

# Leo Samaniego, Sheriff

El Paso County, Texas



## Professional Summary

- ◆ Re-elected Sheriff for four-year terms in November 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000
- ◆ Elected Sheriff of El Paso County in November 1984; Took office January 1, 1985
- ◆ Graduate of FBI National Academy (1972)
- ◆ Served with the El Paso Police Department for 28 years (1956-1984).
- ◆ Patrolman in 1956 and retired in January 1984 as Deputy Chief of Police
- ◆ AAS Degree in Criminal Justice, El Paso County Community College
- ◆ Served five (5) years in U.S. Navy (1951-1956)

## Awards

- ◆ City of El Paso Conquistador Award
- ◆ County of El Paso Eagle Award
- ◆ El Paso County Del Norte Award
- ◆ Sons of the American Revolution Law Enforcement Commendation
- ◆ Lenore E. Walker First Annual Award, El Paso County Task Force on Domestic Violence
- ◆ Law Enforcement Achievement Award (1993) El Paso Chapter, The Military Order of the World Wars

## Memberships

- ◆ American Legion Post 74
- ◆ Texas Crime Prevention Association
- ◆ FBI National Academy Graduates
- ◆ Chairman, El Paso Area Community Justice Council

## Past Memberships

- ◆ Southwest Border High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Executive Committee
- ◆ Salvation Army Advisory Board
- ◆ El Paso Federal Prison Camp Community Relations Board Chairman
- ◆ Multi-Discipline Team, LULAC Project Amistad
- ◆ Board Member, Sheriff's Association of Texas
- ◆ E.P.C.C. Correctional Science Advisory Committee

## Personal Information

- ◆ Born in El Paso, Texas in May 7, 1932
- ◆ Attended Morehead Elementary School, El Paso High School
- ◆ Married to the former Natalia Sandoval
- ◆ One daughter, Two sons, Six grandchildren

# **Personal History of Sheriff Leo Samaniego**

## **A Man of Impeccable Integrity**

Sheriff Leo Samaniego is a man of impeccable integrity. Leo Samaniego served with the El Paso Police Department for 28 years; he entered as a patrolman in 1956 and retired as Deputy Chief of Police in 1984. He was elected as Sheriff of El Paso County in November 1984 and took office on January 1, 1985, marking a new era of honesty, integrity, and pride in El Paso's law enforcement community.

El Paso County has a history of law enforcement corruption and indictments that predates Sheriff Samaniego. When he entered the world of law enforcement, El Paso was to experience the determination of a young man dedicated to serving his city using all his ethics and law enforcement skills.

## **Lieutenant Leo Samaniego, El Paso Police Department, Investigates Criminal Involvement of High-Ranking Members Within His Department**

Lieutenant Samaniego had received information, in 1975, that implicated high-ranking officers, within his own department, in a fencing operation. Samaniego presented his information to the Chief of Police but was ordered to close the investigation.

## **Lt. Samaniego, Commander of the El Paso Special Commission on Crime**

At great personal risk, Samaniego refused to drop the case. He took the information to the Mayor of El Paso, who created the El Paso Special Commission on Crime. Seeing the integrity and dedication to his profession, the Mayor appointed Lt. Samaniego the commander of this Commission.

The Chief of Police and one Assistant Chief resigned under fire, a second Assistant Chief was terminated, a prominent local businessman was convicted, and a large burglary ring was broken; the direct result of this Commission's efforts.

Samaniego overcame harassing and obstructionist tactics from his own command staff, and personal threats from members of the public.

## **The Public's Trust in Law Enforcement**

The work of then Lt. Leo Samaniego improved the community's trust and confidence in the El Paso Police Department. His contribution and leadership during the massive Investigation is

regarded as one of the most significant accomplishments in local law enforcement. It is considered as the cornerstone of changing the face of El Paso Law Enforcement.

Sheriff Samaniego is a 1972 graduate of the FBI National Academy. Prior to his arrival as sheriff in 1985, there were no FBINAA graduates in the Sheriff's Office. His commitment to training has resulted in nineteen current National Academy graduates, all of whom are members of the FBINAA.

