

Ariz. Posse to Arrest Illegal Immigrants

 Associated Press

May 4 06:49 PM US/Eastern

By AMANDA LEE MYERS

Associated Press Writer

PHOENIX (AP) - A posse of 100 volunteers and sheriff's deputies will patrol the Phoenix area and arrest any illegal immigrants, the county sheriff said.

The group likely will be deployed across parts of Maricopa County by the weekend, Sheriff Joe Arpaio said Wednesday.

Volunteers will be drawn from the department's 3,000-member posse, whose members are trained and are often former deputies.

"It's important to send the message out to stay in Mexico and don't come roaming around here hoping you're going to get amnesty," said Arpaio, who in years past gained notoriety for putting inmates on chain gangs and issuing them striped uniforms and pink underwear.

Arpaio's deputies have already arrested about 120 illegal immigrants using a new state smuggling law.

"We're going to arrest any illegal who violates this new law," he said. "I'm not going to turn these people over to federal authorities so they can have a free ride back to Mexico. I'll give them a free ride into the county jail."

Under the law—as interpreted by the Maricopa County attorney—illegal immigrants can be arrested and prosecuted for conspiracy to smuggle themselves into the country. The law's authors have said they intended it to be used to prosecute smugglers, not the immigrants being smuggled.

Lawyers for nearly 50 undocumented immigrants charged with conspiracy to commit human smuggling have filed motions to have the charges dismissed.

A Los Angeles attorney brought into the case last week by the Mexican Consul General's Office in Phoenix plans to file another motion claiming Maricopa County Attorney officials are violating state and federal law because it's the federal government's job to control illegal immigration.

Both motions are to be argued in county court on May 23.

Copyright 2006 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.