

ORANGE RECEIVES \$964,000 COPS GRANT

By Dhiren Shah

Federal Grants are not easy to grab it in these rough economic times. From New Jersey, 305 police departments applied for the COPS Hiring Recovery Program money. Orange is one of the 18 police departments to receive such a grant. Nationally, Pittsburgh, Houston, Seattle and Phoenix were among the roughly 6,000 applications rejected.

At a news conference held at 2 pm on July 31st at the Polhill Justice Complex,

29 N. Park St. in Orange, and attended by Senator Frank Lautenberg, Mayor Eldridge Hawkins, Jr. announced that Orange would be receiving \$964,000 from the federal COPS program to hire five police officers for the next three years. COPS is the Justice Department's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The

funding comes from the federal recovery program, and competition for the grants was intense.

The COPS funding is in addition to the recent federal stimulus grant of \$251,503 received by Orange from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program (JAG) for the purchase of five Ford Crown Victoria police cars equipped with radios and mobile data terminals, funding of two current officer salaries, and desktop computer upgrades for the police grant administrator.

Mayor Hawkins, himself a police officer in neighboring West Orange, took the occasion of the news conference to announce that crime was down in Orange in all categories in the year since he took office compared to the prior year, a 9.7% overall reduction. He attributed the reduction in crime to the city's reliance on its new strategy of community policing and said that

Orange won the stimulus funding because the grants are specifically targeted to help cities with successful community policing initiatives.

Mayor Hawkins stated, "I want to thank Senators Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez and Congressman Donald Payne for helping us secure this funding to expand our community policing. Orange is proof that community policing works. We've reduced crime because the Orange Police Department works 365 days a year with community groups and individuals to identify criminals and crime hot spots and to bring criminals to justice. Our community policing has included a successful Gun Buyback Program; Operation Park and Walk, where officers park their cars and walk along major thoroughfares; a fast response complaint system enabling police to monitor crime "hot spots" reported by citizens; plus Adopt a School, Adopt a Street, and Adopt a Church programs in which officers voluntarily participate in community affairs. We expanded Crime Watch activities and energized neighborhood Police Community Council meetings with regular attendance of the Police Director and top police officials."

"With this grant funding, police officers in Orange will be better prepared to perform their duties. The COPS grant is a proven program that has helped drive down crime and strengthen communities.

After years of misguided budget cuts, I am pleased that the program once again has the full support of the White House and will put officers to work enhancing safety and security in our neighborhoods," stated Senator Frank R. Lautenberg."

"No matter the economic climate, we can never let our guard down when it comes to protecting our families and keeping our cities safe from gangs, from violence, and from the new threats we face as a nation. Every mayor knows their first responsibility is to keep their community safe - Mayor Hawkins has done that, and done it well. This investment in our law enforcement and our security will help him keep the streets of Orange safe and provide budgetary relief during these tough times."

Police Director John Rappaport stated, "I am extremely gratified that our department has received these funds. Budgets are difficult to manage in these hard economic times. Police officer jobs are at stake. This endeavor is important to the City and its citizens and the officers who will I am sure continue to provide both efficient and proficient service to our community."

In reply to my question about the difference between last year and this year response time from 911 calls, Director Rapaport stated that they do not have any statistics, but with the compilation of reports, they can state that the response time now is faster than before.

