

Edison Police Department Gets Stamp of Approval

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EDISON - The Edison Police Department, which has long carried a reputation for being plagued by corruption and scandals, is now a state-accredited law enforcement agency.

The department — which serves 100,000 residents in the state's fifth-largest town — recently passed an independent review by the Commission on the Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies. The commission accesses every aspect of a police department's operations and policies.

"Edison has had its issues," Brian Collier, the town's police director, said today. "But there's no doubt in my mind this is a great leap forward for the department. It is a milestone."

The department has seen a string of problems over the last decade. One officer was convicted of rape in 1995, another of bank robbery in 2000 — the same year CBS' "60 Minutes" aired a segment critical of the department. Five years later, another officer fled the scene of a car accident, naked.

Mayor Jun Choi has aimed to reform the department since he was elected four years ago. He hired Collier, a former federal drug enforcement agent, in April 2008 to head the process.

Collier said he made it one of his goals for the department to be accredited by the state. He noted that the department has revamped hiring practices, established an evaluation system and updated police headquarters.

"We are returning the shine of the Edison police badge," Choi said today.

Departments must meet 112 standards to earn accreditation. Right now, Edison is one of the few that has. Of the 500 law enforcement agencies in New Jersey, only 35 are accredited, said Lloyd Nippons, a spokesman for the New Jersey Association of Chiefs of Police, which helps run the program.

But the program is only five years old, and 135 more departments are working toward the distinction, he said.

The achievement actually comes as Choi and Collier are set to leave their jobs in January. Choi lost his re-election bid, while Collier resigned.

The department still has issues: Multiple officers have sued the department over discrimination recently and a veteran officer was charged with shoplifting this year. But now, Collier noted, the department has a set of standards in place.

"It's one thing to say you've reformed the police department, tooting your own horn," said Police Chief Thomas Bryan, who will run the department when Collier leaves. "But when you have a state agency say that, it's something else."

The accreditation status last for three years. After that, the department must submit annual reports on compliance.