

Hackensack police seek accreditation

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HACKENSACK — the city Police Department is beginning the process of getting state and national accreditation.

"When this process is complete we will be at the forefront of law enforcement," said Capt. Tomas Padilla, the acting officer in charge of the department. "My goal is to be state accredited and nationally recognized, and it will put us in the higher levels of law enforcement. Very few agencies have this certification."

The city has contracted with The Rodgers Group LLC to help the Police Department attain accreditation from the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police and also national recognition from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA)

The contract calls for the city to pay the consulting company, based in Island Heights, \$34,000.

Padilla said the funds will come from the city Police Department's forfeiture funds.

The state program is run by the police chiefs association and the goal is to improve the performance of Police Departments by making sure all policies and procedures are clearly written and current.

Frank Rodgers, owner of The Rodgers Group, said the department will have to comply with 112 standards to achieve accredited status. To that end, he said members of his company will review the city's police department ordinance, and its police rules and regulations and its standard operating procedures.

"There are at least 50 [standard operating procedures] we are looking at," said Rodgers, who retired as the deputy superintendent of the New Jersey State Police in 2007. "It's what you associate with the police department. Use of force, what their patrol practices are, how they handle evidence, and transport prisoners."

"What we develop is a policy that is very specific to that police department," he added. "It's not generic policy."

Would bring benefits

Rodgers said city police officers in charge of evidence, firearms, records and communications will also be interviewed.

After the new policies and procedures are in place, an independent assessment team employed by the police chiefs association visits and reviews the department.

"It's a very involved process," said Rodgers, who recently worked with the Closter Police Department in its effort to get accredited.

Among the benefits of having the accreditation is reduced insurance premiums, and a reduction in litigation, according to Rodgers.

The city police department has been racked with conflict since last year when several officers filed lawsuits against Chief Ken Zisa. In April, Zisa was criminally charged by the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office with insurance fraud and later with official misconduct. He was stripped of his chief's duties and placed on suspension.

Since then, the Prosecutor's Office, which filed the charges against Zisa, has been monitoring the daily operations of the department.

Bergen Prosecutor John Molinelli said he approved the use of seized assets for the initiative. The Rodgers Group worked with the Prosecutor's Office when it received its CALEA certification last year.

"The Rodgers Group is an excellent source to assist Captain Padilla toward the adoption and implementation of best practices at Hackensack PD," Molinelli stated in an e-mail.

39 agencies accredited in N.J.

In New Jersey, 39 police agencies have received accreditation from the state, according to Lloyd Nippins, accreditation program manager for the chiefs association. They include Bergenfield, Ridgewood, Saddle Brook, Mahwah, and the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office, according to the association's website.

Several other Bergen law enforcement agencies are working toward getting certified. They include Lodi, Fort Lee, Hillsdale, the Bergen County Sheriff's Department, Washington Township and Westwood.

In Passaic County, West Milford and Haledon are pursuing accreditation.

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