

Watsonville Police Department

Annual Report

2023





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A Message from your

Chief of Police

On behalf of everyone at the Watsonville Police Department, I thank our community for their ongoing support; it means more than you will ever know. It is an honor to provide you with the 2023 Watsonville Police Department Annual Report.

Each year comes with its challenges and gifts. The beginning of 2023 greeted us with heavy rain; water flooded our community and caused damage to homes, businesses, schools, and City streets, displacing many people for extended periods. As the natural disaster took place, I saw our community infused with courage, love, kindness, and generosity. I witnessed our residents come together with strangers and first responders to save lives and property. Simply put, I saw heroes at work. Seeing what the power of community can accomplish was a wonderful gift.

The Watsonville Police Department is a special place with compassionate, well-trained employees who reflect our community. Like many law enforcement organizations, we struggled with staffing shortages, yet our employees maintained an uncompromising commitment to the people they serve. Hiring, recruitment, and retention will remain a focus goal in 2024.



This annual report summarizes the outstanding work that the women, men, and youth of the Watsonville Police Department have accomplished during the last year. As we reflect on 2023, I see a year of progress, struggle, and growth. We remain dedicated to enhancing the safety and well-being of our staff and this wonderful community.

Jorge Zamora
Chief of Police

What We Stand For

Our Why

Impacting our community in positive ways every day through strong relationships and problem-solving.

Our Mission

Committing ourselves to public safety through engagement, education, enforcement, and professional development.

Our Core Values

Character, Competency, Compassion, Communication.

Who We Are

- 65 sworn police officers
- 21 full-time professional staff
- 13 part-time professional staff

**WATSONVILLE
POLICE**

Command Staff



Chief of Police
Jorge Zamora



Assistant Chief of Police
Thomas Sims



Police Captain
Michael McKinley



Police Captain
David Rodriguez




Police Captain
Antonio Figueroa



Police Captain
Donny Thul

Retirements



Sergeant
Henry Robles
33 years of service



Sergeant
Michael Ridgway
27 years of service



Officer
Kraig Kliewer
29 years of service



Officer
Corey Johnston
16 years of service



Captain
Antonio Figueroa
17 years of service

Promotions



Sergeant
Gustavo Zamora



Sergeant
Tyler Wildey



Sergeant
Octavio Barocio

Remembering Officer

Kraig Klierer

With heavy hearts, we said our final farewell to one of our beloved brothers. In October 2023, Officer Kraig Klierer passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by his family, following a brief battle with cancer.

KK, as many of us knew him, had recently retired from the Watsonville Police Department. Throughout his 29-plus years of service, he exemplified what it truly meant to be a guardian of the community.

KK's legacy will continue to inspire us every day as we remember and honor his service, sacrifice, and his infectious smile.



24/7 Response

- We received 50,225 calls for service
- We filed 4,502 police reports
- We received 790 online reports
- 10,649 items processed as evidence
- 139 firearms seized:
29.75% increase compared to 2022



Property Crime:

17% down compared to 2022



Violent Crime:

11% down compared to 2022

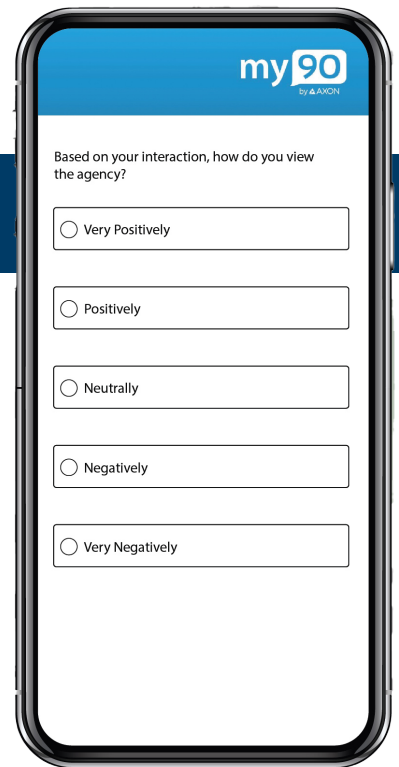


2023 Highlights

In early 2023, our department joined numerous law enforcement agencies nationwide in implementing an engagement tool aimed at bridging the gap between our Officers and the community.

