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CONTRA COSTA COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT 0903

SHERIFF DEPARTMENT'S VOLUNTEERS GET TOP GRADES FROM THE GRAND JURY

TO: Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office

SUMMARY

The County's fiscal year 2008-2009 budget has been seriously impacted by the loss of income due to the Recession and is severely hampered by enormous unfunded debts. These problems may have a major adverse effect on most County departments, including: a hiring freeze, a reduction of County services and a diminishment of benefits for its employees. The Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff's Volunteer Services Program is a bright shining star rising above the doom and gloom. The 2008-2009 Grand Jury believes this dedicated and hard-working group of individuals must be recognized and applauded.

BACKGROUND

The Grand Jury visited the Volunteer Services Program (VSP) offices in June, 2008. After becoming acquainted with this valuable resource, jury members wanted to learn more about the organization and additional interviews were conducted with Sheriff's personnel. The Grand Jury also interviewed volunteers including a reserve deputy in the Search and Rescue section. The following are the results of this investigation:

FINDINGS

1. The Sheriff's VSP is organized into the following groups:
 - The Sheriff's Air Squadron provides air operation support services. The Air Squadron consists of pilots and observers who conduct personnel transportation, aerial cataloging, aerial surveillance, logistical support, and assistance to the Sheriff's Air Support. The Air Squadron has 8 aircraft, 8 pilots and 7 observers. The pilots bring their privately owned aircraft to the VSP and some also pay for the aviation fuel used. Highlighting the fleet are a 6-passenger twin turbo propeller driven aircraft for long distance transport, and a high performance 5-6 seat

helicopter. One volunteer has recently acquired a larger jet aircraft that requires two pilots and it may be added to the Sheriff's VSP inventory in the near future. Should it be used, its deployment will be limited to major crisis or war. In the calendar year 2007, the Air Squadron members contributed 557 hours of service. The members range in age from 30 to 70 years.

- The Sheriff's Explorer Program is conducted under the auspices of the Boy Scouts of America. The Explorer Program provides members with experience and training in law enforcement. The Explorers participate in public events, provide traffic control, and serve in other ancillary functions. In 2007, the Explorers contributed 5,865 hours of service. The Explorers range in age from 14 to 21 years.
- The Sheriff's Dive Team provides underwater services. Members of the Dive Team are highly trained and certified divers. As requested, the Dive Team activities include body recovery, evidence searches, vehicle recovery and swift water rescue. In 2007, members of the Dive Team contributed 550 hours of service. The Dive Team members range in age from 40 to 70 years.
- The Sheriff's Medical Support Team consists of volunteers with specialized medical training who are prepared to respond during times of emergency or disaster. The Medical Support Team is also trained to deploy in support of the Mobile Field Force and the SWAT team during training or active deployment. This team also provides specialized medical training to the first responders of the Search and Rescue Team. Member retention is difficult for this team due to the monetary loss incurred by medical professionals who contribute time to train with the team. In 2007, members of the Medical Support Team contributed 250 hours of service. The three members of the team range in age from 30 to 50 years.
- The Sheriff's Food Service Unit provides meals to units during extended operations and supports overnight training missions of the other volunteer service units. Events include: SWAT operations, in line-of-duty deaths, search and rescue activations, and other Sheriff's Department functions. In 2007, the Food Service Unit contributed 550 hours of service. The team members, who range in age from 30 to 60 years, are led by a Volunteer Food Service professional. Plans are in place to expand this unit.
- The Sheriff's Reserve Deputy Program provides support for all divisions within the department. Reserve Deputies operate and supplement the daily operations of the Field Services Unit by providing: transportation services, off-road vehicle support, and crime scene support. They assist in many search and rescue functions, and serve at hundreds of community events throughout the year providing operational support, traffic control and event security. Security for the Contra Costa County Fair is provided solely by the Reserve Deputy Program. In 2007, Reserve Deputy Program personnel contributed more than 22,000 hours of service. Its 65 members range in age from 21 to 75 years.

