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## 'I'M PAID TO HUNT THE HUMAN ANIMAL'

### Area private eye has uncovered crooked politicians, cheating spouses

By Jake Armstrong  
NEWS-SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Twenty-two truckloads of asphalt bound for Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory mysteriously went missing in the early 1990s.

Despite the high level of security that engulfs the nuclear weapons-testing lab — visitors are under the watch of machine gun-toting soldiers — no one knew exactly what happened to that shipment, which was to be used for two parking lots near the site's nuclear reactor.

Then Robert Archuleta's phone rang. It was a representative of the U.S. government who wanted the private investigator to find out where the missing asphalt went.

So Archuleta headed out to the lab from his Stockton office, scoured blueprints for the parking lots and began taking measurements of the asphalt that had been laid.

Before long the problem was clear: The design showed the lots as 350 feet long, when in reality they were twice that length.

"There was the asphalt," Archuleta

said in a recent interview, releasing a staccato, wheeze-like laugh resembling that of Mutley, the cartoon dog of the classic Hanna-Barbera features.

A private eye for more than two decades, Archuleta has plied his trade to uncover crooked politicians, cheating spouses and a fair share of fraud and waste.

Much of his work is for insurance companies, which involves fact-finding missions at work-related accident scenes and automobile collisions. But he also delves into realms of embezzlement, industrial espionage and the oc-

casional search for a murderer who has eluded police.

"I'm paid to hunt the human animal," said Archuleta, 58. "And it's fun."

Archuleta launched his career as a private investigator in 1983, after five years as an officer, investigator and sergeant for the Lodi Police Department, followed by stints as an engineering contractor and a deputy U.S. Marshal. He now partners with his 30-year-old son, Jordan, to run Archuleta and Associates Investigative Services.

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JAKE ARMSTRONG/NEWS-SENTINEL

Private investigator Robert Archuleta has plied his trade for more than two decades to uncover crooked politicians, cheating spouses and a fair share of fraud and waste.

# Private Eye

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The company has two offices, but given the number of cases he works — 92 since January — most of his time is spent behind the front wheel of his car, which is packed with black leather briefcases stuffed with files, numbered and affixed with combination locks.

Archuleta usually begins his work by reviewing any documents or evidence associated with a case. From there it's a matter of stacking up the facts involving that case so that insurance attorneys can make their case in court.

"When something doesn't go together, it's your job to find out why it doesn't fit," Archuleta said. "Our job is to pile up the rocks and let the attorneys throw them at will."

The job has also taught him some hard truths about human nature: If a wife or husband suspects that their spouse is stepping out, they're probably right; and that there are two kinds of people in the world — good and bad.

Even Archuleta has found his position questioned when it comes to those two words.

His reputation was temporarily singed in 2004 when his longtime friend Baxter Dunn, San Joaquin County sheriff at the time, became embroiled in a federal corruption investigation. Some called for his arrest, but ultimately Archuleta, however, was never

indicted or implicated in the scheme to wrench money from Sunlaw Energy Corp.

Archuleta has learned several tricks of the trade from unlikely places.

Working an industrial espionage case for a firm in a large office building in San Jose, Archuleta needed a way to separate trash from that company — which would hold evidence he needed from the refuse of other companies in the building. He recalled an episode from the 1980s television show "Simon & Simon," in which the investigative brothers put a cigar wrapper in a trash can to mark it. So Archuleta had the maintenance crew use white trash bags in cans at the company, which set them apart when he looked for them in the dumpster out back. And it worked, he said.

Roughly 4,000 full-time licensed private investigators work in California, according to the California Association of Licensed Investigators, the largest association of private investigators in the world.

By uncovering theft of intellectual property or money from businesses or fraud in insurance cases, investigators can help keep the cost of doing business down in a way that benefits the average consumer, said Sean Walsh, president of CALL.

For instance, a large company that pours big money into developing a particular product might suffer devastating financial losses if the design of that product is sold to a competitor by an employee. Those losses

could translate to layoffs, which can crimp the amount of tax revenues flowing into a city or area, Walsh said.

"There's a lot of unseen, or hidden things, in terms of what these investigators actually do — whether it is in an economic way or in a second level of law enforcement," said Walsh, who runs the Novato-based investigation firm of Walsh and Associates.

Investigators also take on missing persons or abducted children cases when law enforcement's limited resources run thin and no resolution to a case is in sight, Walsh said.

Funded privately, an investigator can commit time to a case when detectives stop trailing leads that appear to lead to nowhere. As of late, investigators with high levels of computer experience are used by law enforcement to protect digital evidence of child pornography on computer hard drives so that it may be used effectively in court, he said.

Archuleta wants to get into writing books on workers' compensation and employee-employer relations issues. Until then, however, he says he'll keep hunting down the facts with what he says is the most important tool for an investigator — "a change of shorts."

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