize that. Last week, they announced that the sports program won't be disbanded but will move to the Challenger Memorial Youth Center camp in the Antelope Valley. Teams will resume play in their California Interscholastic Federation league this fall.

But sports isn't the only thing we ought to rely on. Even the athletes understand that:

Restore the drumming program, restore the poetry program. And also, like, some visual arts programs.

More counseling for a

ment] should be a condition of probation.... Maybe some consequences for the parent if they don't participate in classes or something.

The lesson of the Kilpatrick study is that benefits are not so much tied to play on the field, as they are to the relationships that teens build with adults—and each other.

We're tired together. We're sweating together. We're right next to each other... you develop a camaraderie, a love, a respect.

The research suggests that self-respect grew when hard work led to success.

"Some of these kids haven't had any accomplishments," Herz said. "Why not have arts and drama programs to showcase them as well? If they feel good about themselves — 'I can do this. I'm worthy of this' — that makes a huge difference."

And for one athlete, a not-so-huge difference is more than enough.

While I was there I set me a couple goals. My main goal was to graduate high school, even though I was a year behind... and to get off probation. I got off probation without getting a violation and there was no problem.

I graduated high school.

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ELECTIONS 2014

What Baca did right

Education for inmates may be his most enduring legacy. How will his successor improve on it?

As Los Angeles County sheriff, Lee Baca was roundly and rightly criticized for his failure to prevent or correct the abuse of jail inmates over the course of his 15 years in office, most notably during the final few years of turmoil that culminated in the indictment of 20 deputies and Baca's resignation. It is not uncommon, when a controversial figure leaves power, for critics to denigrate every aspect of his tenure and leadership philosophy, and it would be easy to write off anything that happened at the jails on Baca's watch as being a disaster that must be reversed at the earliest possible moment.

So it is encouraging that some (although by no means all) of the candidates to succeed Baca have given at least lip service to what by rights should be his most enduring positive legacy: education-based incarceration.

Baca did not invent the notion that jail time should be used constructively. Incarceration in the United States has oscillated between punishment for its own sake and rehabilitation, redemption and successful reentry into society.

Nor are the particular education programs Baca put in place at the jails — the curriculum, the staffing, the tracking of outcomes — necessarily the right ones, although there are some impressive anecdotal stories of success.

Baca's contribution was an attitude adjustment — a rethinking and reorientation of his job as sheriff. He said he had committed himself to ensuring that his captive audience of inmates would use their year or two (on average) in lockup to begin focusing on the mind-set that landed them in jail and learning basic literacy and other skills that would give them a stake as law-abiding members of society.

Voters should be wary of calls for the Sheriff's Department to adopt a "back-to-basics" approach, if that term means abandoning all but traditional notions of policing and jailing. Unlike police departments, whose primary function is keeping the peace and arresting criminals, and unlike state prisons, whose job has traditionally been to segregate dangerous people from the rest of society, a Sheriff's Department in a county the size of Los Angeles has a leading role in pulling inmates out of the cycle of offending and returning to jail.

It is time now for candidates to go beyond lip service — beyond a grudging or pious acknowledgment that there may be something to education-based incarceration — and produce an assessment of the current programs and a blueprint for improving them.

Ex-sheriff reflects on his leadership

Lee Baca tells students at Loyola Marymount that if he had it to do over, he would 'manage more.'

By Robert Faturechi

After stepping down as Los Angeles County sheriff in January, Lee Baca largely has avoided the spotlight. Former aides don't know how to reach him. Reporters looking to interview him have been rebuffed. His last tweet was a link to his farewell address.

But this week, Baca took center stage once again — this time as a guest speaker at a Loyola Marymount lecture hall where he offered a contemplative, and at times, self-critical view of his 15-year tenure.

Speaking to a group of undergraduates Tuesday night, Baca said his biggest regret as sheriff was spending too much of his time at public events instead of managing his department.

