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 **Yuma
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FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 2017

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Details on C6

75 CENTS



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FORMER YUMA
COUNTY SHERIFF
RALPH OGDEN
(right) stands with
wife Patty Ogden
after he received
a lifetime
achievement
award from
the Arizona
Criminal Justice
Commission
in 2011. "... he
never treated
anybody bad...
there weren't
many people who
disliked him,"
Patty Ogden
says of her late
husband.

LOANED PHOTO



LIFE STORY

Ogden remembered as 'fair,' 'community-minded'

BY BLAKE HERZOG
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Retired Yuma County Sheriff Ralph Ogden was in office so long — 20 years, a record — he came up with his own logo and had stickers made from it, which he placed on the back of all his trucks.

Consisting of a starred cowboy hat on top of a mustache, it's immortalized in the sandstone surface of his backyard patio and now stands as a tribute to someone who loved his

work, his family and the community they were in.

"He was funny," his wife, Patty Ogden, said Thursday.

Ogden died Wednesday morning at 70 of complications from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a thickening and hardening of inner lung tissue that has no known cause. His wife said in an interview he likely would have run for a sixth consecutive term as sheriff in 2012 if he hadn't become ill.

SEE OGDEN/A5



PHOTO BY BLAKE HERZOG/YUMA SUN

RALPH OGDEN'S unofficial personal "logo" is recreated in stone on the back patio of his home in Yuma.

OGDEN

FROM PAGE A1

"He was diagnosed seven years ago, and they gave him six months to live, so we were blessed to have him for all of that time," she said of her husband of 45 years, while sitting in the kitchen of their Yuma home.

Ralph Ogden started out a New Englander, born in Salem, Mass., and raised in Maine, but never left Yuma once he was transferred there by the Marine Corps, shortly after joining in 1966. "Because he came from the snow and he wanted to stay warm," Patty said, laughing. "He didn't want any part of it."

After four years in the military, he headed almost straight into the Yuma County Sheriff's Office. "He had a short job with a finance company, and he knew that he didn't want to be behind a desk," Patty Ogden said.

In 1970 he started out as a jailer and dispatcher in Parker, then still part of Yuma County, and was promoted to deputy in 1971, the same year he and Patty married, having met at a birthday party they arrived at with different dates and left together. (Their respective dates also married each other.)

He always had his trademark mustache, except for a period in his early career when then-Sheriff Travis Yancey kept telling him to shave it off, which Ogden would do, then grew it back until Yancey's resistance was worn down.

"It wasn't as pronounced, but it got bigger and bigger as the years went by," added Matt Catron, a close friend of the Ogdens and chief administrative officer for the YCSO, under Ogden as well as current Sheriff Leon Wilmot.

Patty Ogden said her husband wasn't consciously cultivating an Old West look, "I think that was just part of him. And anybody

that knows him knows that's a big part of him."

Ralph was promoted in 1974 to sergeant and transferred from Parker and took over the Wellton substation, becoming an East County fixture.

"He was very community minded, just involved in everything that was going on," Patty said.

"And asked his staff to be, too," Catron added. "As part of the promotional process, you had to be involved in the community."

Sheriff John R. Phipps named Ogden to be his undersheriff, or chief deputy, in 1980. Catron said Ogden kept his popularity with employees as he rose through the ranks.

"Sure, there are always the one-percenters, but he was always a very fair person, he never treated anybody bad. He had to discipline people when they did something wrong, that's what he's paid to do. But there weren't many people who disliked him," he said.

As undersheriff, Ogden campaigned with Phipps for passage of a bond to get a new county jail built after the existing one was shut down by a court order. "That jail opened in 1987, and it filled up in three years," Catron said. "We were back to double-bunking."

So Ogden, whose first term as sheriff began in January 1993, went to work pushing for state-level legislation to enable the creation of a sales tax-supported jail district, then campaigned for a Yuma County district the following year, 1994.

The county now has 756 jail beds, Catron said.

"He's had many, many accomplishments, done many, many things, been on hundreds of boards and committees and everything. Really, it's too numerous to mention; really the whole front page would have to go to him," Patty Ogden said.

"If it had 'board' behind

it, it probably had his name in front of it," Catron said.

"It wasn't like he sought out (to be) popular or whatever. People came to him and asked him to be on their board because they knew his reputation, and he volunteered. They knew what kind of person he was," Patty Ogden said — a "worker bee."

He was the founding president of the Southwest Border Sheriffs Coalition, formed to lobby Washington for help on international boundary-crossing issues such as drugs and property crimes linked to undocumented immigrants, as well as migrants victimized by crime or succumbing to the desert heat.

The deaths of 14 out of 26 people crossing eastern Yuma County in May 2001 was a particularly harsh reminder for Ogden. "It wasn't 'keep them back,' it was that people were getting killed and we don't have the resources to help them. And that affected Ralph, because we had to go in there and get all those bodies," Catron said.

He would unwind from the pressures of work through photography and outdoorsy hobbies like fishing, hunting and camping, as well as playing practical jokes on family and friends, mostly in the form of gag gifts.

"I got a lot of Christmas presents that were totally off the wall," Patty laughed. One Christmas, she had to use safety goggles and a mining pick to crack open a cement block, which contained a diamond bracelet.

She said arrangements are still being made for a "celebration of life" service for her husband, but it will likely be held at the county fairgrounds after the fair is held in early April.

Ogden, a Democrat, had friends on both sides of the aisle, including U.S. Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Arizona, who he endorsed for Senate. Flake read a tribute to Og-

den into the congressional record Thursday.

Patty Ogden said her husband voted for candidates, not political parties. "I think that's an important thing for people to remember, there's not all good Republicans or bad Republicans, or good Democrats or bad Democrats. You have to know the person," she said.

Ralph Ogden, tall enough for his cowboy boots and Stetson hat to boost his height above 7 feet, cut a memorable figure in the county, and his influence is being passed from law enforcement generation to generation.

San Luis, Arizona Police Chief Craig Higgins said Ogden promoted cooperation between the different county agencies that hadn't existed before, and got to know him and Wilmot through his former role leading the local Drug Enforcement Agency Office.

"Every once in a while I'd run into Ralph and say everything's going good, and he says, 'Remember, Yuma is one big family. Everyone knows everyone and everyone respects everyone. And we respect the people, so the people respect us back,'" Higgins said. "And I use that in San Luis all the time."

He said his son had just graduated that day from a military police academy at Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo. "I asked my son, 'What made you start doing this?' And he goes, 'Do you remember that one photo we took at the Sheriff's Gathering of Badges (an annual local law enforcement mixer at Yuma County Fairgrounds)?" and that was with Ralph.

"(My son said) we were just talking and everything, and I just thought that would be cool, the way he gets along with everybody and everybody likes him. That's what law enforcement's all about."