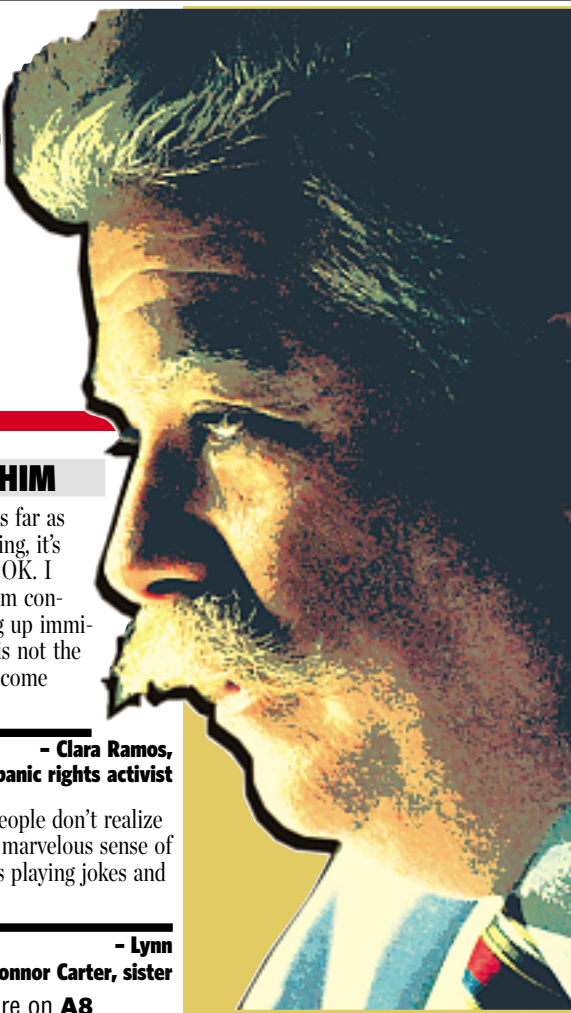


NO.



CROSSROADS
TEN
most
POWERFUL

WHO IS T. MICHAEL O'CONNOR?



BY APRILL BRANDON
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You probably recognize him by his signature mustache and tan cowboy hat, a throwback to South Texas lawmen of old.

Victoria County Sheriff T. Michael O'Connor, a wealthy fifth-generation rancher, is the only one in his storied family to become sheriff.

"There's a difference between a legend and a legacy. I don't want to be a legend. I want to leave a legacy," O'Connor said. "Twenty years from now, people won't know, or even really care, who was sheriff during this time, but they sure would be interested in the legacy he leaves behind for the next generation."

This generation of Crossroads' residents voted O'Connor the most powerful person in the region.

WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT HIM

"If there was a survey to name the best person in the world, I'd vote for T. Michael. He's a wonderful person and a gentleman in every sense of the word."

- Gloria Wearden,
longtime friend

"He's a very driven leader. He understands that the goal of the office goes way beyond himself; the mission is bigger than himself."

- Dale Fowler, president of the
Victoria
Economic
Development
Corp.

"I think that as far as the job he is doing, it's OK and it's not OK. I disagree with him constantly rounding up immigrants. Mexico is not the only place they come from."

- Clara Ramos,
local Hispanic rights activist

"What most people don't realize is that he has a marvelous sense of humor. He loves playing jokes and loves to laugh."

- Lynn
O'Connor Carter, sister
More on A8

TELLING DETAILS

WHAT'S ON HIS DESK?

An engraving that reads, "An original is hard to find but easy to recognize," family photos, the book "17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork"

HOBBIES?

Watching sports, ranching, spending time with family

WHAT DOES POWER MEAN?

"I'd rather use the word empowerment than power. I think my position is leadership, especially the sheriff's office, and it gives me the ability to champion for people who can't champion for themselves, as well as empower people to give them an opportunity to achieve their greatest ability."

HOW DO YOU WIELD POWER?

"I'm only a flash in the pan as far as my term here just like anyone else, but I have to leave some sort of legacy, a stewardship for those in the future to build on."

TIMELINE:

1960s: Bonds as child with Refugio County sheriff and family friend R.M. Harsdorff. Meeting leads to longtime interest in law enforcement.

1973: Becomes deputized with the Refugio County Sheriff's Office

1977: Graduates from Texas A&M University with a bachelor's degree in range science

1980: Marries wife LuAnn; later they have two children

2003: Helps search his family's land for survivors of the deadliest botched human smuggling attempt in U.S. history.

2004: Defeats three-term incumbent Michael Ratcliff by 57 percent of the vote to become sheriff

2008: Campaigns unopposed for his second term as sheriff

O'CONNOR FROM HIS OFFICE

Sitting behind the large desk in his office, Sheriff T. Michael O'Connor said he hesitated to interview for this story. He cringed at participating in a newspaper project in which he is deemed "powerful."

If the 54-year-old knew Crossroads' residents voted him the region's most powerful person, he might have declined the interview altogether.

"That's not what this is all about. That's not what I do. I don't carry a big stick and dictate things," O'Connor said. "I'm not the kind of guy who sits back and puts his feet up on his desk."

In fact, the sheriff doesn't like to talk to people from behind his desk. That's why he added two chairs to his office: one on each side of his desk.

"I don't like a desk between me and other people. It just makes it sterile and almost pompous," he said.

It's a suitable attitude for a man whose job requires him to get his hands dirty once in awhile. With the influx of illegal immigrants and a



ADVOCATE FILE PHOTO

One of Sheriff T. Michael O'Connor's favorite books is "Failing Forward" by John Maxwell, which focuses on learning from your mistakes and knowing your purpose in life.

SEE MOST POWERFUL, A8

Editor's note

This project is not a scientific measure of power. During a three-month period, Advocate readers voted for candidates via e-mail, online survey, snail mail and phone.

Q&A

Who was your most influential teacher or mentor and what did you learn?

"My grandfather's best friend, R.M. Harsdorff, was sheriff of Refugio County for years and years. As a child I got to tag along with them and see what a real South Texas sheriff was all about. When I was about 9 years old, he gave me a badge with my name on it that I still have today. That's where my interest in law enforcement came from."

What is your favorite cause and why?

"My cause is to champion for those who can't champion for themselves. There is a saying in my family: 'To those who much is given, much is expected.'"

What one thing would you change in the Crossroads? Why?

"I would like to see family values come back. I don't know why we lost those fundamental values of morality and integrity. If we could bring back family mentors and unity, it wouldn't totally eradicate some of the issues we're dealing with today, but we would see a significant reduction."

ONLINE VIDEO

To see video of T. Michael O'Connor, visit www.VictoriaAdvocate.com and click the story.

Crossroads 10 Most Powerful recap

- No. 10 : Janey Lack
- No. 7 : Robert Hewitt Sr.
- No. 4 : Benny Martinez
- No. 9 : David Brown
- No. 6 : Steve Tyler
- No. 3 : Geannie Morrison
- No. 8 : Will Armstrong
- No. 5 : Bob Moore
- No. 2 : Jim Graff