

[Larry Barker](#)

# Playing Cop: the Lake Arthur badge scheme

A two-month KRQE News 13 Investigation

By:

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LAKE ARTHUR, N.M. (KRQE) - "It's kind of like going back to the Wild West," State Rep. Bill Rehm said.

"When I first looked at it I went oh my God," New Mexico Municipal League Executive Director Bill Fulginiti said.

And when State Police Chief Pete Kassetas found out what is going on in Lake Arthur, New Mexico he said, "It makes absolutely no sense. It's dangerous. It's inexcusable."

To the casual observer, Lake Arthur is just a picturesque village 33 miles south of Roswell. But behind the scenes, there's something terribly wrong in Lake Arthur, New Mexico: Population 430.

The focus of KRQE News 13's investigation is on the Village Police Department. Officially Lake Arthur doesn't really have a police department. The village pays volunteer cops \$20 a year to occasionally write speeding tickets. But our investigation finds, unofficially, Lake Arthur has amassed an underground police force with more than 100 gun-toting officers on its roster. None of them live in Lake Arthur. In fact, most don't even live in New Mexico.

For example, Lake Arthur Police Sgt. **Come Chantrel** lives in Los Angeles. Sgt. Jonathon Gourley lives in Colorado. And Sgt. **Duane Liptak** lists a Texas address. It's a scheme cooked up by Lake Arthur's volunteer Police Chief Will Norwood. KRQE's investigation finds "Chief" Norwood passed out authentic looking police credentials to scores of his friends and associates, as well as numerous celebrities across the country.

In his more than 40 years with the New Mexico Municipal League, Bill Fulginiti says he's never seen anything like it. "It just actually blew me away," Fulginiti said.

"My opinion is it's a complete sham. My opinion is that what's happening in Lake Arthur needs to be stopped immediately and that Chief needs to be held responsible," said the State Police Chief Pete Kassetas who serves on the Law Enforcement Academy Board.

The Lake Arthur badge scheme was set up 13 years ago.

"We started it out as a way to have more law enforcement here in the town," Lake Arthur's long-time Mayor Ysidro Salazar said. "Our community is so small that we can't afford to pay a police officer a lot of money."

Will Norwood came up with a suggestion to help the village with a no-cost law enforcement solution. Norwood submitted his proposal to the Lake Arthur Town Council. "He came up with the idea that maybe we can have some reserves and they'll help us out," Mayor Salazar recollected.

Norwood proposed forming a Lake Arthur posse of sorts, a group of volunteers called Reserve Officers who could help keep the village safe. Because reservists are not certified police officers, under New Mexico law they do not have law enforcement powers to act on their own and they cannot make arrests.

The Lake Arthur Reserve Police Program was launched in 2005. But instead of recruiting local residents, the "Chief" rounded up a posse from across the country. There were ex-military buddies, gun enthusiasts and a handful of celebrities.

For example, military hero and "Lone Survivor" **author Marcus Luttrell** from Texas signed on with the tiny southeastern village Police Department. So did **Rob O'Neil**, the ex-Navy Seal who claimed to have killed Osama Bin Laden. Mixed Martial Arts legend **Royce Gracie** and his brother Royler were recruited along with **Jiu-Jitsu guru David Adiv** from New Jersey.

Norwood also recruited ex-Navy Seal and sometime actor [Andrew Arrabito](#), who calls California home.

More than 80 percent of the Lake Arthur police force live out of state. KRQE's investigation found at least 112 names on the Lake Arthur police roster. "They were here as volunteers. They would fly in, do their time and then they would go back home," Lake Arthur Mayor Salazar said.

Although Lake Arthur's Reserve Officers had limited law enforcement authority only within the village limits, "Chief" Norwood set up the volunteer posse as if it were a legitimate police department. The "Chief" organized a Lake Arthur Training Division and claimed all Reserve Officers would be required to pass a comprehensive police officer training program. However, New Mexico Law Enforcement Training Academy Executive Director Stephan Marshall says Lake Arthur's training program is not accredited. "Basic (police officer) training has to be through a certified academy," Marshall said.

