

MTA Transit Security Officers Gus Lozano, left, and Henry Solis keep vigil at the general entrance to Gateway Transit Center.



PHOTO: GAYLE ANDERSON

MTA Security Officers, Sheriff's Deputies Help Ensure a Peaceful Strike

By FRANKLIN A. HOLMAN

(October 22, 2003) While work may have changed for some MTA employees during the strike, MTA Security officers and Sheriff's deputies have been busy protecting MTA staff and property.

"The main challenge is ensuring that everyone keeps a cool head when crossing the picket line," Transit Security Lt. Dan Cowden says. "We want staff to relax and be patient when crossing the picket lines."

To ensure a peaceful strike, Security officers have been reassigned to strike duty, working 12-hour shifts, six days a week. The number of Security officers that can be deployed has also increased so they can efficiently monitor gates and patrol rail lines during the strike.

"We have several billion dollars of public assets that we are keeping an eye on," says Cowden.

First Amendment rights

While on duty, Security officers maintain open communication with the picket line captains to ensure that the First Amendment rights of the picketers are protected, says Sheriff's Lt. Gary Hayden.

Along with the Security officers, Sheriff's deputies are placed on fixed posts wherever there are picketers. "Their safety and security is part of our job too," says Cowden.

The deputies keep their eyes open for problem areas and stay in contact with the Transit Law Enforcement and Security Emergency Operations Center so resources can be sent out quickly if certain picketing areas heat up.

"We make sure that there is peace," Sheriff's Sgt. Paul Becker says. "We know that sometimes tempers flare."

Cordial relations

Although strikes can be packed with emotion, "For the most part,

strikers have been cordial in exercising their right to strike," says Becker.

Crossroads Depot Division 2 Transportation Manager Thom Pelk says, "This is the most congenial strike I have ever been involved in."

To prepare for strike duty, Sheriff's deputies get instruction regarding labor laws and enforcement issues from Labor Relations Sgt. George Smith, but through their training, the deputies and Security officers are prepared to handle the duties assigned to them.

"The types of things they do are part of their training," says Cowden.

Although the Security Department is not involved in the issues of the strike, Cowden says, "We hope we come to a good resolution for both parties so we can get back to providing service for the transit riding public as quickly as possible."

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