

EXCELLENCE PERSONIFIED

Ukiah Police Chief And His Finest Are To Be Commended

May 18, 2009

Summary

Law enforcement officers have to deal with numerous difficult situations and the Grand Jury found the Ukiah Police Department (UPD) to be professional and up to the task. Operating with effective new leadership, the department:

- has significantly upgraded its evidence room to a state-of-the-art facility;
- provides a School Resource Officer (SRO) to maintain a law enforcement presence at Ukiah High School and implement drug and gang intervention programs;
- is collaborating with the Sheriff's department to establish a grant-funded K-9 corps;
- works with Project Sanctuary to improve response to domestic violence incidents;
- re-instituted the annual report to the community.

The Department is currently focused on identifying alternative resources to replace State funding that will soon end for booking and forensics. The new Chief is emphasizing local recruiting to fill four currently vacant positions for sworn officers.

Methods

The Grand Jury visited the UPD facility, evidence and training rooms, interviewed personnel regarding operations, and reviewed pertinent documents.

Background

Penal Code § 925a states that *...the grand jury may investigate and report upon the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments, functions, and the method or system of performing the duties of any such city or joint powers agency and make such recommendations as it may deem proper and fit.* The 2008-09 Grand Jury undertook their charge with numerous visits to the City of Ukiah Police Department between August 28 and November 27, 2008.

Findings

1. The Ukiah Police Chief is also in charge of the Ukiah Fire Department as Director of Public Safety.
2. There are three captains, five sergeants, sixteen officers, seven dispatchers, two records clerks, one mechanic, one school resource officer (SRO) and two parking enforcement officers. There are currently no training sergeants.
3. All officers, including the SRO, are assigned their own patrol vehicles.
4. The current SRO has not received special training for his position.
5. The SRO has an office at Ukiah High School (UHS) and also goes to other schools to teach younger children about prevention of alcohol and other drug use, gangs and vandalism.

6. Marijuana and alcohol abuse are the biggest problems in and around the school this year. The SRO and school representatives perform locker and backpack checks on a random basis and whenever there is probable cause.
7. Student affiliation with rival gangs is a significant concern at UHS.
8. Due to construction, the SRO is not able to use his designated parking space in front of the school. This will be corrected when the construction is complete.
9. Dispatchers are given one month training at an academy and then work with an experienced dispatcher for three months.
10. If a non-English speaker calls 911, they are immediately transferred to a communications center where a language specialist transfers them to the correct interpreter.
11. The UPD currently has no service dogs. The UPD and Sheriff's office have received a total of \$100,000 from Homeland Security funds to purchase two dogs, special cars, equipment and training for the officers and the dogs. The officers and their dogs will attend two months of specialized training. Each dog will cost between \$8,000 and \$10,000. An officer has to make a commitment of three to five years to work in this position.
12. One dog will be assigned to the UPD and trained for bomb detection, the other will be assigned to the Sheriff's office for drug detection. Both will be trained to protect the officers.
13. There is an active bicycle law enforcement and safety awareness program. UPD issued 295 warnings and two citations during the past year. Violator's names are taken and logged. The warnings were for bicycle safety and failure to wear helmets.
14. There are two parking officers and one parking enforcement vehicle. Although parking meters have been removed, the officers enforce posted time restrictions. City officials have delayed decisions on downtown parking to study what should be done.
15. The UPD sponsors an Explorers program to introduce young adults, ages 18-20, to law enforcement professions.
16. State funding for forensics and bookings is scheduled to end this year. UPD is seeking alternative funding sources.
17. The Grand Jury found significant upgrades to the evidence room. In particular, the security and cataloging of evidence is now state-of-the-art.
18. Project Sanctuary workers are involved in all domestic violence calls. This is a new collaborative effort between the Chief and Project Sanctuary.
19. The UPD annual report that had been discontinued is being produced again and distributed to the community. Copies are available at the UPD.
20. There are four openings for sworn officers.
21. The Chief stated it is difficult to find qualified applicants that are likely to stay in the community after training because the pay is higher in other cities. For that reason, he is trying to recruit locally.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. any officer assigned to SRO duties be trained prior to assuming these duties. (Finding 4)
2. the SRO have a highly visible designated parking space at UHS. (Finding 8)
3. the UPD and the City of Ukiah should pursue additional funding to secure a second dog trained for drug detection. (Findings 11-12)
4. the UPD increase its emphasis on issuing citations and fines for serious bicycle violations. (Finding 13)
5. the Explorer program be continued. (Finding 15)
6. a continued search for funding for the forensics and bookings programs be given a high priority. (Finding 16)

Discussion

The evidence room is state-of-the-art and well managed. The Grand Jury observed significant improvements and commends the UPD for creating an evidence room that is now a model for other agencies.

Jurors appreciated the cooperation of the Chief and found department staff professional and informative. The jurors were also impressed with the information provided and the enthusiasm shown about re-institution of the K-9 unit.

The policy of involving Project Sanctuary workers in domestic violence calls has proven to be of real value to victims. The Grand Jury commends the Chief for this effective collaboration with an important community agency.

The Grand Jury was also very pleased that the UPD annual report is being produced again and would like to see this continued.

Jurors further commend the Chief for focusing on local recruitment to fill openings.

Required Responses

Ukiah Chief of Police (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Ukiah City Manager (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Ukiah City Council (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Requested Responses

Principal, Ukiah High School (Findings 5-8 and Recommendation 2)

Project Sanctuary (Finding 18)