KRQE News 13's investigation finds Lake Arthur's "Chief" abused his authority by passing out legitimate police credentials. In exchange for a \$400 annual fee paid to the private Lake Arthur Reserve Police Officer Association, the credentials Will Norwood issued gave his friends full police powers with statewide authority. A Lake Arthur commission card allows an individual to wear badges, carry concealed weapons, bypass accredited training and play cop.

Why would private citizens want New Mexico police credentials? "There's probably a couple of reasons," State Police Chief Pete Kassetas said. "Many people want to be police officers and just can't. So that's what it seems like what they're doing is they're somewhat buying their way in."

Chief Kassetas said the difference between a businessman with a Lake Arthur badge living in California and a New Mexico State Police Officer is, "Twenty-two weeks of on-site closely evaluated training. The difference is the 14 step process to even get to the academy. The difference is that my officers aren't able to walk in, write a check and then leave with a badge and credentials and a gun."

Lake Arthur's police roster includes Texas actor Will Rivera and businessman Oliver Brooks. Brooks calls himself "Captain Brooks" and keeps a Lake Arthur take-home patrol car parked in the driveway of his Los Ranchos estate, north of Albuquerque. Los Ranchos is 242 miles from the village of Lake Arthur.



Oliver Brooks LA Unit

"I asked the Chief about that and he said that Oliver (Brooks) had bought that car to donate to the reserve unit and that the car had been having engine problems so he decided not to do it," Mayor Salazar said. "(Brooks wanted to) keep it up there in Los Ranchos because the Chief told me ... they were having problems with break-ins in (Los Ranchos) and he thought that the car sitting at his house would be a deterrent."

Oliver Brooks has since been told to remove the Lake Arthur Police insignia from his vehicle. The Los Ranchos businessman did not return repeated calls for comment.

Jordan Nighbert, who owns an Albuquerque self-defense school, has a Lake Arthur commission and falsely claims on his resume to be a certified police officer.

Even though Texan Allan Brooks is not a certified police officer, he used his Lake Arthur credentials to take part in a 2015 drug task force raid in Artesia. While trying to serve a warrant the suspect in the case was shot and killed. According to State Police investigators, Brooks was one of three who fired his weapon. Brooks was not charged.

Charles Pressburg flashed his Lake Arthur police credentials after he was busted for shooting his brother-in-law in Oregon last year. Pressburg pleaded guilty and was sentenced to eighteen months probation. Mayor Salazar says after the shooting incident Pressburg was removed from the Lake Arthur police roster.

When ex-Navy Seal James Dennis "JD" Smith was charged with drug smuggling by the DEA in North Carolina last year, he carried Lake Arthur police credentials. Smith was indicted on the charges and will face a jury trial later this month. Lake Arthur's Mayor admits Smith was a Reserve Officer and says his Commission was revoked after his arrest.

Albuquerque attorney and former Bernalillo County Commissioner Simon Kubiak runs the Lake Arthur Reserve Police Officer's Association. Although Kubiak has no police training he is listed in Lake Arthur's records as a Lieutenant. Kubiak's private association collects the \$400 in annual dues from each of the posse members. However, the Albuquerque attorney refused to release an accounting of the funds and would not agree to be interviewed about the money.

"It looks like to me like it's a fraternity that wants to carry concealed guns," said State Rep. Bill Rehm, who is a retired Bernalillo County Sheriff's Captain and also a member of the BCSO Reserves.

Rehm says, in his opinion, the Lake Arthur Police Department is not by the book. "They're not following any of the procedures prescribed by the Law Enforcement Academy and the documentation that you showed me is totally inadequate to even be a police agency," Rep. Rehm said.

Bill Fulginiti says it looks like, "People from outside the state and some inside the state ... (are) taking advantage of a small village and their ability to issue commission cards and use those to get concealed carry authorization and further their own interests."

Chief Pete Kassetas has some advice for Lake Arthur's Police Chief. "This is an abuse of your power. You need to cease and desist operating this program. You need to recall all those credentials immediately," Kassetas said.

Will Norwood did not show up for a scheduled interview at Lake Arthur's Town Hall. Subsequently, he refused to return News 13's phone calls for comment. After being placed on Administrative Leave by Lake Arthur's Mayor, Norwood turned in his resignation.

