

MTA Mechanics Moonlight as LA Crime Fighters

By CHRISTINA ESPARZA

(April 26, 2002) By day, they're MTA auto mechanics. By night, they fight crime at every turn.

No, they're not superheroes – they're Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Reserves.

Non-revenue Division 4 mechanics Peter Ostry and Saul Garcia get paid a very modest salary to work as part-time deputies in the cities of Industry and West Hollywood, respectively.



MTA mechanics Saul Garcia, left, and Pete Ostry work a minimum of 20 hours a month for \$1 year to be Los Angeles County Sheriff's Reserves.

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"You do everything that a regular deputy does," Ostry, who has been a reserve since 1997, said. "The only difference is, you go out there for \$1 a year."

Sheriff's Reserves, who are required to work a minimum of 20 hours a month, receive the same training as regular deputies, but go through a more condensed version of the academy. A Reserve cadet, for example, must absorb the same material in a weekend that a deputy cadet covers in a week.

Hand-to-hand combat

Such training includes weapons, hand-to-hand combat, physical training to build stamina and classroom studies that teach language, laws and radio codes, among other things.

Garcia, who is assigned to Metro Red Line Division 20, has been a Sheriff's Reserve for 18 years, and sees his volunteering as an interesting form of community service.

"My motivation was to serve the community and I felt I could make a difference," Garcia said. "I felt law enforcement was a great personal challenge."

Ostry has always been interested in law enforcement, and has a sister who used to work for the Los Angeles Police Department. However, he thought that, rather than being a full-time police officer, being a Reserve would best fit his lifestyle.

"I was looking into being a full-time peace officer, and so before jumping directly into it and finding out I didn't like it and doing it six to seven days a week, I figured I'd sign up to be a Reserve," Ostry said.

Garcia considered becoming a full-time law enforcement officer, but also chose to be a Reserve so he can remain at the MTA.

"At the beginning, I wanted to see what law enforcement was all

about," Garcia said. "But, I decided to stay with the MTA. It was best for me. I enjoy working for the MTA and I didn't want to start a new career."

Some peculiar people

Although the two don't work as often as regular deputies, both have seen their fair share of excitement and have run into some peculiar people. Ostry once detained a woman for domestic violence against her boyfriend and, another time, arrested a courteous criminal.

"This one guy I arrested said the funniest thing," Ostry recalled. "He turned around and told me, 'Deputy, you're the nicest deputy I've ever been arrested by.' I never got a compliment like that before."

Also caught by surprise was Garcia, who made what at the time appeared to be a simple arrest, only to learn later that it helped disband a notorious theft ring in Los Angeles.

"I was working surveillance one night, and arrested someone who had stolen a cellular phone," Garcia said. "It turned out that person was linked to a theft ring and his arrest led to the recovery of millions of dollars worth of electronic equipment. I'm really proud of that one."

As a person who had sometimes been critical of police, Ostry has gained an appreciation and an understanding of those in law enforcement since he has been a Reserve.

"Law enforcement is definitely interesting because you come across different people, and you get to see both sides of it," Ostry said.

For Garcia, being a reserve has been a very rewarding experience. "It's a privilege to be given an opportunity to be in law enforcement. I'll keep doing it as long as I'm healthy and able to do it."

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