

first person

with Calcasieu Parish Sheriff Tony Mancuso
by Kristy Como Armand

He's spent over half of his life working in law enforcement and has no intention of changing course. In his own words, "There's still a lot I want to accomplish." Calcasieu Parish Sheriff Tony Mancuso is serving his fourth term and has run unopposed in the last three elections.

From an entry level position at the parish jail, Mancuso carved an impressive career path that included several years serving as Ward 3 City Marshall before he ran for Sheriff – and won. As Sheriff, he is responsible for 900 employees and supervises all the additional services under that department, including the regional crime lab, five-parish Training Academy, tax collection and the parish jail.

A graduate of McNeese State University, Mancuso has an extensive list of advanced training programs, including graduation from the FBI National Academy and the National Sheriff's Institute, among others. He has held many state-wide and national appointments for law enforcement organizations.

In his tenure as Sheriff he has brought the office into the 21st century by obtaining state-of-the-art equipment, technology and law enforcement resources. He is credited with bringing the law enforcement community in Southwest Louisiana together to show a spirit of cooperation often held up as a model to follow in other parts of the country.

An avid outdoorsman, Mancuso loves hunting and fishing. He is married to the former Mickey Pruden and they are the parents of three adult children and grandparents to three grandchildren.

Thrive recently visited with Sheriff Mancuso about his career and plans for the future.



What was your childhood like growing up in Lake Charles?

Perfect. It really was. I wish everybody could have the upbringing that I had, with a mother and father who loved us; took care of us. They were not wealthy, but we weren't poor. They worked hard to provide for us and we had a great life. I still live on the same property where I grew up. My parents gave me and my brother and sister a lot to build a house on, so we all live next to each other on the same road. We're a tight-knit bunch. My mother is still alive and I live right behind her, so I get to see her often and help take care of her.

Did you always know that you wanted to go into law enforcement?

No, not at all. I wanted to be an architect. I took drafting in high school and would draw up house plans all the time. I

took a job at the Sheriff's Office when I was 20 years old, in the jail, while I was at McNeese and my life changed. I knew this was where I belonged. I switched my major to criminal justice and this became my whole life. I love it. I grew up here – it's my home. The people here are like my family. I can't image being anywhere else or doing anything else.

Describe your career path in law enforcement.

I started in February of 1984 as a corrections officer at the jail. I moved into patrol and then around 1986, I was assigned to the youth division and also put over the Crime Stoppers program. I did that for the next 10 or 11 years. This gave me an opportunity to get a true overview of the department. I got to work with detectives in solving crimes with Crime Stoppers; working on a lot of unsolved and/or tough cases. Then in 1996, I ran

for City Marshal and won. I held that office until I ran for Sheriff in 2003. I took office in 2004 and I've been here ever since. It's been a great career. I feel like I do a good job and I feel like the people think I'm doing a good job. I'm just past the middle of my 4th term. I have no political aspirations other than being Sheriff. But you know, it's not my job – the position belongs to the people and they have to elect me, so as long as they'll have me, I'll be here working hard for them as their Sheriff.

What do you feel has been your greatest accomplishment as Sheriff?

I look at all the things we've done and I feel our really big accomplishment is bringing the department into the digital world. When I took office in 2004, we were sorely lacking in technology. We still did handwritten reports and sent them to a typist. We didn't have cameras or computers in the cars. Everything moved slowly – usually waiting on the report to get typed. We were behind the times. We've invested a lot in improving the infrastructure of our Sheriff's Office, and everything is integrated now. We can match up with any other department in the country. We have the latest technology and that's what it takes today to solve crime. If you don't keep up with that and continue to stay abreast of developments as you grow, then you're going to fall behind. It changes every single day and we're constantly learning and evolving from a technological standpoint.

What's your greatest challenge?

Drugs. The influence of drugs and alcohol abuse are an ongoing battle for us. I'm sure most law enforcement professionals would

agree. Illegal substances fuel our crime. Most of our domestic violence issues are drug and/or alcohol related. Most of our criminal activity such as thefts and violent crime have some degree of drug involvement. We continually try new things and new approaches, and work hard to combat it, but it's remains one of our toughest challenges.

Describe a time when you were most proud of your staff and the work you all do.

I'm proud of them all the time, but I think during and after Hurricane Rita and the level of performance they gave this community will always stand out as a really proud period of time for me. Keep in mind, we did not have the type of technology we have now to deal with large-scale disaster – it was just a year into our first term. We didn't have the equipment we have today, but they did an incredible job keeping order and managing the evacuation, all at a time when their homes and families were also at risk. This makes the point that even with the technology we've added, the key component of our performance is the human element. Technology helps us perform our jobs, but you still must have the drive, the knowledge and the dedication to serve to help you do the tough tasks, such as dealing with a major catastrophic event such as Rita. That same performance level was evident during the subsequent flooding of Gustav and Ike, and even more recently, last year, in the Vinton and Starks area when Harvey caused flooding. I think every time we have one of those events, it makes me so very proud of the men and women who work here and the true dedication they have to this department and the community we serve.

Your son also works in law enforcement. How do you feel about that?

I'm proud of him. I'm proud of all my kids. I think that's one of Mickey and my greatest accomplishments personally – our children – who are all grown up and happily married, raising families of their own. I'm proud of Trey for choosing a law enforcement career, but as a father, of course I worry about him. It's just a different time and it scares me, but I know he's been trained and I know his character; he's going to do his job and do it right and he's going to do everything with his training to protect himself.

What is the best advice you've ever received?

You know, I have a saying on my desk that is something one of my former supervisors told me. I honestly don't remember who said it to me, but it stuck with me, and it's probably the best advice I have ever received: 'There's no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit.' I've found this to hold true throughout my career. As much as I love this department and being Sheriff, I know that if it weren't for the men and women who work here I would not be who or what I am today. They're the ones who go out there every day and do the tough, dangerous work. I'm typically back here at the office, providing direction. That's a big part of my job -- to give them the tools and resources they need to do their job well. Of course, I have to answer to the public, so I get singled out for praise or criticism, but the people who work here are unbelievable and deserve all the credit for our success. That's something I never forget.

Is there anything about the Sheriff's Office you wish people knew or understood better?

I wish they understood how much these men and women truly care about their community and about each other. Law enforcement today is under so much scrutiny and pressure compared to when I started out. That adds to the already high stress of the job. We've worked hard to earn the public's trust and I think we have that here in Calcasieu Parish, but that's not always true across the country. Our philosophy is that we treat people like they're family. We feel like if that's the way our atmosphere is -- internally and to the public -- we may make mistakes, but we're always going to try to do the right thing. I believe that shows in how we conduct our business every day.

I appreciate that our community does stand behind us. I'm very thankful to live and work here because we really do live in a good, safe community. It's not perfect, and we're not without problems, but we can handle our problems and we work through them together.