The My90 tool automatically sends residents a short survey to rate their experience with our Officers. The survey, available in English, Spanish, and other languages, is sent to community members who call our dispatch center for a call for service.

Understanding how residents feel about us is crucial as we strive to provide the best service to the community we serve.



Community Connection & Collaboration

Our commitment to better connect with our community continued throughout the year.

In June, Chief of Police Jorge Zamora announced he would establish a Chief's Advisory Board, bringing together a diverse group of community members to advise our organization and help him better understand the community's concerns.

Ten community members with a wealth of experience and knowledge currently sit on the board. The board



meets with Chief Zamora once every two months to discuss our agency's ongoing efforts to better serve, understand, and address the needs of those we serve.

Advancing Crime Fighting



Our department made significant strides in advancing our ability to combat crime in our community.

By September, nearly two dozen automated license plate reading cameras had been installed in strategic locations throughout the City. The Flock Safety Cameras identify, and flag license plates connected to a crime.

From September up until the end of 2023, this newly acquired technology resulted in more than a dozen arrests for stolen cars, as well as the arrest of an attempted murder suspect.

Driving Towards Safety



Improving safety on our roads also remained a top priority for us in 2023.

Our agency was awarded nearly \$130,000 in grant funding from the California Office of Traffic Safety. The funding supports our ongoing enforcement and

education programs to help lower the number of injuries and deaths on our roads, and provide education about the importance of sharing the road.

The grant will provide additional programs and resources for:

- DUI Checkpoints
- High-visibility distracted driving enforcement operations
- Enforcement operations targeting street racing and sideshows
- Community presentations addressing traffic safety issues
- Collaborative enforcement efforts with neighboring agencies
- Officer training or recertification

Policing with Purpose

We actively organize fundraisers that benefit and support our community throughout the year.

April 2023 marked the first time our department joined the Autism Awareness Campaign by launching colorful puzzle merchandise for purchase. All funds raised were donated to the San Andreas Regional Center, supporting individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in Monterey, San Benito, Santa Cruz, and Santa Clara counties.



Over the summer, our 13th Annual Watsonville Police Activities League Golf Tournament raised about \$10,000 to support PAL's mission of empowering youth with tools and resources.



Additionally, our annual Watsonville Police Pink Patch Project proudly contributed \$19,062.59 to the Katz Cancer Resource Center. Thanks to collaborative efforts from sponsors, volunteers, and the community, we've raised nearly \$109,000 since 2017. We remain committed to supporting local families affected by breast cancer.



Beyond the Call

This section of our annual police report showcases some instances where Officers and professional staff went above and beyond their call of duty to serve and protect our community. Their courage, professionalism, and selflessness were honored during an awards ceremony held in September 2023.

Corporal Octavio Barocio

Corporal Octavio Barocio has been credited with saving the life of a newborn baby during one of his graveyard patrol shifts. That night, Octavio rushed to the scene, where he found a distraught mother holding her 3-week-old baby, who was not breathing.

Without hesitation, Corporal Barocio began chest compression CPR, successfully reviving the baby. He checked the infant's airway and vital signs and remained with the infant until paramedics arrived.

Corporal Barocio was awarded a Life Saving Medal for his heroic efforts in saving the newborn's life.



Officer Nelson Hernandez & Parking Enforcement Officer José Navarro

Parking Enforcement Officer José Navarro and Officer Nelson Hernandez received a Life Saving Medal for their quick and decisive actions that helped save the life of an unconscious man lying in the middle of the road.

Parking Enforcement Officer Navarro stopped to check on the man. He immediately suspected the man had likely overdosed on drugs, as his face was blue, and he was motionless and not breathing. Parking Enforcement Officer Navarro broadcasted his location and requested paramedics respond while he began chest compression CPR.

