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# Wily "Coyote" Laughs at the INS

By Mark Shaffer

Although he has been deported three times for smuggling illegal immigrants into Arizona, Carlos Humberto Samayoa Lopez has scant respect for law officers.

Those who know him say Samayoa likes to belt down a few cold ones, talk about the stupidity of U.S. immigration officials, then brag about how he tears up all his traffic tickets.

That's hardly the worst of the problems presented by Samayoa, 42, a Guatemalan *coyote* — slang for a smuggler of illegal immigrants. His activities over the past decade illustrate the frustration that mires the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

INS investigators often complain that a "revolving door" of justice provides little incentive for going after *coyotes*. There is ample blame to spread: the courts, which must follow flawed immigration laws; the Border Patrol, which can't keep smugglers out; and the INS, which lacks the manpower to act effectively.

Consider Samayoa.

Since 1983, according to the INS and Guatemalans living in the Valley [Phoenix and environs], Samayoa has smuggled about 2,500 illegals to the Valley from his coffee-growing village of San Francisco Zapotitlan. His reward? About \$3 million.

"He's got five large, brick houses in Guatemala," said Juan, a Phoenix resident who grew up with Samayoa and was smuggled here by him, and who did not want his last name used. "One of the houses he has in San Francisco is two stories with marble columns in the front."

To make the five-day journey from Guatemala to Phoenix, Juan said, Samayoa pays off two sets of Mexican customs officials, one at the Guatemalan-Mexican border and the second at a checkpoint south of Nogales. After crossing the border through holes in the fence at Nogales, Arizona, Samayoa moves the group north on Interstate 19 at a time when the Border Patrol does not staff a checkpoint north of Nogales.

According to INS records, a special operation, code-named Guatemala Express, was set up to nab Samayoa. Three times he has been arrested and deported. Samayoa was arrested in May 1991 on Interstate 10 near Tonopah and charged with transporting seven illegal immigrants. He pleaded guilty and was deported October 23, 1991. Two months later, Samayoa was back in Phoenix with another load of illegals. Arrested on a charge of illegal entry after deportation, he again was deported.

In August 1993, he was deported a third time after being arrested on the same charge.

But Samayoa keeps on trucking, bringing about 20 illegals on a 2,500-mile journey every two or three weeks. About half the Guatemalans remain in the Valley, Juan said, with the rest heading on to California.

The INS says Samayoa's son and nephew help him drive the 12 vehicles he owns and stores at various addresses in the United States and Guatemala. A niece operates "drop houses" in Phoenix for the immigrants he smuggles, and a friend provides them with fake documents so they can obtain welfare and health care.

The INS says Samayoa has been accused in Mexico of sexually assaulting women while en route to Arizona and of robbing others of their jewelry.

Guatemalan national police records show that in 1988, Samayoa was imprisoned seven months after he stole a pickup. Nine years earlier, he had been convicted of wounding a security guard with a firearm after the guard tried to take a friend of Samayoa's into custody.

In Arizona, authorities know of at least eight active cases in which Samayoa has been cited for driving on a suspended license. And that's not counting the various aliases he has used.

"This guy is a nightmare," one INS investigator said, "and we never seem to make any progress against him." ■