He proudly served his country in the United States Navy prior to joining the El Paso Police Dept.. In 1984, after a 27 year career with the El Paso Police Department Leo Samaniego retired as Deputy Chief to run for sheriff of El Paso County. Later that year he was elected and on January 1, 1985 he took over a department reeling from scandals. Two of the three immediate past sheriffs had been indicted and removed from office. Several high-ranking officials had been convicted in federal court of violating the civil rights of prisoners. Many employees were qualified for food stamps due to low wages. Confidence from the community was at an all time low as was the morale amongst employees.

Sheriff Samaniego brought his impeccable integrity into an office whose poor reputation was known throughout the Southwest.

His forward thinking attitude was emulated by his staff. His initial focus was in the development of existing staff through training, the adoption of uniform policies and procedures, and the implementation of an Internal Affairs section.

Due to his tireless efforts, deputies have received steady increases in pay and benefits and are now the top paid in the state.

His steadfast dedication to his profession has resulted in a department that has grown from less than five hundred total personnel in 1984, to more than one thousand personnel in 2003.

Under his leadership, in 2001, this once maligned department became the first CALEA accredited Sheriff's Office in the history of Texas.

The name Leo Samaniego has grown to legendary status in West Texas. The El Paso County Commissioners' Court honored Sheriff Samaniego in 1997 when they named the new site of the jail annex, training academy, and patrol station, "The Leo Samaniego Law Enforcement Complex"

His integrity, dedication, and commitment to his profession have also become well known across this great country. His accomplishments are too many to detail in this document but are included in an attachment. He has created a progressive and now proud organization that consistently lives out our motto, "We Serve With Pride."

# Sheriff Leo Samaniego's Accomplishments from 1985 to 2001



**The 21<sup>st</sup> Century** in El Paso County brought good news for the community:

- **Leo Samaniego is Sheriff, and**
- **El Paso has the best two jails in the State of Texas**, according to the Texas Commission on Jail Standards.
- Under Sheriff Leo Samaniego's direction and leadership, the El Paso County Sheriff's Department has risen, from being one of the worst Sheriff's Departments in Texas, to becoming the **First Accredited Sheriff's Office in Texas.**

## 2000 - 2001

- Department received national accreditation from Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), the first and only Sheriff's Department in Texas, and one of only 450 agencies nationwide to earn this honor. March 23, 2001.



- CALEA Assessment – Recommendation by CALEA Assessors: Files were "Flawless".

- Accreditation Process initiated for Accreditation of Jail Annex and Downtown Detention Facility by American Corrections Association.

- Department generated 54% of 2000/2001 Budget of \$46,085,073; under Sheriff Samaniego's leadership:

Housing Federal Inmates .....	\$13, 583,273
Housing City Inmates .....	1,722,237
Jail Commissary Income .....	312,600
Inmate Phone Commissions .....	n/a
Traffic Citations.....	n/a
Civil Process Fees .....	n/a
Federal and State Grants .....	9,410,136
<b>Total Income.....</b>	<b>\$25,036,154</b>

- CALEA Mock Assessment, June 2000.
- Sheriff Samaniego Elected Chairman of Southwest Border HIDTA Executive Committee. (Arizona, California, New Mexico, West Texas, and South Texas)
- Detention Facility exterior restored/painted.
- Department verified its practices, policies, procedures, and standards for CALEA assessment.



**In the 1990's**, Sheriff Leo Samaniego established drug task forces, community crime prevention programs, improved the Department's compensation programs, and encouraged personnel to pursue their work activities to arise to greater achievements.

Sheriff Samaniego's leadership brought the El Paso County Detention Facility up to the high standards set by the Texas Commission on Jail Standards.

