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Orinda Police Chief French to Retire

By Andrea A. Firth



Chief Bill French in his office Photo Tod Fierner

After almost 26 years with the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office and serving the last three years as the Chief of Police in Orinda, Bill French is preparing to retire. French's last day on the job will be March 30th. French will be departing as the cities of Orinda and Lafayette evaluate potential new police service delivery options in the wake of the rising costs associated with the contracts they maintain with the Sheriff's Office. "I know the community is concerned about the cost of police and fire service," notes French, but he adds, "The product the Sheriff's Office provides the community is second to none. I hope the relationship continues."

In his tenure as Orinda's top cop, French has focused on crime, particularly burglary, identity theft, and robbery, and on curbing underage alcohol use. French and the 14 officers and two city staff that he commands have had to manage a couple of crime sprees in the city over the past few years. In the summer and early fall of 2008, French's team worked with the police in Lafayette and the County Sheriff's department to break up a ring of thieves that had committed up to ten burglaries a month in Orinda during the height of their crime spree. "We were very active and worked well with east and central county departments to stop this group," says French noting that Orinda typically experiences four or less burglaries a

month, many of which occur at construction sites. "I also knew coming in there was going to be a focus on teen alcohol use. It was and remains a priority for the department," says French. "Our policy is zero tolerance."

City Manager Janet Keeter anticipates that Chief French's replacement will be on board before he departs at the end of March. "The Sheriff's office has provided me with four qualified candidates," states Keeter, "I am putting together an interview process that will include a number of oral boards consisting of community partners and professional technical individuals."

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