

## MCSO deputies ID'd, reinstated

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent  
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### GPD officer also on paid leave

The three deputies from the McKinley-County Sheriff's Office that were recently placed on paid administrative leave are Joey Guillen, Johnson Lee and Richard Rangel, McKinley County Sheriff Ron Silversmith confirmed.

And each, but Rangel, was back at work on a full-time basis as of Jan. 23, the sheriff said.

"As far as a status update, that's the latest that we have right now," Silversmith said during a break at Tuesday's McKinley County Board of Commissioners meeting. "I don't have any information on the third deputy (Rangel)."

Silversmith said other deputies in the department worked extra hours to cover for the deputies that were on leave. He said Guillen, a former member of the U.S. Navy, has worked at the sheriff's office for 16 years and Lee for four. Rangel, a Gallup High School graduate and a starter on its basketball team last year, is the newest McKinley deputy of the three.

Silversmith said he didn't have a timeframe in which Rangel would return, saying there are internal and external investigations that are not yet complete which could figure into the

decision. Still, Silversmith stressed that public safety was never compromised.

“That’s all I can say about that,” Silversmith said. “I don’t know how long the investigations will take. It could be weeks or could be months.”

McKinley County Attorney Doug Decker told the *Gallup Sun* two weeks ago that the three deputies were involved in a physical altercation near a residence on West Hill Avenue that sent Cody Bitsilly, 23, to an Albuquerque hospital with undisclosed injuries. Decker did not specifically reveal the combined annual salaries of the three deputies, but said the total salary amount of the three is in the ball park of more than \$100,000.

A source recently told the *Gallup Sun* said the house party took place at the home of fellow sheriff’s deputy A.J. Noriega on the evening of Jan. 6.

The Gallup Police Department issued a news release Jan. 7 that said one of its own was placed on paid administrative leave as well and in connection to the incident. The release did not state the name of the officer, but a check of police call logs on Jan. 6 and Jan. 7 suggest that Officer Clarissa Morgan is the Gallup officer placed on leave. Morgan was on duty into the early morning hours of Jan. 7, logs show.

A five-year GPD veteran, Morgan took a call at 12:23 am on Jan. 7. Marinda Spencer, public information officer with the GPD, did not confirm or deny if the Gallup officer on paid administrative leave was Morgan.

An investigation of the whole matter is underway by the New Mexico State Police so as to avoid bias, Decker and Spencer said.

Spencer did not return a telephone call from the Sun seeking information on Morgan’s job status.

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Silversmith said his first reaction at finding out about the situation was one of “disappointment.” He said MCSO consists of a lot of hard-working people, saying he’s optimistic that things at the sheriff’s office will be back to normal soon.

***By Bernie Dotson***  
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