Mayor Ysidro Salazar now says he is "bothered" by Norwood handing police commissions to his out-of-state friends. Did the village law enforcement chief mislead the Town Council? "Yeah, he probably did," Mayor Salazar said.

"Because of you asking for the names (on the Lake Arthur police roster) to be released, a lot of the Reserve Unit resigned," Mayor Salazar said. "When (the officers) resigned I dismantled the Reserve Unit." He said all the Lake Arthur police credentials issued by Will Norwood have been recalled and will be destroyed.

Lake Arthur's Town Council has asked the Chaves County Sheriff to patrol the village now that the police department has been dismantled.

The Lake Arthur badge scheme is being investigated by Federal and State officials.

"We try to do good in this community and it just got away from us I guess, Larry," Mayor Salazar said.

### Table of Lake Arthur Reserve Police Officer Roster

(Lake Arthur would not provide KRQE News 13 with a complete list of Reserve Officers)

	<b>Name</b>	<b>State</b>
1	<a href="#">David Adiv</a>	NJ
2	Mario Armijo	CA
3	Andrew Arrabito	CA
4	James Assad	CA
5	Louie III Banks	NC
6	<a href="#">Dan Bilzerian</a>	CA
7	Kevin Boland	
8	David Bolgiano	DE
9	Nicolaas Bosch	KS

10	Oliver Brooks	NM
11	<a href="#">Allan Brooks</a>	TX
12	Truman Brooks	CT
13	Jonathan Canipe	CO
14	Bryan Carpenter	MS
15	Toshiro Carrington	CA
16	Craig Castellanos	CA
17	<a href="#">Come Chantrel</a>	CA
18	Adam Chavez	NM
19	Hunt Collins	CA
20	Christopher Connors	MD
21	Brian Cook	CA
22	Charles Cotey	
23	Akshara Crites	NM
24	Keith Daris	CA
25	Cameron Dieterle	VA
26	Mark Dietz	NM
27	Skip Drish	
28	Nicholas Esayian	CA
29	Warren Evert	KS
30	Art Fabela	NM
31	Jason Falla	
32	Ralph Fisher	MI
33	Burns Forsythe	NM
34	<a href="#">Tej Gill</a>	

35	Chris Givvines	MD
36	Jose Gordon	
37	Jonathan Gourley	CO
38	<a href="#">Royler Gracie</a>	CA
39	<a href="#">Royce Gracie</a>	CA
40	Michael Green	VA
41	Tyler Grey	
42	<a href="#">Chase Hamilton</a>	NM
43	Andrew Haywood	UT
44	Sean Hergerger	
45	Ronald Hill	FL
46	Stephen Hodnett	TX
47	Daniel Hutson	NM
48	AJ James	
49	Mark Johnson	AZ
50	Jerod Johnson	AZ
51	Charles Kauffman	NM
52	<a href="#">Kevin Kent</a>	CA
53	<a href="#">John Klier</a>	CA
54	David Kuang	
55	<a href="#">Simon Kubiak</a>	NM
56	Charles Lafferty	PA
57	Raymond Jr. Lallo	
58	<a href="#">Mark LaRue</a>	TX
59	Charles Lasky	WI

60	Charles III Law	CA
61	<a href="#">Duane Liptak</a>	TX
62	Marcus Luttrell	
63	Brian Mackey	
64	Daniel McClelland	
65	<a href="#">Robert Mercer</a>	NY
66	Frank Methola	NM
67	James Miller	
68	Dustin Mohacsi	CA
69	Andrew Mullins	
70	Piya Navanugraha	CA
71	Terry Nelson	NM
72	<a href="#">Jordan Nighbert</a>	NM
73	Donald Ochoa	CA
74	Micah Olsen	AZ
75	<a href="#">Robert O'Neil</a>	
76	James Patterson	
77	Danielle Pinkston	CA
78	Matthew Powell	NM
79	Kevin Power	NM
80	<a href="#">Charles Pressburg</a>	NC
81	<a href="#">Peter Pukish</a>	
82	Harrison Rakes	NM
83	Timothy Reams	TX
84	Evan Rees	NM



