

SANTA BARBARA POLICE HIRING

Filling the Ranks

SUMMARY

At one time, the Santa Barbara Police Department had a difficult time hiring and retaining police officers. The Santa Barbara City Council worked with the Police Department to help fill vacancies, creating new advertising and incentive programs to face this challenge. The Police Department has successfully accomplished full staffing and now seems to be on a viable path to retain officers.

BACKGROUND

The 2016-17 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) received a complaint requesting the Jury to investigate why it is so difficult to find officers to work at the City of Santa Barbara Police Department (SBPD). Santa Barbara is considered an ideal place to work and live, and the pay and benefits are competitive. What efforts and money are being spent on recruitment?

In addition to accusations of danger to public safety and a workforce with low morale in early 2015, the outgoing Police Chief cited other challenges in maintaining a strong police department. Reasons ranged from disqualified candidates and retirement, to injuries and competition from other law enforcement agencies. At that time, the “Ferguson effect,” regarding the police shooting in 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, was also cited as a deterrent for police applicants.¹

By November 2015, the Santa Barbara Police Department, with the assistance of the Santa Barbara City Council, had devised ways to implement changes in the hiring process so that the SBPD would be fully staffed. A referral incentive program was put in place for dispatchers and officer trainees. Signing bonuses were offered to lure lateral hires (officers from other agencies). The City Council also set aside \$50,000 for advertising.

Procedures put in place by City Council and the Police Department have shown results. Members of SBPD do not feel that the “Ferguson Effect” is still an influence, but agree that the climate has changed and that recruitment of police officers requires a different outreach. With added programs, the SBPD has not had to lower its standards for its recruitment process. In January 2016, it was reported that 130 of 143 positions were filled.² By October 2016, the SBPD declared all vacancies filled.

¹ Welsh, Nick. “Cam Talks Cop Cams. Police Chief Also Takes Heat for Slow Hiring of Community Service Officers.” *Santa Barbara Independent*. 30 April 2015. Web.

² Molina, Joshua. “Santa Barbara Police Department Struggles with Injuries, Low Staffing.” *Noozhawk*. 27 January 2016. Web.

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METHODOLOGY

To learn how the turnaround in employment was achieved, the Jury interviewed a representative of the City of Santa Barbara, who provided statistical information. The Jury reviewed documents and publications. Several members of the SBPD were also interviewed.

OBSERVATIONS

In 2016, the Santa Barbara City Council and City of Santa Barbara Police Department set programs in motion to appeal to new applicants. The two main components of these programs were bonuses and advertising. Each has helped to attract more recruits.

The first of the program innovations, bonuses, was announced at the Santa Barbara City Council meeting on November 10, 2015. A bonus became available to City employees who referred a potential dispatch officer, with \$1000 paid on the candidate's first payday and another \$1000 at the end of the probationary period. The police officer trainees receive a \$3000 bonus upon completing field training, another \$3000 at the end of their probationary period, and an additional \$6000 at the end of three years. While the number of referrals has been disappointing, trainee bonuses seem to be an incentive to joining the force.

The second innovation was an advertising program. The City Council authorized a one-time allocation of \$50,000 to the SBPD for recruitment advertising. Posters have gone up at local universities and colleges. A recruitment video was produced and has been seen on television and in movie theaters, promoting "being part of the team" and helping one's home community. Other means of looking for new recruits have been internet job search engines, job fairs, government and military websites and radio stations, including Spanish radio. Members of the SBPD also recruited at the local police academies, Allan Hancock College and the Ventura County Criminal Justice Training Center.

The City of Santa Barbara is an expensive place to live; however, this has not prevented positions from being filled. More than half of the officers in the SBPD live outside the City and some must commute over 100 miles a day. At one time, the SBPD offered help with home loans, but that program did not entice many officers to reside in the City. In spite of the high cost of living, in 2016, ten lateral hires (officers from other law enforcement agencies) decided to work in Santa Barbara.

Retirement has accounted for several departures. Officers can retire at age 50 or 55, an age when they are still highly "marketable." For example, they could go to the University of California, Santa Barbara, where they would receive a 30 percent pay cut, but their retirement pay would make up for that loss in salary. In addition, there have been a few medical retirements. In 2015, it was acknowledged that this, as well as transfers to the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department, was a common practice.³

³ Potthoff, Gina. "Santa Barbara Police Still Struggling to Hire Officers for 19 Vacant Positions: Retirements, Lateral Moves to Sheriff and UCSB Police Departments Plague Department and City Council Questions Recruitment Efforts." *Noozhawk*. 14 October 2015. Web.

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The hiring of new officers begins long before they are needed on the job. Many applicants drop out during the process. Of the applications received, only a small percentage of individuals come in for the initial written exam.

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Applications</u> | <u>Show Up for Exam</u> |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| September 2014 | 1107 | 207 |
| March 2015 | 1139 | 85 |
| August 2015 | 50 | 12 |
| September 2015 | 877 | 182 |
| January 2016 | 692 | 166 |
| March 2016 | 330 | 106 |

Information supplied by the City of Santa Barbara Human Resources Department

As noted in the chart above, a high number of applicants are lost before the written test. Then a high number of applicants do not pass the written test. An equal number is lost during the background check, which includes a polygraph test and interviews with friends and acquaintances of the applicant. The background checks average a cost of \$2,500 per applicant to SBPD.⁴ There is no drug testing without cause. Nationally, more than 75 percent of applicants for military service are ineligible due to lack of education, obesity or other health concerns, or criminal record. It is just as difficult for our local police department to find qualified applicants.

The SBPD sends recruits to the Ventura County Criminal Justice Training Center (Academy) for six months of basic law enforcement training that meets Peace Officer Standards and Training requirements. The Jury learned that sending a recruit to the Academy is an investment for the SBPD. The costs include \$1,500 in ammunition, \$6,000 in equipment, \$600 for educational expenses, and \$2,500 for housing during the stay. The recruits are also paid a salary while there. There is no payment to the Academy itself because the SBPD provides officers to augment the training staff. Eighty percent of the recruits sent to the Academy successfully complete the training.

After Academy graduation, the recruits are sworn in as police officers in the SBPD. It is expected that all will complete field training. All new officers are on probation for one year. In the final result, they expect that over 80 percent of new officers will make the three-year mark.

CONCLUSION

In October 2016, one year after acknowledging hiring difficulties, the Santa Barbara Police Chief declared all positions filled. The new recruitment programs and the vetting processes successfully accomplished full staffing. The 2016-17 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury commends the Santa Barbara Police Department and the Santa Barbara City Council for their initiatives for successfully filling vacancies in the Santa Barbara Police Department.

Under *California Penal Code §933 and §933.05*, this activity report does not require a response.

⁴ Ibid.