

Gallup police build relationships through National Night Out

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Annual event fosters community-police relations

With many police-community relations broken across the nation, the Gallup Police Department continues their efforts to forge positive relationships with the community by hosting its annual “National Night Out.”

The Aug. 2 event, held at the east-wing parking lot of Rio West Mall, 1300 W. I-40 Frontage Road, and amid balmy weather, marked new Gallup Police Chief’s Phillip Hart’s first year attending the family-fun affair that included helicopter landings, fire department demonstrations, bike safety courses, a climbing wall, three-on-three basketball games, hot dogs, and, of course, Hart’s officers.

“This is about community and police relations,” Hart said. “A lot of people have come up to me

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since I arrived and shook my hand.”

Mayor Jackie McKinney, one of several members of the Gallup City Council who gave a short speech, said the National Night Out event is important because there are strained relationships between cops and the public everywhere across the nation.

According to national news reports, police officers have been shot and killed in Baton Rouge, La., and Dallas, Texas, in the past few weeks.

“There’s a lot of stuff happening around the country and around the world,” McKinney said to a crowd of a few hundred people. “There have been a lot of sacrifices. A lot of people have given their lives for people everywhere.”

National Night Out is a community-building event that provides local police departments the opportunity to meet and greet residents in a friendly atmosphere. It is celebrated in more than 16,000 communities across the United States.

The event was started in 1984 by the National Association of Town Watch, a nonprofit that develops and promotes crime-prevention programs throughout law enforcement agencies and neighborhoods.

Among the groups represented at the Aug. 2 event were the Gallup Boys and Girls Club, the McKinley County Sheriff’s Office, Rehoboth Christian School, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Civil Air Patrol, Gallup Med-Flight, the McKinley County DWI Office, among dozens of other groups.

Ben Welch, city community services coordinator, said Gallup Councilor Linda Garcia was instrumental in getting the city to stage National Night Out this year. He said former Gallup Mayor Bob Rosebrough started the event in Gallup back in the early 2000s.

“[Rosebrough] started things going years ago,” Welch said. “We’ve tried to hold the event every

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year since then.”

Garcia was one of the members of the City Council who spoke.

“We must respect the people who protect and serve us,” Garcia said. “Thank a police officer the next time you see one,” she said.

Councilor Fran Palochak also gave a short speech.

“They [police officers] protect people they don’t even know,” Palochak said. “We are very thankful for these public servants.”

Welch and Garcia noted that the event was dedicated to Ashlynn Mike of Shiprock who was murdered and assaulted a few months ago while walking home with a family member. Mike’s father was a scheduled guest speaker.

The message from the event’s speakers hit home.

“I liked it, and if they have it again next year, I’ll come,” Tracy Wynn, 18, a Gallup resident, said. “I think things like this are important.”

***By Bernie Dotson
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