

## 7 Republicans in race for Pender sheriff

Carson Smith's upcoming retirement has drawn large crowd

By F.T. Norton

StarNews Staff

PENDER COUNTY — Seven candidates are running in the Pender County sheriff's Republican primary race to replace retiring Sheriff Carson Smith, who is vying for a seat in the N.C. House.

Carson served four terms as sheriff after first being elected to the office in 2002.

The winner of the May 8 primary will face unchallenged Democrat Lawrence Fennell in the general election in November.

The position pays a yearly salary of \$101,137.

### 1) What would you change or do differently if elected?

**Brown:** I will be a working sheriff, in the office every day in uniform and accessible to the citizens of Pender County. If someone wants to see me and cannot come to me I will go to them. If a citizen calls me and wants a return call, I will be the person that returns that call — not a secretary, me personally.

**Burton:** As Pender County's population continues to grow rapidly, my past experience and qualifications have equipped me to be able to deliver as sheriff on day one the required leadership and management skills to create a growth plan for the sheriff's department. This strategic growth plan will lead to an increased presence of law enforcement all across Pender County and will result in the greater ability to keep the citizens of Pender County safe. The professional management of our tax dollars to increase personnel and improve operational efficiency is a skill that I look forward to putting into practice if granted the honor to be Pender County's next sheriff.

**Cina:** When elected sheriff the first thing I will do is open the door to the public. I will begin by setting up several new programs, for instance: Citizens Academy, Veterans on Patrol, Partnership for Change, Ride with Us (Bike Rally), and many more. Along with these programs I will work hard to modernize the communication between the sheriff's office and the community as soon as possible. This begins with updating the Facebook page and the web page along with implementing Twitter and Instagram. I believe that transparency is professionalism and the public deserves to know what their sheriff's office is doing.

**Cutler:** I would attempt to work with county commissioners to obtain additional positions and equipment. This would be done to attempt to catch the sheriff's department up with the growth of the county that has occurred in the past several years. I would pursue certain federal grants that would be beneficial to Pender County.

**Spivey:** Pay studies to increase pay. I would implement more training for school resource officers, K-9, patrol deputies etc., welcome federal operations, apply for grants, community involvement, cross-sworn deputies, send animal control officers through Basic Law Enforcement Training, add on to current jail or explore options for a new one.

**Stokes:** In a world revolved around social media, I would use this platform to keep the community informed and promote transparency in the sheriff's office. Posts would include new hires/promotions, community events, traffic alerts, recent arrests, and Pender County's Most Wanted. I would also create an interview panel for all hires to ensure the best person is getting hired versus who you're friends with. In addition to county funding, I would search and apply for grants to ensure the sheriff's office is meeting the needs of our community. We also need to keep our officers in their sections as much as possible.

**Ward:** I would like to increase our patrol presence by redesigning their schedule to ensure better law enforcement coverage throughout the county. Decrease the transportation movement of inmates by utilizing video-conferencing system for court appearances when transport is not essential. Plan to work in partnership with other law enforcement agencies against further criminal activities that are on the rise.

2) With opioids wreaking havoc on communities, what would you do to combat the epidemic?

**Brown:** We currently do not have a good working relationship with our surrounding counties. We must create a joint drug task force with New Hanover, Brunswick, Bladen, Sampson, Duplin and Onslow counties as well as with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. We cannot tackle this alone, we must have joint efforts. We need more strict penalties for those found guilty and we need to implement a rehabilitation program as part of the sentencing process for those charged and found guilty.

**Burton:** This problem has grown from an epidemic into a national pandemic. My law enforcement experience in narcotics fighting the source of our crisis, drug trafficking, grants me the capability to effectively combat the opioid problem. My narcotics law enforcement background combined with witnessing the devastation the opioids cause in both EMS and fire-rescue has motivated me to fight on the citizens' behalf. If given the opportunity to be your sheriff, I will lead through the tough enforcement of narcotics law while realizing addiction also requires

collaborating with communities, families and treatment organizations to help those affected by this poison.

