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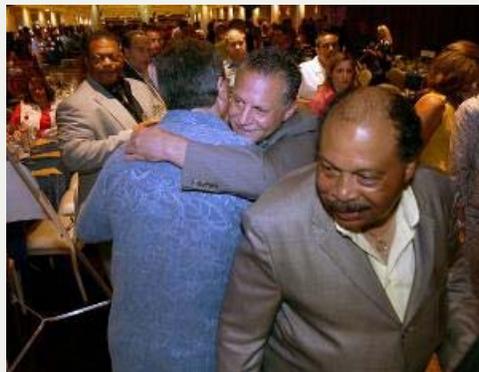
Passaic County sheriff has raised over \$1M in reelection bid

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BY RICHARD COWEN
THE RECORD
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It was Tommy Bahama Night at the Westmount Country Club, but the star of the show didn't come decked out in a Hawaiian shirt, like many of the guests. He wore a blue sport jacket and carried a badge.



MICHAEL KARAS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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Passaic County Sheriff Jerry Speziale, center, greeting supporters at a recent fund-raiser that earned \$100,000.

It was Passaic County Sheriff Jerry Speziale's official welcome to the summer of 2010: a glitzy election fund-raiser that drew an estimated 1,000 people, each of whom paid \$150 a ticket. If he had one, the Democratic sheriff certainly didn't lose his Hawaiian shirt: The event on Wednesday is estimated to have raised \$100,000, a spokesman said.

Speziale has now raised more than \$1.1 million this year. That's the most money ever raised in a county sheriff's race, surpassing the \$1.08 million Bergen County Sheriff

Leo P. McGuire raised in 2004, state records show.

Felix Garcia, Speziale's Republican foe in the November general elections, has raised just \$50,000. But Speziale, wary that having lots of money can also hurt a candidate, isn't taking the race lightly.

"I walk four miles a day and campaign door to door," Speziale said. "I don't take this job as an entitlement. I work for it."

Sheriffs like to raise a lot of money because it tends to discourage the competition, political observers say.

"If you're an incumbent and you've raised a lot of money, it signals to anybody who wants to challenge you that it's going to be tough," said Ingrid Reed, a political scientist at the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers University.

As head of the Passaic County Sheriff's Department, Speziale oversees a \$100 million budget and a small army of highly paid officers, administrators and jail guards. Many of the folks wearing those expensive Tommy Bahama shirts were the sheriff's top brass, including Passaic County Jail Warden Charles Meyers and his chief of staff, Leonard Lovely.

Also buying tables at the event were big vendors who do business with the Sheriff's Department, including Classic Towing. Unions, such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the Passaic County Education Association, and United Food and Commercial Workers Union, also bought tables to the fund-raiser.

Speziale's charisma and ability to draw money has made him an important player in Democratic circles. His fund-raiser attracted another aspiring Democrat, Newark Mayor Corey Booker, who is said to be considering a run for either governor or the U.S. Senate seat now held by Frank Lautenberg.

Booker was supposed to make a speech, but left early and yielded the floor to Speziale.

Speziale boasted that since he took office in 2002, he's reduced the population at the crowded Passaic County Jail from 2,400 to 900 through measures including programmed alternatives to incarceration. And the Sheriff's Department, working with federal agents, has seized \$75 million from drug dealers.

"Over the past nine years, I've watched the agency evolve into the highly professional law enforcement agency it has become," Speziale told the crowd of cheering supporters.

Garcia, who is planning to hold a more modest fund-raiser at La Neve's restaurant in Haledon at \$40 a ticket on June 23, says money won't be the deciding factor in the race.

"Joey Torres [the Paterson mayor] had a million dollars and he lost, too," Garcia said. "It's not about the money. It's about the message."

Garcia, 57, is a former Passaic County undersheriff who was fired by Speziale. He later sued for wrongful termination and won a \$150,000 out-of-court settlement.

Garcia says he's campaigning against high taxes and spending in the Sheriff's Department, which he says is out of control.

"Jerry Speziale is running scared," Garcia said. "Why else would he be raising so much money?"

Speziale doesn't apologize for raising a lot of money. Campaigns are expensive, and he plans to hire consultants, pollsters and buy radio and television advertising.

What he doesn't spend on his own campaign, Speziale says he'll use to support other candidates. He also contributes to numerous charities around Passaic County, and sponsors more than a half-dozen youth baseball and basketball teams.

"I plan on spending every bit of it," Speziale said.

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By the numbers

Sheriffs have built huge campaign war chests in recent years. A look at fund raising among sheriffs in the counties of Bergen, Passaic and Morris since 2004:

	Raised	Spent
Jerry Speziale (Passaic County)		
2010:*	\$1,033,052	\$359,456
2007:	\$751,270	\$737,831
2004:	\$1,045,819	\$591,329
Leo P. McGuire (Bergen County)		

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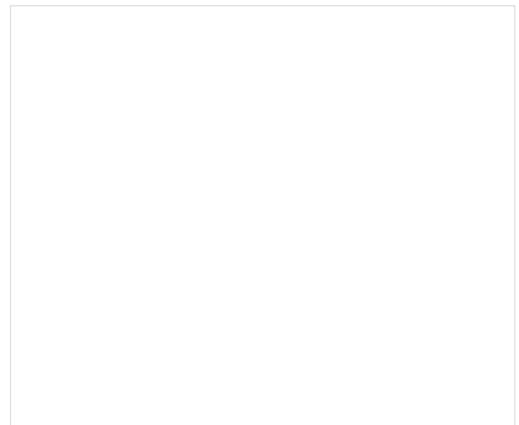
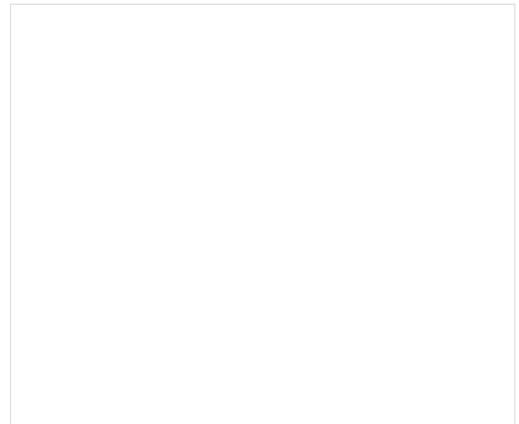
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Last 48 Hours



2010:*	\$216,819	\$181,726
2007:	\$672,369	\$645,569
2004:	\$1,087,634	\$815,292
Edward V. Rochford (Morris County)		
2010:*	\$259,514	\$203,568
2007:	\$346,090	\$219,738
2004:	\$295,113	\$170,529

*** As of June 1**

Source: N.J. Election Law Enforcement Commission



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