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Orinda Police Department Presents Annual Report for 2011

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Vice Mayor Amy Worth welcomes the City's newest police officers, from left: Reserve Officer Daryl England, Reserve Officer Bill Howard and Officer Travis Dennison. Photo Cathy Dausman

Attendees at Orinda City Council's April 10 meeting were introduced to the newest members of the Orinda Police Department (OPD) by Chief Jeffrey Jennings. Travis Dennison and Maynard Patacsil of the Contra Costa Sheriff's Department have begun as new police officers. Daryl England and Bill Howard will be serving in reserve.

Jennings also presented his department's annual report. Advising Council members that OPD had stepped up traffic enforcement in 2011 because his staff had been required to conduct 87 collision investigations related to nearly 200 traffic accidents, Jennings observed that the increased focus on safety appeared to be working. "Reported traffic accidents dropped by eight percent over the last three-year average," he noted.

Reached later for comment, Jennings explained that although "the amount of citations we write doesn't even pay for a full-time officer," there are genuine savings to the City via reduced property damage and officer response costs.

Thefts, once on the rise, also began declining in July 2011 as OPD personnel turned their attention to criminals attempting residential and commercial property crimes. The word is out, Jennings said, that criminals will lose their cars if they get caught. So crooks now go elsewhere.

A recipient of the Lamorinda Alcohol Policy Coalition's "People Who Make a Difference" award, Jennings was also honored by the California Senate in 2011.

Working with City Manager Janet Keeter to hold the line on spending by running staff on overtime rather than filling a vacant position, he saved the City roughly \$98,000. Further savings were generated when the Contra Costa Sheriff's Department (CCSD) agreed to a seven percent reduction in total salary and benefits, making CCSD now the lowest paid law enforcement department in the area.

However, running forever on overtime is not realistic. New officers require training, and experienced personnel need vacations from high-stress work. And, OPD has not seen a staffing increase in 12 years - even though Orinda's population has increased. So, Jennings and Keeter will engage in further budget planning to find the best way forward financially while maintaining Orinda's high public safety ratings.

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