Officer Nelson Hernandez was the first to respond and quickly dispensed Narcan into the man's nostril while Parking Enforcement Officer Navarro continued CPR. Officer Hernandez then took over chest compression CPR. Once paramedics arrived, they continued life-saving efforts for several minutes until the man regained consciousness.



Officer Juan Castillo

While on duty, Officer Juan Castillo came across a surveillance video on a community crime watch Facebook page of a recent commercial burglary.

Officer Castillo recognized one of the burglary suspects from an unrelated DUI arrest the day before. Castillo then contacted the author of the Facebook post and learned that the incident had yet to be reported, prompting him to initiate a formal investigation.

He also remembered seeing some of the stolen property in the DUI driver's car. A search warrant was secured for the vehicle, and some of the victim's stolen property was recovered. Officer Castillo later found the suspect and arrested him for the burglary.

Officer Castillo received a Police Service Award for his proactive efforts, dedication, and commitment to ensuring the safety of our community.



Notable Incidents

January

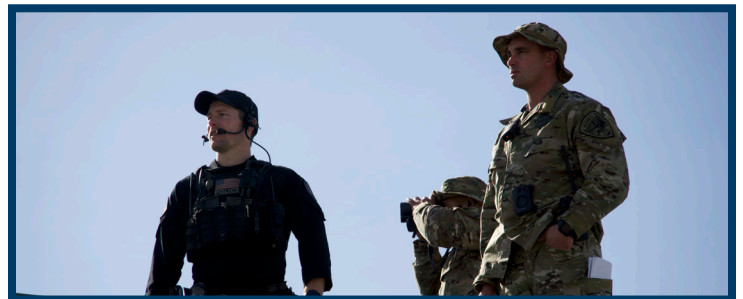
Watsonville Faces Unforeseen Floods

Our entire community rang in 2023 with unforeseen floods. A New Year's Eve storm caused a nearby creek in County jurisdiction to overflow and flood thousands of homes in our senior citizen neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, this storm was only the start of a long, tiring, and emotionally taxing wet winter for the residents of Watsonville, as several more storms battered our region. Our Officers responded by coordinating evacuations and notifications, patrolling to prevent crime, managing traffic, and collaborating with other emergency services to ensure public safety.



By mid-January, our department was working directly with the Secret Service to help provide security for President Joe Biden, who visited areas in our County heavily impacted by extreme weather. The President's visit came less than a week after he approved a disaster declaration for Santa Cruz County and several other counties in our state.



February

Arrest made in Sunnyhills Drive Fatal Shooting

The investigation into a fatal shooting on Sunnyhills Drive resulted in the arrest of a 29-year-old man.

Two weeks following the January 22, 2023, incident, the suspect was tracked down in San Jose and taken into custody on murder charges.

Our investigation indicated that there was an argument before the fatal shooting in an apartment complex. The



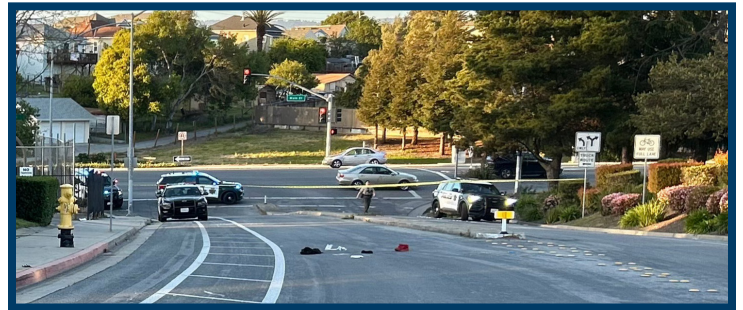
victim's family rushed the 39-year-old to the hospital, but unfortunately, he passed away a few hours later.

April

Swift Arrest Made in Fatal Shooting of Teen

Within less than 24 hours, Watsonville Police Detectives arrested the suspect behind a fatal shooting on Rodriguez Street.

