



## Sheriff Thompson runs for second term



Tony Thompson, Incumbent

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Editor's note: The following is the fourth in a series of interviews with local candidates running for office in November. Challenger Bill Herkelman, who is running on the Republican ticket for Black Hawk County Sheriff, will share his responses next week.

1. What's at stake in this race, for the voters and for you?

We have established an operational tempo here at the sheriff's office over the past four years that far exceeds my predecessors.

Evidence of this can be found in our increased revenue generation, increased narcotics enforcement, increased partnerships with other law enforcement agencies (for example: gang task force and the consolidated crime lab) and ultimately the successive four years of decreasing crime statistics as a result. My plan is to continue the methods that we have initiated, build on the successes and clean up the areas that need extra attention.

We have only scratched the surface of what capabilities and impact our agency can have on the citizens of Black Hawk County. Change is slow coming, but the ball is rolling, and I look forward to continuing to aggressively push for improvements. If the voters have appreciated seeing a sheriff's office that is consistently under budget, exceeding revenue projections, creatively using non-tax based funds to increase their capacity so as to not have to ask for more tax funding and demonstrating improvements due to that creativity, then they stand to maintain (or lose) that effort depending on their vote. That is what is at stake for the voter and for me.

2. What are some of the issues that voters have brought to your attention in your interactions with them? How do you plan to address their concerns?

I have held a town hall meeting every month since taking office. Each of these meetings are held in a different community each month. In October, my meeting will be in Cedar Falls at the Community Center and will be the 46th of my tenure as sheriff.

In each of these meetings, I hear concerns about state legislation, legislative mandates, mental health concerns, school bullying and youth crime and violence, weapons laws, and taxes. In each of these meetings, my response to these issues have garnered additional support and additional understanding for my approach to leadership.

I currently serve on the Iowa State Sheriff's and Deputies Association's Legislative Committee. During their sessions, I meet at least monthly, if not every two weeks with our legislators to address these concerns. I am proud to provide another local voice for the state legislators to hear, providing local perspective on these matters that impact our communities here in Black Hawk County.

I sit on several committees and task forces that were specifically designed to address mental health concerns in the state. I have spoken at several of the "mental health redesign" subcommittee meetings, bringing perspective from our county jails and sheriff's offices. I sit on the steering committee for our own Adult Crisis Stabilization Center, and am proud of helping to marshal that consolidated effort from concept to reality.

I wrote and designed the drug education curriculum that we now teach in our rural schools which helps identify behavior and attitudes that precipitate drug use, bullying and violent behavior. I initiated a youthful offender diversion program called Shadow Boxers to aid in providing yet another outlet and resource to parents and schools struggling with at risk youth or youth already involved in the juvenile court system. I continue to meet with school administrators and leverage our agencies resources more now than ever before in partnering with our schools and our school counselors to both educate and be more of a resource to them in ensuring safer, more productive school environments.

I enforce new legislation regarding weapons permitting, and continue to work with the state legislature on improving those laws to ensure the safety and security of our citizens... and finally, I ensure that I have a concise, well-thought budget, that is easy to defend, to enforce, and to abide by during the fiscal year.

I challenge our revenue generation, seek new and creative ways to ensure more positive impact with that budget, and seek to transfer more operationally dependent spending on non-tax based resources such as: room and board, seized and forfeited funds, etc.

While our agency will never be budget neutral, we have increased our revenue generation by nearly \$600,000 in just these first four years. That increase helps both our agency, as well as the county's general fund balance.

3. How many doors have you knocked on since the beginning of the campaign? How has this experience informed and guided your campaign goals?

I have knocked on very few doors. I loathe campaigning. I get tired of all the commercials, mail literature and expense, and I think most other citizens do to. I openly recognize how dependently small our local campaigns are. I have no visions of grandeur when it comes to campaigning. What I am passionate about my organization, my county and the safety and security of my family and my

neighbors.

I choose to put my money where my mouth is. I work from 6:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. daily. On a good day, I may not get home until 9 or 10 p.m. depending on my meetings, talks or organizational obligations. I meet with anyone who will have me. I created an extremely dynamic Web site for the sheriff's office, and I also have a great one for my campaign. I initiated the Citizen's Advisory Council to provide better citizen insight, oversight and advocacy within our organization.

Based on all these things, I feel that I present an extremely transparent approach to the governance of the sheriff's office, and through my town hall meetings, public speaking engagements, support of charity and philanthropic organizations, my service on multiple community oriented boards and organizations, I am extremely available and open to questions and criticism. Fortunately, I have seen little of the latter, and have heard from most that they see and appreciate the change in leadership style that I have introduced. The comments that I hear empower me and encourage me to believe that with the sheriff's office, our operational goals and our fiscal efforts are meeting and exceeding the public's expectations. I hope to continue to build on those successes for at least four more years.

4. What's your pitch to the undecided voters?

I think that at this late stage, any undecided voter will likely have to search their own feelings, experiences and attitudes to ensure that they are comfortable with their personal choice for sheriff.

I have given 18 years of service to the Black Hawk County Sheriff's Office. The last four years as its sheriff. It is a humbling, challenging, dynamic position that asks so much more from a person than one can imagine. I rely heavily on my 20 years of military experience, my deployments, the physical and mental training associated with all of that to deal with and develop plans, training and forward progress within my agency.

