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Transit Police Officer Exchange Program an Eye-Opener

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Feb. 24, 2004) The Sacramento Regional Transit Police Department may be small – only about 30 officers – but that doesn't mean a larger transit security force can't learn something from them.

That's what four members of MTA's Transit Services Bureau found out, recently, during an officer exchange program.

Sheriff's Sgt. Vince Moultrie, who supervises patrol officers, and deputies Kyle Hayden, David Hernandez and Michael Shaw of the Special Projects Unit spent four days in January with their Sacramento counterparts. Earlier this month, two Sacramento officers visited MTA for four days.

"The idea of an officer exchange program was born during a peer review of the Sacramento Transit Police Department last summer," says Capt. Dan Finkelstein, MTA Transit Police chief. "A fresh set of eyes, reviewing each other's practices, and suggestions on how things could be improved could only be of benefit."

Issues in common

Both transit police agencies have issues in common: graffiti and vandalism, transients, crime on board buses and trains and responding to the security needs of their transit agencies.

And they have differences. In Los Angeles, the Sheriff's Department is under contract to MTA. In Sacramento, the transit security force includes both sheriff's deputies and local police officers. The chief of the force is a police lieutenant.

Moultrie cites several valuable "lessons learned" during the deputies' visit to the state capitol. They included the importance of a constant flow of information about the transit agency's security needs.

"The information has to get to the officers on the street," says Moultrie. "The Sacramento officers have that relationship with their transit agency."

The LA deputies also learned that the floor plans and other information about the Sacramento transit agency's buildings are on computer. Having that information at their fingertips is a great help to the transit police during an evacuation or hostage situation.

Training scenarios

During their stay in capitol, the deputies trained with the Sacramento officers. The scenarios included dealing with an armed suspect on a bus and hostage and rescue situations.

"It was enlightening," says Moultrie.

When the Sacramento officers – a deputy sheriff and a police officer – were in LA, they visited the Rail Operations Center and the Bus Operations Center, the Sheriff's training academy and shooting range.

They were particularly interested in MTA's graffiti abatement program, how LASD deals with the homeless and the relationship between the Sheriff's Department and the LAPD.

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