

MCSO: Two deputies resign; three suspended

Written by gallupsun

Wednesday, 22 March 2017 20:45



Silversmith drops the hammer on Rangel, Noriega

By Bernie Dotson

Sun Correspondent

Two of the three deputies involved in a physical altercation in January are no longer employed with the McKinley County Sheriff's Office, officials said. Three others were suspended.

McKinley County Sheriff Ron Silversmith confirmed in a written statement to the *Gallup Sun* March 22 that termination letters were prepared for Richard Rangel and A.J. Noriega, but, the one-page letter states, "... pursuant to policy and past practices we have accepted resignation in lieu of termination from each."

Three other deputies received suspensions without pay from between 30 to 45 days, Silversmith wrote. Those deputies are Joey Guillen, Monty Yazzie and Johnson Lee. The annual salary amounts of each of the five deputies in question was not available at press time.

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Silversmith continues in the letter that the appropriate personnel actions were taken and the McKinley County Sheriff's Office will continue to provide transparent and professional services to the citizens of McKinley County.

"I, as the sheriff of McKinley County, would like to thank the community for their patience and understanding with the constitutional due process requirements of these types of actions," Silversmith wrote. "The laws and processes a local government must take for these types of situations require lengthy and thorough investigation; and due process meetings to come to the appropriate conclusions."

Guillen, Lee and Rangel were initially placed on paid administrative leave in early January as a result of the reported altercation. They were reinstated Jan. 23 by Silversmith who, along with McKinley County Attorney Doug Decker, revealed ongoing county and state investigations at the time.

Both investigations are complete. The state investigation, conducted by the New Mexico State Police, was initially turned over to McKinley County District Attorney Karl Gillson, but was farmed out to the San Juan County District Attorney's Office as to avoid conflicts of interest.

A call to the San Juan District Attorney's Office in Aztec was not immediately returned this

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week.

Reportedly, Guillen, Lee and Rangel were involved in the beating of Cody Bitsilly, 23, at Noriega's residence and during a party. A Gallup police officer, five-year veteran Clarissa Morgan, transported Bitsilly to a local hospital. Bitsilly was subsequently flown to an Albuquerque hospital due to the extent of his injuries.

Morgan was not placed on administrative leave of any kind, city police have said, instead, police have said, she took a personal leave of her own volition.

The reasons behind Bitsilly getting beat up are not clear, but comments made to the *Gallup Sun* have suggested that Bitsilly, believed to be a Phoenix resident, made a pass at Rangel's girlfriend, who was at the party at Noriega's place, too.

It is not immediately clear how Yazzie's name surfaced as his name was not part of the original information given to the *Sun* by Silversmith regarding the matter. Guillen is a U.S. Navy veteran and near 20 year veteran of the MCSO. Noriega's name is a constant in day and night police reports, and Rangel, 20, was a superstar basketball player at Gallup High School before joining MCSO.