### **1996 - 1999**

- Sheriff Samaniego elected Vice-Chair of SW Border HIDTA Executive Committee.
- CALEA team formed and work commenced toward Accreditation.
- Department received \$1,041,175 from US Dept of Just Bureau of Justice Assistance 1998 State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) Grant.
- Sheriff's Department awarded \$318,712.43 in drug forfeitures.
- Sheriff and Police Chiefs and all school superintendents, and campus police, met at Region VIII Training Academy about school violence and the need to be prepared.
- Metro Narcotics Task Force awarded CJD grant: \$1,085,639 CJD funds; \$362,141 Task Force Cash Match. Total: \$1,447,780.
- Fitness Center at the El Paso County Downtown Detention Facility opened.
- Sheriff Samaniego hosted the Sheriff's Association of Texas Annual Training Conference in El Paso. Nearly 1000 attendees.
- The Downtown Detention Facility and the Jail Annex passed the annual jail inspection and certified as meeting all standards by the Texas Commission on Jail Standards.
- The Downtown Detention Facility external painting project to begin. Commissioner's Court approved \$497,728 bid by BRYCO.
- Department Awarded School Based Partnerships 1999 grant for \$131,869.
- FATS installed, Purchase price \$77,450. Drug Forfeiture fund.
- Civilian Employees' Career Ladder reinstated, approved by Commissioners Court, \$83,000 to bring everyone to appropriate pay level; \$28,000 per year thereafter.
- Department conducts First County Wide Graffiti Wipe Out, "Spring Clean Up 1998"
- Triad Agreement between Department and Texas Attorney General signed.
- Accreditation process approved by Commissioners Court.

- Jail Annex and Downtown Detention Facility certified by Texas Commission on Jail Standards. No violations.
- Collective Bargaining Agreement approved.
- New contract with US Marshall Service: housing federal pretrial detainees \$57.98 per day per inmate.
- Received \$4.1 million from US Marshal Service to assist county in increasing Jail Annex capacity.

## 1995

- Department's personnel received awards:
  - ✚ Outstanding Texas Drug Law Enforcement Officer Award presented to Metro Narcotics Task Force Detective Larry Guerra by the Texan's War on Drugs.
  - ✚ Officer of the Year awarded to Criminal Investigation Division Detective Onesimo Esparza by American Legion Law Enforcement Post #74.
  - ✚ El Paso County Detention Facility windows glazed at a cost of \$17,000. Inmates inside could no longer communicate to visitors standing outside across the street, which had created hazards for the fire and police emergency vehicles.
  - ✚ El Paso County's Communications Specialist of the Year awarded to Monica Madrid by the El Paso County E-911 Board of Directors. Sheriff's Department Communications Specialists had won this honor three times at state level; twice at local level.
- Sheriff's Department became "Partners in Education" with Cesar Chavez Academy, Ysleta Independent School District.
- Chain Gang created by Sheriff Samaniego, to clean up areas around the Detention Facility, County Courthouse and Parking Garage, Central Police Command Center, Central Fire Station, Federal Courthouse and Federal Building, Archives Building, Mexican Consulate, and portions of the downtown Business District.
- Sheriff Samaniego appointed as National Sheriff's Association Representative by nation-wide law enforcement advisory group to screen and evaluated counterdrug assistance requests made to the military Joint Task Force 6 by U.S. sheriffs.
- Department Increased warrant round-ups (arresting individuals wanted on criminal or traffic warrants) by initiating new procedure for all Criminal Investigations detectives and Crime Prevention and Traffic Officers.
- Automated Fingerprinted Identifications System purchases and installed.
- Department upgraded computers, an ongoing project, using asset-sharing funds seized from drug dealers.

- Department purchased RESO duplicator with computer interface for \$25,000. Department able to print 95% of its forms at substantial savings.
- Veterans Administration pays El Paso County up to \$10,000 to train each veteran the Sheriff's Department hires under the SMOCT Program (Service Members Occupational Conversion and Training Act), through agreement with the Sheriff's Department.
- Detention Division personnel identified 16 inmates still receiving Social Security payments (SSI). The Department notified the Social Security Administration and checks, totaling \$9,022 per month, were stopped.