On the night of the incident, the suspect confronted the teen victim. As the victim and his friends attempted to leave the area in their car, the shooter opened fire, striking the victim multiple times. The 15-year-old was rushed to the hospital, where he passed away.



Detectives tracked down the suspected shooter in unincorporated Santa Cruz County and took him into custody. The 16-year-old suspect was booked into juvenile hall on murder charges.

July

Man Suspected of Luring Young Girls

In early July 2023, our Detectives initiated an extensive investigation that culminated in the arrest of a 26-year-old Watsonville man suspected of preying on several young girls.

Detectives were alerted that the man lured a 14-year-old teenager into a sexual relationship, and that there was a strong possibility of additional victims.



Evidence indicated that the 26-year-old used social media to engage with the young girls and deceive them into believing he was under 18.

July

Man Arrested for Indecent Exposure at Local Laundromat

Our department investigated an incident involving a 27-year-old man who indecently exposed himself to several women at a local laundromat.

Through our Patrol Officers' collaborative efforts and the laundromat owner's cooperation, the suspect was



successfully identified and later arrested and booked into the county jail.

August

Suspect Surrenders in Fatal Shooting Case

In August, Detectives were yet again investigating another fatal shooting in our community.

The victim, a 23-year-old man, was shot multiple times in broad daylight in a residential neighborhood on McKenzie Avenue and passed away at the scene of the shooting.



Approximately two weeks later, a 17-year-old suspect voluntarily surrendered, providing a critical development in the investigation.

August

Hours-long Standoff with Murder Suspect

An armed and dangerous man accused of a fatal shooting was arrested following an hours-long standoff on the outskirts of Watsonville.

This investigation unfolded in early August when the suspect shot and killed a 42-year-old man. Detectives quickly identified the shooter and requested assistance from the community in finding the suspect.

Thanks to information from a vigilant community member, our Officers found the suspect in an agricultural field the following morning. For more than four hours, the man remained in his truck while our Crisis Negotiators maintained contact and eventually convinced him to surrender himself and a loaded AR-15.



We'd like to recognize the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, Santa Cruz Police Department, Monterey County Sheriff's Office, California Highway Patrol, Santa Cruz County Anti-Crime Team, and Santa Cruz Auto Theft Reduction and Enforcement Task Force for helping bring this dangerous individual into custody.

August

Armed Robber Arrested following Tense Moments

August was a very busy month for our department.

An armed robbery at the CVS store on Main Street turned into tense moments for our Officers. Once on scene, patrol Officers found the 20-year-old suspect holding a gun and hiding it in the pocket of his jacket.

While running away from Officers, the suspect tripped, fell to the ground, and started to pull out his gun. Officers took cover as the man kept trying to pull his gun from his pocket. The suspect eventually complied with our Officers' orders and was arrested for robbery, resisting arrest, and other gun-related charges. The Officers involved in this case showed tremendous restraint when faced with this dangerous, armed suspect.



August/September

Cracking Down on Gang Crimes

Our department continued to take proactive measures to crack down on crimes committed at the hands of gang members.

With the help of our local and state partners, a probation and parole compliance check operation was held. The operation, led by our Officers, was a direct response to the violence that had impacted our community and focused on Watsonville probationers and parolees with known ties to gangs and guns. More than 35 compliance checks were conducted, resulting in five arrests.



The following month, Officers seized six guns from active gang members and made eight arrests during a similar multi-agency operation.

November

Mother-Daughter Duo Wanted for Jewelry Store Heist

An investigation involving regional, federal, and international authorities led Watsonville Detectives to identify two women suspected of stealing more than \$100,000 from a local jewelry store through distraction techniques.

The mother-daughter duo is wanted throughout the United States by the FBI Secret Service. They've also landed on the International Criminal Police Organization's radar due to their connection to organized crime.



In November, a Santa Cruz County Judge issued warrants for their arrest. The investigation is ongoing.

December

Sexual Assault Suspect Rearrested on Additional Charges

In December, a man accused of sexually assaulting a Watsonville teen girl was rearrested and booked on additional charges stemming from new allegations.

