

June 18, 2008

## Calimesa weighs painful police cutbacks

By: **MICHAEL PERRAULT**  
*The Press-Enterprise*

CALIMESA - The cost of providing police services in Calimesa is expected to jump \$82,000 next year, leaving city leaders with the prospect of trimming already lean police staffing levels amid declining revenues.

One option city officials are considering is to eliminate a community service officer position, Calimesa Police Chief Chris Davis said.

"But to lose him would be adverse to public safety," Davis said. "In my view (the position) is vital."

The city spends about \$103,000 annually for a community service officer's salary and benefits, City Manager Dave Lane said.

Another option being studied is to reduce police service to 24 hours a day from 30 hours, Davis said. The additional six hours are used to cover shift changes.

Eliminating both the community service officer position and cutting back to 24 hours would slash nearly \$376,000 from the overall

police budget, city officials said.

Since 1990, Calimesa has contracted with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department for police services. Deputies based at the Cabazon station serve Calimesa and about 500 square miles of unincorporated area through the San Geronio Pass, as well as the Morongo Indian Reservation.

The Sheriff's Department relies on a community service officer in Calimesa to handle tasks such as transporting and booking prisoners, which can take two hours or more out of a deputy's shift, Davis said. The officer also handles traffic control, vehicle towing, takes crime reports and helps with crime prevention and other duties.

Calimesa officials are trying to slash nearly \$400,000 in spending from a nearly \$5 million fiscal year 2008-09 general fund budget. The cuts are necessary, in part, because the city expects at least \$350,000 less in planning, building permit and other

development fees in a sagging housing market.

As city leaders analyze possible public safety cuts, Councilwoman Joyce McIntyre said it is important to remember the position frees sheriff's deputies to respond to more serious calls.

"I think it's one of the reasons we don't have the problems with gangs and graffiti," Councilman Jim Hyatt said.

Reach Michael Perrault at 909-806-3053 or mperrault@PE.com