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5 police officers rehired

City receives OK to rework a grant

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. and Police Director John Rappaport conducted a press conference and ceremony at City Hall to announce the rehiring of five laid-off city police officers after the administration's successful effort to revamp a federal grant it had received.

The five officers are: Jashan Carter, Rocco DeSantis, Rennie Wilson, David Fanfan, and Pablo Cajiga. They, plus seven others, were laid off by the city as a cost-cutting measure intended to help bridge a multimillion-dollar gap in the budget.

The city was able to rehire the five after officials received permission to use a \$964,875 grant received in 2009 from the Community Oriented Policing Services program meant for new officers to bring the old ones back.

Under the COPS grant, recipients would be required to fund officers' salaries and benefits after the first three years. Those terms are still in effect, but city officials said they will consider that situation when it occurs.

In the meantime, Hawkins and Rappaport said they were happy to have five more experienced officers back on the streets.

"Today signifies the creativity and ingenuity of the administration, in cooperation with federal officials and some of the members of the Police Department who actually work on these grants," Hawkins said. "While we are at an impasse with the unions and we are unable to bring back officers with negotiated concessions, like we did with the Fire Department, we are able to use the grant to facilitate their return. I think that is important because we cannot stop the progress of the city."

Even though Hawkins said negotiations between the city and the local Policemen's Benevolent Association union have not gone as he had hoped, he still commended the department for their work. Hawkins said their efforts have never been more evident than over the course of the last few weeks as they have solved two homicide cases and made arrests that took guns off the streets.

Officer Joe Lane, president of PBA Local 89, said it was great to have the officers back, but it did not equal the 12 who were originally laid off.

"Out of the 12 that were laid off, they brought back five," Lane said. "Three of the other officers are already gone after they found new jobs: two in Hackensack and one in Lodi. Now there are three left that we need to bring back."