The suspect was taken into custody after a new victim came forward. The 18-year-old victim reported that the suspect sexually assaulted her multiple times over a few years.

In July of 2023, our Detectives arrested the 37-year-old man on suspicion of drugging and sexually assaulting a 16-year-old girl he had just met.



December

Dog Survives Shooting

Our department investigated a distressing incident at the Pájaro River levee involving a dog that had been shot.

Officers found the injured dog and learned from witnesses that two suspects were seen near the campsite where the dog and its owner were staying. They also reported hearing one gunshot and seeing both suspects run farther down the levee.

Our Officers quickly sought help from the Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter for the dog's medical aid. Despite surviving, the dog had one of its legs amputated. The investigation into this animal cruelty case remains open .



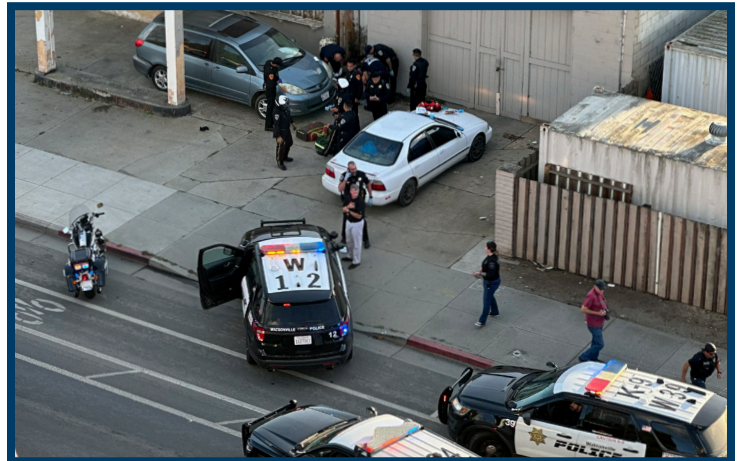
December

Attempted Murder Suspect Arrested After Stabbing K-9

An attempted murder suspect was arrested on additional charges after injuring one of our police dogs.

Officers were on patrol when our Flock Safety cameras alerted them of a Honda Accord linked to an attempted murder in Monterey County. They spotted the suspect's car and conducted a high-risk stop.

After the 28-year-old ignored Officers' commands and attempted to flee, K-9 Cruze was released. The suspect then pulled a knife and stabbed him. Officers, in return, deployed their tasers and detained the man.



Cruze received immediate medical attention and has since returned to work fully recovered.

Patrol Division

As the largest division in the Watsonville Police Department, the Patrol Division consists of Officers you encounter daily, patrolling and responding to service calls, ensuring 24/7 protection for more than 52,000 residents.

Six teams operate during the day, swing, and graveyard shifts. Officers are strategically assigned to five geographical sectors known as "beats," allowing us to provide effective coverage and maintain a visible and responsive presence in the community.

In 2023, the Patrol Division responded to 50,225 calls for service, made 1,303 arrests, took 4,502 cases, and conducted 107 ride-alongs with community members.



Special Assignments

Traffic Unit

The Traffic Unit's main responsibility is to enforce traffic laws, ensuring the safety of drivers and pedestrians on the streets of Watsonville. In addition to enforcing traffic laws, the unit actively investigates vehicle collisions within the City.

In 2023, Officers investigated 483 traffic collisions, three of which were fatal. They also reviewed 102 hit-and-run collisions, issued 249 speeding citations, 156 distracted driving violations, 18 arrests related to street racing and reckless driving, 181 DUI arrests, and held one DUI Checkpoint.



K-9 Unit

In August 2023, our department added K-9 Dante, a Labrador, to join K-9 Cruze and K-9 Canelo on the Watsonville Police K-9 Unit. They are trained to work in a patrol function and are partnered with K-9 Officers Angel Hernandez, Jay Garcia, and Ruben Zendejas.