I bring my college education, as well as my life experiences to bear on daily issues involving the administration of our agency. I have four years of budgeting experience, for which no other experience or exposure can prepare you. I have demonstrated not just a "get along" approach, but a "how do we improve?" approach to my governance. If you are still undecided, please look at my Web site, and the Web site of my opponent. Ask yourself what experience, training, education or exposure does each have that adequately prepares them for the daily challenges of leading one of the largest sheriff's offices in the state of Iowa? Ask yourself what has each done to prepare themselves for the challenges of leading? Ask yourself what kinds of connections to the community, and what kinds of selfless service have they demonstrated to the internal improvements of our county through their personal (as well as their professional) efforts?

I stand by my philanthropic and community involvement in organizations that have no personal benefit to me. I work with organizations that specifically make Black Hawk County a better place to live and work, regardless of the fact that there is no personal benefit to my family or myself. I commit thousands of hours yearly to causes far outside my personal interests, with a solemn goal of progressing our communities and moving our county forward. I think you will find these commitments and convictions auspiciously absent in my opponent's approach.

5. Looking at your life, what's your proudest accomplishment so far — politically or personally?

I am most proud of my life, my family and my wife. I cannot be more pleased watching my oldest son grow up. He was born while I was deployed and I intend to spend the rest of my life making up for missing his first months. I married a wonderful woman, who for 18 years has supported, encouraged, educated, scolded, and mentored me. My youngest son continues to impress me with this wit and his intellect as he matures into a fine, respectful young man. My family is my prized possession, my sons are my proudest moments and my wife is an accomplishment that far exceeds my expectations. As passionate as I am about serving as your sheriff, it pales in comparison to the drive I have to get this part of my life right.

6. Share a story, something that has touched you deeply.

Just prior to winning election in 2008, I was working on a narcotics case. This incident involved a family, where the mother, step-father, and daughter all were using, making and distributing methamphetamine. During a search warrant, I opened a door and in the room, the daughter, who was 3-4 months pregnant and physically had a needle in her arm shooting the drug as I entered. I escorted her out of the house in handcuffs and to the county jail. Her case was disposed of and she was sentenced to go to prison.

I happened to be in the jail on the day of her transport and she knocked on the window, asking to speak with me. I unlocked the cell door and she politely asked to give me a hug. I asked "for what?"... her response was "because you saved my baby... I could not have gotten off that stuff if you hadn't intervened." I have no knowledge of whatever happened to her, or her baby, but for that day, I was so deeply touched, and saw clearly how much impact we can have in this job. I think about that moment often. I have a passion for ending the compounding damage that illegal drugs have on our communities, and that singular "win" in the battle was extremely satisfying.

7. How much money have you raised so far and how much have you spent?

I have brought in \$6,458.37 in campaign contributions to date, and I have spent \$3,956.08 so far this election.

8. What keeps you awake at night?

Things unfinished tend to cause me sleepless nights. I have many irons in the fire and tend to burn the candle at both ends quite often. It is when things are their most hectic that I start to lose sleep literally. Proverbially, it is concern for those who are out when we are asleep. Those deputies who work diligently when we are snug in our beds are who I concern myself with. Have we trained enough? Have we provided the right tools for the job? Are they well supervised, and do they know the resources available to them? As an administrator, these concerns are always ones that you think about before closing your eyes at night.

9. If you were to tell your grandchildren about the experience of campaigning for the House seat in 2012, what would you like them to know? How would you tell that story regardless of the outcome of the election?

I hope to be able to look back on a long career as the Black Hawk County Sheriff and fixate on the totality of service to the citizens of Black Hawk County and not just one campaign.

When I consider my last campaign and largely this one too, you just don't hear much about them. These are small, county (local) campaigns that don't need, nor deserve a lot of added attention.

Four years ago, both candidates ran respectful campaigns and this time there has been very little "ruffling of feathers" by either side. Each of us have an agenda, issues and perspective and I don't disparage any of that. In fact, I am honored to be running with several great candidates up and down the ticket.

Serving as an elected official when there has been so much change and struggle at the state and national levels causes me to be more focused on this campaign, so that our local message is not lost in the rhetoric of a state or national campaign. I think the voters see that, and when I talk about my service during these times, I think it will be that focus that shines. The Black Hawk County Sheriff's Office is a professional organization and possesses a professional leader. My grandkids will be proud of that fact.

10. Is there a decision in your political past that you regret? And if you could do it over, how would you change things?

There are many things that have happened over the past four years. There are many incidents that occurred where I wish I had the power to go back and change them. I wish that a 32-year-old deputy would not have died from a heart attack. I wish I did not have to call one of my long-time friends and fellow deputy to tell him that his daughter had been shot in Jesup. I wish we would not have allowed

an inmate to escape from custody. I wish we could find our missing cousins from Evansdale.

But, would I change what I did post incident? No. Would I alter my personal choices as they impacted the events? No.

I look back and the biggest regret that I have is not realizing how daunting it is to change and "make over" an organization of this size. We continue to be a "work in progress" and I regret underestimating that very large fact.

Change is so slow to manifest itself in an organization like ours. We established so many short-term successes to anchor our long-term changes, but it still takes time. When I talk about the fact that we have just scratched the surface of this organization's potential, I believe that wholeheartedly.

I look forward to continuing to implement change and improving an already outstanding organization. I look forward to marshaling new initiatives that I've not yet had time to work on. I look forward to forging new partnerships and community outreach opportunities. I look forward to continuing to improve the infrastructure and operation of our county jail. I look forward to continuing to manipulate our budget to squeeze every ounce of benefit from it without having to ask for more. I look forward, and do not regret where we've been, because we have learned from our successes and from our failures. We are a better organization because of each and I am a better leader for having experienced them.