

Every so often I receive e-mail from residents with suggestions on how to run the jail. Often these are forwarded messages and include specific suggestions that a popular Arizona sheriff, Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County, has implemented in his jail.

One popular comparison that is consistently brought up is the price Sheriff Arpaio pays for food versus what other jails pay. From his Web site I found he serves a sack lunch and two hot meals. Weld County serves a sack lunch and two hot meals a day to approximately 530 inmates and pays 92 cents per meal. A representative from the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office said that in 2006 they paid 23 cents per meal for raw food costs. After adding costs for storage, preparation and transportation the total cost per meal was \$1.16. According to a July 26 Web site message from Sheriff Arpaio, his jail system houses 10,000 inmates.

Another comment that is common among the messages I receive is that Weld County should start a tent city, just like Sheriff Arpaio. The costs associated with building a tent city unfortunately include more than just purchasing or renting tents. Other considerations include sanitation, heat in the winter months, secure fencing and staffing to run the operation. Other jails have set up a tent city, which involved renting the tents for a temporary period of time. The costs involved for a six-month period were approximately \$100,000.

Here are some additional facts about our jail that you might not know:

«Only basic hygiene items and clothing are provided. If an inmate wants something more, it is available through the commissary and the inmates must pay for it themselves.

«Medical services are available to inmates but only at the same level of care they would receive if they were seeking medical care in the community and not incarcerated in jail. Inmates don't get a choice of which doctor to see. Dental care is available but only for pain management and medical necessities, which means no cosmetic dental work. Inmates are charged an \$8 co-pay to see the jail physician unless the inmate is referred for care by a nurse. The inmates are also liable for the costs of medical care for pre-existing conditions or self-inflicted injuries.

«There is no cable or satellite television and only public broadcasts are available. Pornographic material or any material advocating violence against anyone is not allowed. Newspaper and approved magazine subscriptions are paid for by the inmates themselves through their commissary monies.

«Free weights were removed from the jail more than a decade ago.

«Inmate workers prepare meals, do facility laundry and clean not only in the jail but also work on cleaning details outside the jail under the supervision of county janitorial staff. Work-release clients have literally worked hundreds of hours for many community nonprofit agencies.

Most people think of jail and images of punishment and discomfort are normal. Let me simply say the inmates in the Weld County Jail are not living like kings. As you can see, except for the pink underwear issued to the inmates by Sheriff Arpaio, there is not much difference between the Maricopa County and Weld County jails.

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