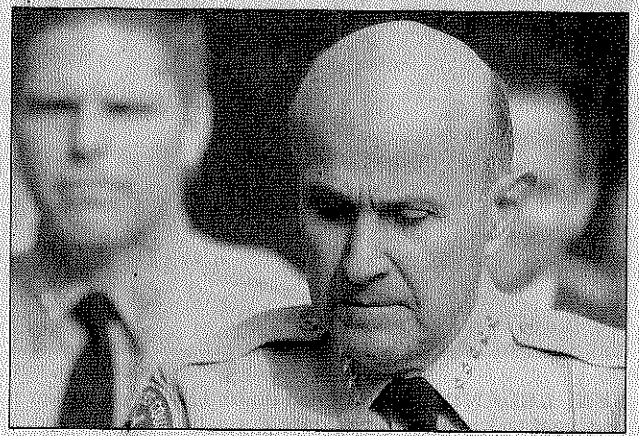
"What I'd do differently is ... manage more," said Baca, looking relaxed during the two-hour question-and-answer session.

The former sheriff said he's also coming to terms with criticism over his leadership of the department, which has been mired in various scandals including an FBI investigation into inmate abuse.

"You won't hear anyone giving me credit for much of anything, which is OK," he said. "Did I give it my heart and soul? I didn't leave much space for anything else but the Sheriff's Department."

Baca said when he looks back, he realizes he spread himself too thin and should have focused more on the inner workings of the department. Baca was known for his community outreach as well as his frequent trips abroad for various cultural and law enforcement events.

"It's amazing how hindsight is always clearer than foresight. I think what I can be clearly faulted for is I tried to do all things for all people. That's asking for the impossible," he said. "It doesn't mean that the public doesn't come first. It just means that your time comes first."



Mark Boster Los Angeles Times

LEE BACA, shown announcing his retirement in January, led the L.A. County department for 15 years.

One student asked Baca if he would have stayed on "if the scandals were not front page news."

Baca, 71, blamed his age instead, saying that being sheriff "is definitely a younger man's type of work."

"People who were political professionals" told him he would have been the front-runner, but that the campaign was going to be tough. "I decided to say this is one for the future. I'm not the future," he said.

Stepping down, Baca continued, was the hardest decision of his life.

"As I moved toward the idea, I talked to myself extensively in terms of what is this going to mean," he said.

Baca said he's now advising several of the candidates in the race but did not disclose which ones.

He said the tenor of the campaign has disappointed him.

"I have never believed in running for a law enforcement job and putting down the rest of the candidates and making them appear to be something unqualified," Baca said.

Baca didn't mention whom, if anyone, he favored in the race. But when he announced he was stepping down, he tapped two of his top assistants, James Hellmold and Todd Rogers, as qualified successors.

Amid the talk of his shortcomings, Baca pointed out his successes and boosted the role he played as a transformational law enforcement figure who helped bring minority communities into the fold.

"With all the controversies that have happened in the jails recently ... the most amazing thing about this is: Where do you see the public picketing the Sheriff's Department?" Baca said, referring to the lack of public outcry about conditions in the jails. "You know why? The communities know we care about them."

In the years before he retired, Baca was hit with a slew of problems.

Federal prosecutors charged 19 of his current and former deputies as part of an investigation into jailhouse abuse. In the Antelope Valley, Baca's deputies were involved in searches and detentions that federal authorities said violated the constitutional rights of black and Latino residents. Internal records surfaced showing Baca's agency hired dozens of applicants even after background investigators discovered histories of serious misconduct. And Baca was accused of cronyism, including launching criminal investigations on behalf of donors.

Still, the former sheriff said the appreciation of him has continued: "What's amazing when I retired ... there have been 12 community farewell tributes to me ... it's not that it's happening because I'm calling for it."

Other than that, Baca shared little about his post-retirement life. He said he still runs 30 miles a week. And he checks up on the news, "depending on the newspaper, at least once a week."

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