

Cop force returns to strength

Final three laid off are back at work

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

City officials have rehired the last three police officers who had been laid off for budgetary reasons earlier this year.

Police Director John Rappaport swore in the three officers July 19. He said they were the last of the 10 laid-off officers who remained unemployed. Two others who were released secured employment in other municipalities.

Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. said the rehiring was possible through the reallocation of funds made available due to recent retirements of officers. The rehired three are Yolanda Williams, Natea Bomar and Omar Coulote.

"During the time these officers were laid off, the remaining officers of the Orange Police Department rose to the occasion by implementing a successful crackdown on gang violence and increased surveillance of crime hot spots," Hawkins said. "The return of these three, on top of the five brought back in May, will enable us to strengthen those two initiatives. When the officers were laid off, we reorganized our staff so that there would be no reduction of officers actually out on the streets on patrol."

Hawkins credited Rappaport for managing the department's manpower. He said the director's handling of the situation was example of what it means to "do more with less."

"The return of these officers actually enables an increase of the police presence on our streets above the level that existed prior to the layoffs," Hawkins said.

Rappaport said the return of the three could not have come at a better time. He said the city and police have been busy this summer doing the things necessary to promote public safety. The work they have done so far, added Rappaport, was part of a strategy that the administration and police have put together.

"We've made plans to increase our patrols and to strategically deploy our officers and resources to the areas and locations in the city where they can be most effective," Rappaport said.

Hawkins said Rappaport was referring to the "two-pronged approach" for summer safety that includes police, city officials and Recreation Division staff working together to increase public safety.

"I have always believed that idle hands are the devil's playground, so my administration and the City Council have made recreation programs a priority in the city," Hawkins said. "We have to be creative in that regard, and help support that program, because there are a variety of pre-trouble things we can do to intervene and prevent kids from going the wrong way."

Hawkins said in addition to investing in activities and recreation programs for children and teenagers, the Police Department also has been busy. Rappaport said police have "beefed up" their patrols and manpower in the city's parks, playgrounds and other areas where young people congregate.