85	David Rhoden	
86	Glenn Riccio	VA
87	Freddie Richard	CA
88	Xavier Ries	ID
89	William Rivera	TX
90	William Rodriguez	TX
91	Thomas Samples	DE
92	Damon Schaefer	
93	Matthew Schamroth	NY
94	<a href="#">Richard Schulze</a>	FL
95	Arthur Schulze	FL
96	<a href="#">James Smith</a>	VA
97	Tyrone Smith	CA
98	Timothy St Hilaire	TX
99	Christopher Stoechner	NM
100	Michael Szot	RI
101	David Paul Thomas	KS
102	Lewis Thomas	KS
103	<a href="#">Alexander Trafton</a>	CA
104	Christopher Wear	
105	George Wells	
106	Harlan Williamson	
107	Scott Wolff	NV
108	Bryan Yarbro	CA
109	Trent Zimmer	LA

# Reserve officer from New Mexico arrested in Oregon shooting

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By Associated Press

Monday, February 13th, 2017 at 8:39am

EUGENE, Ore. — Authorities say a reserve police officer from New Mexico was arrested after a shooting in Eugene, Oregon.

Eugene police say 44-year-old Charles Pressburg was drinking Saturday night and fired a round shortly after midnight. The Register-Guard reports (<https://is.gd/Ld3NnF> ) police did not disclose any information about the victim, except that the person was taken to a hospital for treatment of an injury that's not life-threatening.

Pressburg was booked into jail on charges of assault, reckless endangering, unlawful use of a weapon and negligent wounding of another.

Pressburg is from Lake Arthur, a small town in southeastern New Mexico. The Lake Arthur Police Department placed Pressburg on administrative leave pending an internal investigation.

## NM town stops badge program

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By Zachary R. Mider And Zeke Faux / Bloomberg

Wednesday, April 18th, 2018 at 11:45pm

The tiny New Mexico town that handed out police badges to dozens of out-of-towners, including New Mexico native and New York hedge fund manager Robert Mercer, is stopping the practice.

Lake Arthur Mayor Ysidro Salazar said he shut the town's volunteer reserve-officer program earlier this month and is asking current reserve officers to hand in their credentials, which allowed them to carry concealed weapons in every state. The mayor put Chief William Norwood, who ran the program and served as Lake Arthur's sole full-time paid police officer, on administrative leave. His status will be discussed at a future town council meeting, Salazar said. Norwood didn't respond to requests for comment.

Mercer, a graduate of Sandia High School and the University of New Mexico, reportedly plowed \$15 million into Cambridge Analytica, which helped both the Trump campaign in the U.S. and the Brexit movement in the United Kingdom, the Albuquerque Journal reported last month.

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The previously obscure online data-mining firm has been thrust into the national media glare after revelations it harvested Facebook user information to help propel Donald Trump into the White House in 2016.

The volunteer officer program was the subject of a March 28 article in Bloomberg Businessweek. At its peak, the department said, almost 150 volunteers were serving as reserve officers for a town of 433 residents. The reservists were scattered around the country. Their right to carry a concealed weapon in all 50 states is a perk available to law enforcement officers under a 2004 federal law. More recently, the department winnowed the program to 84 members.

“Because of the notoriety this was bringing, I decided to go ahead and disassemble the unit,” Salazar said. The Businessweek story “didn’t put the town in a very good light.” He said Norwood’s intentions were good, but the “program got a little bit too big for him and a lot of the reserves kind of took advantage of that fact.”

Mercer, a prominent donor to President Donald Trump who bankrolled Breitbart News and the political-data company Cambridge Analytica, served as a Lake Arthur reserve officer from 2011 to 2017, according to department records. An organization he funded awarded a grant to the Lake Arthur reserve program and also advocated nationally for the rights of police officers to carry concealed weapons. Mercer works at Renaissance Technologies, a hedge fund based in East Setauket, N.Y., where until recently he was co-chief executive officer. Mercer’s son-in-law George Wells also had a Lake Arthur badge.

A spokesman for Mercer declined to comment.

According to Forbes magazine, Mercer donated \$24.6 million to the Republican Party in 2016. He has reportedly invested \$10 million into Breitbart, the conservative news site. Financial journals place his net worth between \$900 million and more than \$1 billion.

*Journal staff contributed to this report.*