

# Police: New initiative won't hurt local effort

By Chris Sykes  
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Police and city officials said residents who may be concerned that the city's participation in Essex County's new Homicide-Major Crimes Task Force will diminish police activities locally should not worry.

While municipal police are the first to respond to homicides, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office, often with local detectives, handles the investigations. The difference now, said Acting Essex County Prosecutor Carolyn Murray, is that detectives in the task force will all be housed in downtown Newark.

"They will now be co-located on the fourth floor of the Essex County Veterans Courthouse," state Attorney General Paula Dow said. "All of the detectives who will be working homicides will be working under a command structure from one location. Co-locating and being together under a single command structure will allow us to respond more quickly when homicides happen."

Dow said she pushed for the creation of a countywide task force when she served as Essex County prosecutor. She and Anthony Ambrose, the chief of detectives for the coun-

ty, said the task force had been 10 years in the making and will benefit to law enforcement agencies.

Through a spokesman, Orange Police Director John Rappaport echoed those sentiments. Capt. Kevin Sooy, who represented the department during Monday's press conference which announced the new task force, said it is the expansion of the good working relationship the city has had with county and state officials for a long time.

"We entered into an agreement with the county, and as a result he will be assigned and investigating crimes throughout Essex County," Sooy said, referring to Detective Peter Cassidy. "But whenever anything happens in Orange, the whole task force assigned to be working on that shift will come to the city to assist us. That will give us extra resources with our investigation and will enable us to free our investigative personnel to do other crimes and follow up on other incidents that have happened in the city."

Sooy said joining the task force will allow Orange police continue taking a preventative approach to crime. As "any crime is one crime too many," Sooy said department personnel

strive to create an environment that is not conducive to crime through their strategies and presence on the city's streets.

"We try to take a proactive approach in Orange and stop crime before it occurs," Sooy said. "We received a technology grant recently from the Attorney General and the Essex County prosecutor that will be used to install cameras throughout the city. We were one of the awardees and we will use it to put up cameras in designated areas."

All this law enforcement activity comes at the right time, Sooy said, as the busy summer season begins.

With the new initiative, everyone in Essex now has a task force dedicated to one specific task — solving homicides. That frees officers to help each other.

"We have mutual aid all the time with our neighboring jurisdictions, and we have mutual-aid agreements we sign annually," Sooy said. "If we need mutual aid, like the fire departments, the officers do respond across borders. This is a designated task force for a specific reason and it will provide resources to all the municipalities in Essex County and to the county itself."