## 1993 - 1994

- Department implemented the "Schools as Community Centers" Program. Two deputies each are assigned to Socorro, San Elizario, Canutillo, and Mountain View High Schools.
- Drug forfeiture funds from Metro Narcotics Task Force fund four deputies for one year and to purchase four completely equipped patrol units for "Schools as Community Centers" Program at a cost of \$212,724. Used by Criminal Justice Division.
- Department awarded by Keep El Paso Beautiful for the third year.
- Department received \$2.5 million grant from U.S. Marshall's Service to fund a portion of our new 1200-bed facility and to guarantee 250 beds at the El Paso County Detention Facility for Federal inmates for the next 15 years.
- Courthouse Security Unit was established, five deputy sheriffs and eight security officers.
- Full Courthouse Security program implemented with purchase of radios, metal detectors, and x-ray machines.
- El Paso County Metro Narcotics Force (EPPD, EPCSD, and DA's Office) created to replace West Texas Multi-County Narcotics Task Force.
- Hostage Negotiations Team created: personnel selected, trained, and equipped.
- S.W.A.T. Team (Special Weapons and Tactics) created; personnel selected, trained, and equipped. Training provided by Border Patrol (BORTEC) at no cost to the County.
- Substantial improvement in career steps for Detention Officers, newly covered by Collective Bargaining Agreement.
- Floor Control Officer position becomes a promotion. Substantial pay increase.
- Explorer Scout Program funded by drug forfeitures of the Metro Narcotics Task Force. 30 young at-risk men and women selected for the program.

- Career ladder established for civilian personnel, with ten pay steps and substantial improvement in pay for each position.

## 1990 - 1992

- Civil Service Commission for El Paso County Sheriff's Department (approved by Commissioners Court) established. Three members are appointed; one by the Sheriff, one by the County Judge, and one by District Attorney.
- Voters approve \$35 million bond issue for El Paso County's new 1200-bed Jail Annex. 72 – 28% margin.
- Approximately 160 deputies, unnecessarily working at the Detention Facility, were transferred. Substantial savings to El Paso County.
- County-paid detention officers' uniforms issued. Improved professional image.
- Upper Valley Patrol Operations moved to new substation next to Village of Vinton Town Hall. No cost to the County.
- Crime Stoppers Program became Sheriff's Department's responsibility. Department provides housing, program coordinator, and secretary.
- Housing Federal Inmates contract with US Marshall's Service raised from \$42.40 to \$50.00 per inmate per day.
- Swanson Commissary Services contracted for inmate commissary. Reduced 1991/1992 budget by \$800,000. Reassigned five employees to other vacancies in the Department. Substantial savings to the County.
- Traffic and Drug Interdiction Motorcycle Unit created. Motorcycles, radios, video cameras, uniforms, and salaries for seven officers for one year paid from drug seizures.
- Drug Education Unit created. Three fully equipped vans, radios, overhead lights, drug education materials, and salaries for three officers paid from drug seizures.
- Multi-Agency Selective Enforcement and Interdiction Unit created to go after drug dealers and their assets. Funded by Criminal Justice Division, Governor's Office. Participating Agencies: SO, EPPD, DPS, IRS, FBI, DEA, US Customs, US Immigration.
- Drug forfeiture funds used to purchase six fully equipped patrol units for reserves to use in special drug interdiction program; four-wheel drive vehicles for litter abatement officers.
- Department assigned five full-time Crime Prevention Officers to DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) for all 6-year old students in El Paso County. Funded by Criminal Justice Division, Governor's Office.



- Department welcomed full-time coordinator for High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and Operation Alliance Programs. Funded by Criminal Justice Division, Governor's Office.
- Department personnel received awards:
  - ✚ Outstanding Chief Deputy in the State of Texas, Chief Deputy Guadalupe Dominguez, by Chief Deputies Association.
  - ✚ Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, Detective Sonia Vega, by the Combined Law Enforcement Association of Texas (CLEAT).
- Department cleaned up blighted areas in Operation Desert Sweep, with Keep El Paso Beautiful's program to prevent illegal dumping.
- Department plans for New Jail, 1200-bed facility.
- Department contracted with US Marshal Service for 300 to 400 beds for federal inmates, to generate sufficient funding to pay for most of the new jail's operation.
- Department raised Deputy salaries to encourage retention of qualified, competent employees.
- Department formed Search and Rescue Unit, a trained unit well-equipped for emergency rescue operations, and K-9 and handler to track lost persons.
- Sheriff created Human Resources Section to conduct entry level and promotion examinations, evaluations, and commendations.