- The Sheriff's Search and Rescue Team is well known throughout the state for its search and rescue efforts. It is regularly called to assist throughout California, including Yosemite and other high risk situations. In addition to responding to routine missing person calls or lost child calls, the team is in a constant training mode. Currently the team is working toward Mountain Rescue Association accreditation and expects to receive it in early 2009. The team operates its own training academy for new members as well as for those who are preparing for advancement assignments. In 2007, the team contributed over 45,000 hours of service. The program's 211 members range in age from 14 to 60 years.
- The Sheriff's Amateur Radio Communications Team (also known as ARC) primarily provides communication support to all department operations. Team members provide essential communications for events and operations, and ultimately support the Office of the Sheriff in times of disaster by providing an alternate means of communication when the normal systems are overloaded or destroyed. In addition they also support the Sheriff's emergency mobile command center. In 2007, the team contributed over 2,000 hours of service. The 22 members of the team range in age from 40 to 60 years.
- The Sheriff's Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (also known as RACES) Team provides communications for all of the emergency operations centers within Contra Costa County. Members are all licensed amateur radio operators (also known as HAMS). During times of disaster the team establishes and supplements communication networks. In 2007, they contributed nearly 4,000 hours of service. The team has 124 members ranging in age from 35 to 70 years.
- The Sheriff's Chaplaincy Program provides spiritual guidance and counseling as needed to all members of law enforcement and the community. Chaplains participate in community events, ride along with deputies on patrol, and assist during times of crisis. In 2007, members contributed in excess of 3,500 hours of service. The 35 members of the team range in age from 40 to 70 years.
- The Sheriff's Auxiliary Volunteer Extended Services (SAVES) program provides assistance to all areas of the Office of the Sheriff. SAVES members can be found providing essential services to the Crime Lab, the Coroner, Field Operations Bureau, and Emergency Services Support Unit. In 2007, members contributed over 15,000 hours of service. The team's 135 members range in age from 18 to 75 years.

2. There are about 500 individuals in the Sheriff's 11 volunteer programs. Approximately fifteen percent are women. The services rendered by these volunteers are equivalent to about 50 full time paid positions yearly. If the County had to pay for the services provided by all of these volunteers it would cost in the vicinity of \$5,000,000.

3. The 500 volunteers are supervised by two county employees.
4. All volunteers are extensively screened. This process includes a Department of Justice background check, a DMV report, and fingerprinting. Reserve Deputy Sheriffs must undergo the same physical, psychological and academic testing as regular Police Officers.
5. All volunteers are trained for emergency responses in their respective programs. The Search and Rescue Team members, for example, must successfully complete training on the Search and Rescue Mutual Aid-Ground Searcher Guidelines before they can be certified to become eligible to participate in search and rescue missions.
6. The Search and Rescue Team members pay for some of their own rescue gear, which can be costly. It is not unusual for team members to incur costs of \$1000 to \$2000 during their first year.
7. The county provides the first uniform for volunteers and also pays an annual uniform allowance of \$150 - if there is adequate money in the budget.
8. The Reserve Deputy Program members provide services for events not normally budgeted by the County Sheriff's Department. They are not paid for these services.
9. Most volunteers maintain their volunteer status and do not apply to become a sworn Deputy Sheriff.
10. The longest tenured volunteer has 35 years of dedicated service and pictured below is the oldest volunteer in the program, a retired deputy sheriff sergeant who is 75 years old.



CONCLUSION

The Grand Jury is very impressed with all aspects of the VSP. The dedication displayed by these citizens is outstanding, and the professionalism of the officers in charge is exemplary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The VSP would be more effective if more support staff were made available. Currently, two county employees are supervising 500 people. We recommend that the Sheriff identify the amount of funds necessary to support additional staff to enhance this valuable county resource.
2. Other than for emergency services, the Sheriff should consider generating revenue from the services the volunteers perform. The Sheriff should consider whether event organizers should pay a nominal fee for volunteer services provided, including events such as athletic events, car shows, parades, and community events.
3. The Sheriff should consider whether all monies generated from the VSP, including funds from the contract with the County Fair, should be reinvested in the volunteer program.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Findings:

Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office: 1 through 10

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Recommendations:

Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office: 1 through 3