

By attorney general

Spreen cleared in meat theft probe

Oakland County Sheriff Johannes Spreen has been cleared of charges alleging that he was a meat thief and that he used county-employed personnel to do chores at his home.

State Attorney General Frank Kelley, in a letter, informed state Police Director Gerald Hough that the investigation "did not develop evidence of criminal conduct by the sheriff or an alleged conspiracy against him."

In December, Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy ordered an audit of Spreen's activities after two former aides of Spreen, Undersheriff Robert Nyovich and Spreen's personal secretary, Jacqueline Cey, accused the sheriff of taking home specialty cuts of meat.

He forwarded the audit to the state police, and in turn, the attorney gener-

al was asked to investigate the audit's findings.

"I'm certainly elated. I didn't expect him (attorney general) to find anything wrong. I always believed that truth is the best defense," Spreen said.

Nyovich and Cey also charged Spreen with using a deputy on county time for maintenance on Spreen's Farmington Hills home, misusing state road patrol funds and working with his wife Mona Jo to secretly tape-record conversations with Sheriff's Department employees.

IN HIS WRITTEN opinion, Kelley said that a sheriff does not have a right to receive county food under Michigan law but that "any criminal prosecution based on the giving or receipt of county food would require proof beyond a reasonable doubt that the individuals

charged (knew) they should not do so."

Spreen and Murphy agreed that Spreen would be entitled to food if he lived at the jail. However, Spreen maintained that he was told he could take the food home, since he did not live on the jail premises. He testified that in February 1981 when he was told he could not take food home, he stopped the practice.

As far as using a deputy for work at his home, Kelley said the deputy Sgt. Gerald Girard, "told officers he had done some yard work at Spreen's house while on comp time because he was a personal friend of the sheriff."

In response Kelley said, "Regardless of the possible need to address this

matter in terms of a management problem... the evidence furnished us would not support a criminal charge against the sheriff."

Kelley also said the investigation did not provide enough evidence that conversations of sheriff's employees were tape recorded without their knowledge.

Spreen said in his 24 years in law enforcement he has been the subject of many investigations, but been cleared each time.

"What the taxpayers ought to ask Mr. Murphy is what is the cost of all these investigations," he said.

Murphy was out of town and unavailable for comment.

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