**Cina:** When elected sheriff I will immediately implement my three-part plan to combat this epidemic in our community. Part 1 will focus on education and prevention primarily with our youth, but also with families and businesses within our community. Part 2 will focus on the enforcement of the current laws against the transporters, distributors and manufacturers. I will work to implement a multi-county task force to work together to combat this epidemic. Part 3 will focus on rehabilitation primarily in the detention facility. I will offer counseling and resources to inmates seeking help prior to release and after.

**Cutler:** We need to have drug awareness programs for our citizens. Drug recognition officers would be used throughout the county offering seminars to teach early signs of drug use. Strict enforcement is needed to remove illegal drugs from our streets. This could be accomplished by utilizing multi-agency task forces working together. Recovery efforts also need to be expanded, including assistance for those that are incarcerated. In the case of substance addiction, rehabilitation efforts would be jump-started while the individual is incarcerated. Upon release, a liaison to guide individuals to further recovery would be a feasible option.

**Spivey:** Work with rehabilitation programs, complete a task force, welcome federal operations, add drug interdiction and K-9 units.

**Stokes:** Look to increase the number of narcotics detectives and work with surrounding local and state agencies in order to combat the drug epidemic. I would also work to increase the number of K-9 officers and create a Highway Drug Interdiction Unit. However, we also need to work with local nonprofit organizations to help citizens struggling with addiction. I would also like to work with the county commissioners in finding the funding for a drug court in Pender County. This would require citizens arrested for drug-related offenses to complete a court mandated drug rehab program and routine drug testing.

**Ward:** My goal is to work cohesively with any task force using city, state, and federal resources to aid in identifying and eradicating opioid trafficking, distribution, production and other activities directly associated with opioid epidemic. In addition, I plan to work with support groups and rehab facilities to aid in the healing process needed for families and individuals.

3) What is your opinion of the relationship between the sheriff's office and the community?

**Burton:** Relationships can always be improved, and any great organization will tell you that relationship improvement should be a continual process. To effectively extinguish and prevent crime in our county, we need a law enforcement team that has the respect for and the trust of the law-abiding citizen. Respect and trust leads

to open communication and communication leads to effective and efficient law enforcement presence in our communities and across Pender County. Together we can fight crime and keep each other safe through community engagement.

**Brown:** I feel we have lost touch with our community. I will implement community policing get the deputies out of their cars and interacting with the citizens of this county. I want the citizens to know each and every deputy and feel they can trust to walk up to them and feel comfortable with the one-on-one interaction. Something as simple as security checks of closed businesses at night and leaving a door tag letting that owner know we checked their business.

**Cina:** In my opinion as a current community member I feel there is barely a relationship between the sheriff's office and the community at the moment. There are no community programs available to involve the community in the daily functions of the office, nor are there any modernized social media avenues for the community to get involved. Currently the sheriff's office only has 378 likes on Facebook which is half the amount of my candidate page likes. Our neighbors next door, New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, has 6,286 likes on their Facebook page.

**Cutler:** I think the relationship between the sheriff's department and the community could be improved. There is a communication gap that needs to be bridged. I would attempt to bridge this gap by having sheriff's department representatives meet with the communities throughout Pender County on a monthly basis. I would also encourage and support the resurgence of Community Watch Programs.

**Spivey:** It is good from what I see but I would like to have more community involvement. For example, citizens of the community should be more aware of things that area happening at the sheriff's office.

**Stokes:** The sheriff's office should meet the needs of its citizens. This comes about by both parties working hand in hand with one another. It takes community policing to help the sheriff's office keep criminals and repeat offenders off the streets and drug traffickers behind bars. The sheriff's office needs to be visible and transparent with its citizens.

**Ward:** I believe our relationship must be one that strengthens and unifies our communities with the sheriff's office. It should be founded on mutual respect, professionalism, transparency and most importantly, trust. Trust is essential to establishing a meaningful and long-lasting relationship between law enforcement and citizens today.

To see more candidate questions and previews of all the contested primary races in the Cape Fear region, go to [www.StarNewsOnline.com/news/politics](http://www.StarNewsOnline.com/news/politics).