

### Audit says sheriff took meat

## Spreen says he saved county money

By Suzie Rollins Singer  
staff writer

The controversy surrounding the Oakland County sheriff's meat orders is so thick a cleaver might be needed to cut through all the allegations.

"This continuing controversy around the sheriff has got to be cleared up," said County Commissioner John Peterson, R-Rochester, summing up the mood of many board members.

"Because this has been going on so long, it can't be called a political battle any longer. Even the Democrats are disgusted.

"It has almost reached the point that if the sheriff is any kind of a man, he should stand up and defend himself or resign. I'd say the same about a Republican too."

PETERSON'S challenge came on the heels of an audit report which alleges that Sheriff Johannes Spreen took home more than \$4,000 worth of meat and shrimp during a four-year period.

The report was prepared by the county auditing division, which reports to County Executive Daniel T. Murphy, a Republican.

Spreen, a Democrat, called the audit report "full of untruths, erroneous and one-sided."

In a telephone interview, Spreen said that under a state statute, the sheriff is entitled to a jail apartment and to have his meals provided. In his nine years as sheriff, Spreen said he has never lived in the jail apartment.

"The apartment and food are a right of the sheriff. Sheriffs before me took food home. How come this practice went on for 25 years and this is the first time it is being questioned?" Spreen asked.

"I have not used the apartment for nine years that I've served the county, and I've saved the taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars," he added.

SPREEN SAID said he began taking meat home in 1978, after five years in office, when the county food service supervisor encouraged him to do so.

"I only took steaks and (pork) chops because my wife was confined to a wheelchair, and I did all the cooking, so I made those on the grill — even in the winter," he said, adding, "I never took shrimp home."

The audit report, however, says, "Under no circumstances does the county have an obligation and/or authority to provide the sheriff with food or supplies for use at his personal residence."

THE MEATS in question include such prime-cut steaks as T-bone, New York strip, Porterhouse and Delmonico, rib-eye steaks, center cut pork chops, lamb chops and shrimp.

The audit examines the sheriff's food orders made to the county Central Stores for groceries and meats from Jan. 1, 1978, through Dec. 31, 1981.

Spreen said he wants to discuss the audit allegations at the March 9 meeting of the county board's public services committee.

"I will also have a fuller statement for the board," he added.

THE AUDIT concludes that prior to February 1981 — when James Brennan, director of the county's management and budget department, informed him that the county would no longer supply the sheriff with food for consumption outside of the jail — Spreen took food home about once a month.

Spreen said he took home food once every three months.

It also states that county food was used for the meal following his first wife's funeral in April 1979.

Spreen said, "I never gave any orders for the food. That was arranged by Capt. (Carl) Matheny, (former undersheriff) Bob Nyovitch and (former secretary) Jackie Cey. I appreciated their arrangements but I never gave them any orders to do so."

The report states that \$683 worth of meat was sent to the sheriff's department, but the receipt was never signed.

"I think this is just a vicious witchhunt. This report is a farce and self-serving," Spreen contended.

Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy said he doesn't plan to do anything with the audit report, but had it conducted at the request of the several commissioners. He said two auditors worked full time for "a couple of weeks" on the report.

ACCORDING TO Jack Hays, the county's acting civil counsel, there is little county commissioners can do about the sheriff's alleged actions.

"If this is an alleged criminal matter, then it belongs under the purview of (Prosecutor) L. Brooks Patterson," Hays said.



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— Johannes Spreen  
Oakland sheriff

### WSU center sets courses in PR, writing

Three communications credit courses will be offered at the Wayne State University Southfield Center, 21705 Evergreen, between Eight and Nine Mile roads, starting Feb. 26.

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