

Behind-scenes control at issue in Oakland County sheriff race

By TOM LONERGAN

Listening to Oakland County Sheriff Johannes Sreen, one could become confused about who he's running against in Tuesday's election.

During a recent interview, Sreen, the only countywide-elected Democrat, repeated his many disagreements with the county's Republican Prosecutor, L. Brooks Patterson. The two have been at odds since first winning elections for their county jobs eight years ago.

Sreen rarely mentioned his actual Republican opponent for sheriff, Huntington Woods Public Safety Director James Y. Stewart.

STEWART AND Patterson are strong allies — stronger than even their joint "Tough on Crime" billboards would suggest. Stewart is treasurer of Citizens for Capital Punishment, a group organized by Patterson to petition for a death penalty referendum by 1982.

Treasurer of Patterson's re-election committee is Jacquelyn A. Stewart, an investigator in the prosecutor's office, and James Stewart's wife.

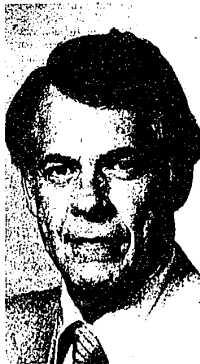
"If the people want the prosecutor's office to control the sheriff's department in this county, let them beware," Sreen said.

Sreen acknowledges that he and Patterson are "good friends," but denies that he would be dominated by the prosecutor.

Sreen has emphasized "cooperation" between the county sheriff and local police departments and with other county-elected officials, most notably Patterson and the Republican-dominated Board of Commissioners.



JOHANNES SREEN



JAMES Y. STEWART

REGARDING THE prosecutor's Organized Crime Strike Force, which Sreen has abhorred, Stewart said in a recent interview: "We'd be involved in it up to our eyeballs — as much as we possibly could be."

The three-year-old strike force has been controversial since its initial investigation of a Pontiac numbers racket, which implicated several of the city's high level police officers. Former Pontiac Police Chief William Hanger, a

Sreen ally, was recently cleared by Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Steven Andrews of obstruction of justice and perjury in the investigation. Andrews had served as a one-man grand jury in the case.

Sreen has long pushed for more county-coordinated police services like criminal investigations, road patrols and communications. But Sreen says he's "not advocating a county police force."

Among the new programs during his tenure, Sreen specifically mentioned countywide arson-investigation training and the transport of prisoners from local "lock-ups" to the county jail.

"Ask anyone in my department, who's honest, and they'll tell you we've come a long way," said Sreen.

STEWART SAYS he's "not sure" local departments want more county coordination of police services.

President of the south Oakland County Chiefs of Police, Stewart says there is "very little cooperation" between the county's southern city police departments and the county. "The difference is the individual — the sheriff," says Stewart.

Stewart says the sheriff could do a "better job on ancillary kinds of services" such as polygraph tests and providing breathalyzer machine operators in the county's northern townships.

The county's south end police departments "don't really use the sheriff's department that much," said Stewart.

A major rift developed between Sreen and some south Oakland chiefs during the search for a suspect in the killings of four children during 1976 and 1977.

Sreen was critical of the investigation, headed by the Michigan State Police. He said last week, "I was not included in there, and frankly I wanted no part of it the way things were going." A suspect in the slayings has never been found.

Stewart, who's department wasn't involved in the investigation, said, "I think they did a good job. The clues were sparse."

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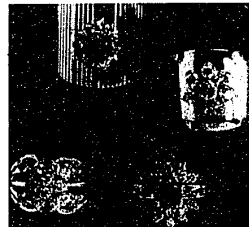
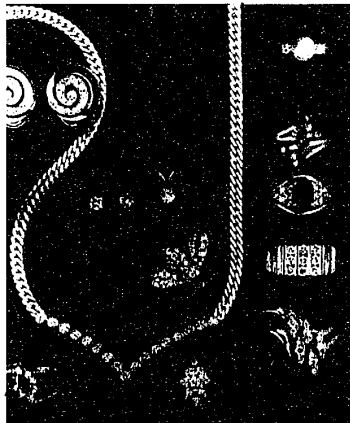
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