

\$17 million adds more cops to Coachella Valley and Riverside County

Palm Springs receiving largest local share of the federal grant money

DENISE GOOLSBY • THE DESERT SUN • JULY 29, 2009

Local law enforcement agencies will be able to hire 63 more officers after snagging more than \$17 million in highly competitive grants, the Obama administration announced Tuesday.

As reported Tuesday at mydesert.com, the Coachella Valley will get 13 new police officers and the Riverside County Sheriff's Department will get 50 new deputies through the federal stimulus money.

The Riverside County Sheriff's Department will receive nearly \$13 million.

"We're ecstatic. It's the best news we've gotten in a while," said Undersheriff Valerie Hill. "With all the dark clouds it really feels good to get this excellent news."

The 50 positions will be used for patrols in unincorporated areas, she said. Without the grant, the department was facing pulling staff from corrections to put on patrol duties.

With the 50 new deputies, the department will be down about 300, she said.

The Palm Springs Police Department will receive the largest local chunk — nearly \$1.7 million, which is enough to hire five police officers.

With recent retirements and a hiring freeze — there are six vacancies at the patrol level, Police Chief David Dominguez said. With the new officers, the department will be close to fully staffed.

"This is great news for the city of Palm Springs," Dominguez said.

A total of \$1 billion in grants was awarded to 1,046 law enforcement agencies across the country, according to a federal press release.

More than \$211 million will go toward hiring 649 officers in California.

But there were more than 7,200 applications for more than 39,000 officer positions across the country — \$8.3 billion in requested funding.

Indio Police Chief Brad Ramos said he's appreciative. His department will receive a little more than \$1.4 million — enough for four more officers.

“The good news is there are 1,000 happy police chiefs, and the bad news is there are 6,000 unhappy police chiefs,” Ramos said.

“It was a very, very competitive process and departments and cities had to tell their story,” he said.

The Cathedral City Police Department will receive about \$840,000 for three officers.

“These three positions will definitely help in our efforts to keep the city safe,” Cathedral City Police Chief Stan Henry said.

Desert Hot Springs will receive a little more than \$346,000 — enough for one officer.

“We asked for 10 positions and got one,” said Desert Hot Springs Police Chief Patrick Williams.

But he added — twice: “We're happy to have the extra body.”

The funds will provide 100 percent of each officer's salary and benefits for three years.

All police departments receiving the grants will be required to retain the grant-funded positions for a fourth year.

“At the end, the economy will hopefully turn around,” Ramos said.

Vice President Joe Biden and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced the grants, which were funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The grants will be administered by the U.S. Department of Justice through the agency's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Hiring Recovery Program.

“These brave individuals are most deserving of our full support, especially during these tough economic times,” Rep. Mary Bono Mack, a Palm Springs Republican, said in a news release.

“These grants could not be more timely as cities across California continue to face difficult budget cuts,” U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., said in a news release. Boxer has a home in Rancho Mirage.