**The 1980's** were times of change for the better. Elected in 1985, Sheriff Samaniego was faced with tremendous Department obstacles to overcome.

He resolved to implement massive improvements in building, equipment, and employee professionalism.

## 1985 - 1989

- Created Uniformed Litter Abatement Unit. Two full-time deputies assigned to upper and lower valley areas to enforce and investigate litter and dumping.
- Formed West Texas Multi-County Special Investigations Group, funded by Criminal Justice Division, Governor's Office.
- Acquired patrol boat for law enforcement and rescue operations at Ascarate Park.
- Formed West Texas Multi-County Narcotics Task Force, funded by Criminal Justice Division, Governor's Office.
- Career, Training, and Compensation Plan for Detention Officers approved by Commissioners' Court. For the first time, jail employees could have advancement based on time in grade, training, and performance.
- Implement Floor Control Officer Program for Jail Personnel. Improved supervision and control of inmates on each floor.
- Created three-team K-9 Unit for building searches, suspect tracking.
- Established Testing and promotion procedures to promote competent, qualified employees.
- Implemented Commendation and Awards Program to reward exemplary performance.
- New Department Motto: *We Serve with Pride.*
- Created new uniform shoulder patch depicting history of El Paso County.
- New uniforms for all Deputies. Selected "Best Dressed Sheriff's Department in the U.S." by Uniform Manufacturers Association.
- Establish jail ministry to provide spiritual needs of inmates and counseling to suicide prone inmates.
- Sheriff wrote, published, and distributed new policy and procedures manual to each employee.
- Sheriff wrote, published and distributed job description to each employee.



- Increased academy staff from one to five full-time instructors.
- Increased Internal Affairs staff from one to four full-time employees.
- Established Field Training Program for Patrol Officers, prepared new deputies to apply academy learning to actual field situations.
- Evaluated and corrected mechanical and electrical systems malfunctions in Jail.
- Established performance evaluation system, trained supervisors, published performance manual.
- Implemented: Bondsmen pay for each bail bond written by Sheriff's Personnel. Formerly, taxpayers paid for this service.
- Implemented: Increased fees for Civil Process and charged persons requesting process. Formerly, taxpayers paid for this service.
- Department's "Jail Management Plan" approved by Texas Commission on Jail Standards. Allowed Detention Officer and Control Room of each floor to be counted in the guard/Inmate Ratio. Saved the County salaries of approximately forty additional Detention Officers if TCJS did not approve the plan.
- Cancelled Jail Maintenance contracts totaling \$170,00.00, and hired one electronic technician.



**Leo Samaniego was an accomplished law enforcement professional, serving as a patrolman and promoted through the ranks to Deputy Chief of Police, even before he was elected Sheriff.**

These are a few of the programs and operations Leo Samaniego establish while he served with the El Paso Police Department.



### **First in Texas**

- Established the first "Crime Prevention Program" in Texas, then was voted Top Unit in Texas.
- Established first "Crime Stoppers" in Texas, third in the nation.
- Established "Operation Identification," first property marking program in Texas
- Established first "Court Watch " program in Texas



### **First in El Paso**

- Established first "Sting Operation". Police Officers posed as fences and recovered more than \$10 million in stolen property.
- Established the R.A.T. Patrol (Repression and Apprehension Team). Arrested habitual burglars and fences.
- Established city-wide "Neighborhood Watch Program"
- Established undercover operation to eliminate pushes selling narcotics to schoolchildren.
- Established "Criminal Intelligence Division" anti-corruption force.