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CITY OF MERCED

POLICE DEPARTMENT INSPECTION

INTRODUCTION

The Law and Justice Committee of the Grand Jury conducted an inspection of the Merced Police Department on November 28, 2007. The tour of the facility, located at 611 West 22nd Street, Merced, was conducted by Commander Jeff Shindler.

FINDINGS

Commander Shindler gave a complete overview of the entire operation of the Merced Police Department (PD). The passage of Measure C in 2006 has enabled the expansion of the PD's uniformed force to 109 sworn officers. The main police station is well maintained, though quite cramped for space, but the department has received approval to complete a study for a new building. In addition to the main police station, the department has two substations, one located at 1109 Loughborough Drive and the other at 470 West 11th Street. These substations, each of which is staffed 12 hours per day, allow officers to be readily available to the neighborhoods in which they are located for investigations and assistance in gang suppression activities.

The committee was also briefed by Commander Tom Martin, Officer Hector Ortiz and Chief Russ Thomas. Commander Martin showed the committee officers' briefing room, their locker room and the detectives' offices. Officer Ortiz conducted the tour of the evidence room, which was very well organized, neat and clean. Access to it is limited to two officers, thus ensuring positive control of all evidence materials.

Detective Joseph Weiss gave a thorough and interesting explanation of the operation of the computer forensic laboratory where evidence of computer and cell phone crimes are investigated and processed. Of particular note is the lab's status as a headquarters facility for the Sacramento Valley Hi-Tech Crimes task force. As such it is consulted by other law enforcement agencies throughout the central valley for its expertise in this specialized field.

Chief Thomas explained his beliefs and expectations for his officers. He has made some changes in the command staff alignments and added new services. One example is the creation of a Crime Scene Response Team, which has proven to expand the PD's investigative capabilities.

COMMENDATION

The Merced Police Department is well organized and responsive to the community's needs. The facility is clean and well maintained and presents a professional appearance. Education of officers and staff and service to the community are top priorities of the chief and his administration.