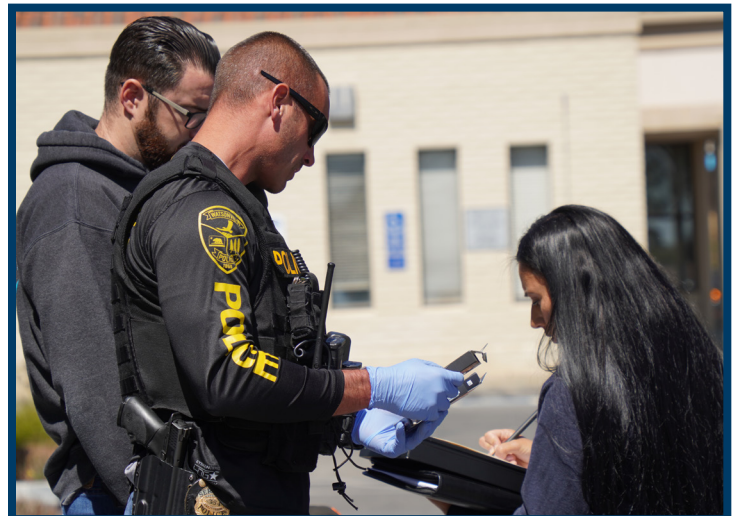
Since the K-9 unit's establishment in 1986, our police dogs have been trained for tasks such as apprehending suspects, narcotics detection, evidence recovery, handler protection, and searches of buildings and areas. Additionally, our K-9s actively engage in community events and provide demonstrations for local organizations and schools.

Detective Bureau

The Detective Bureau is comprised of one Detective Sergeant and several Detectives with specialized training to investigate cases involving sexual assaults, persons crimes, gang crimes, property crimes, and major crimes.

They handle behind-the-scenes tasks, such as generating search warrants and paperwork related to cases, and also spend time in the field for investigative duties.

In 2023, the bureau reviewed/worked more than 500 cases and executed more than 200 search warrants/court orders.

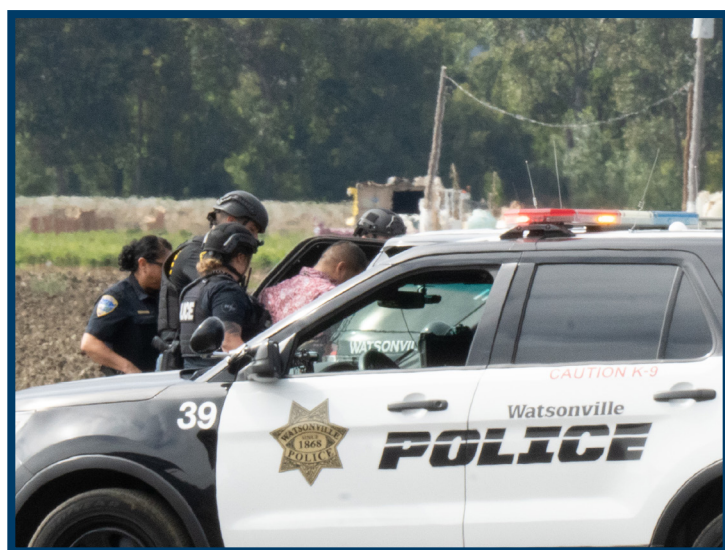


Special Assignments (Continued)

Special Response Team

Our Special Response Team (SRT) consists of 11 specially trained and experienced Officers from within our department. Their objective is to protect the lives of community members and members of law enforcement during high-risk incidents.

SRT members train monthly and are on call 24/7 to handle high-risk situations such as search warrant services, resolve incidents involving barricaded suspects, conduct hostage rescues, and any other needs that arise and exceed the response capabilities of our patrol officers. In 2023, the team was deployed five times and held seven active shooter presentations for the community.



Crisis Negotiation Team

The Crisis Negotiations Team is dedicated to safely resolving critical incidents, including hostage situations, barricaded individuals, suicidal cases, terrorist acts, and potential hostage or barricade situations.

Our specially trained negotiators are available round-the-clock, 365 days a year, to assist in critical incidents.

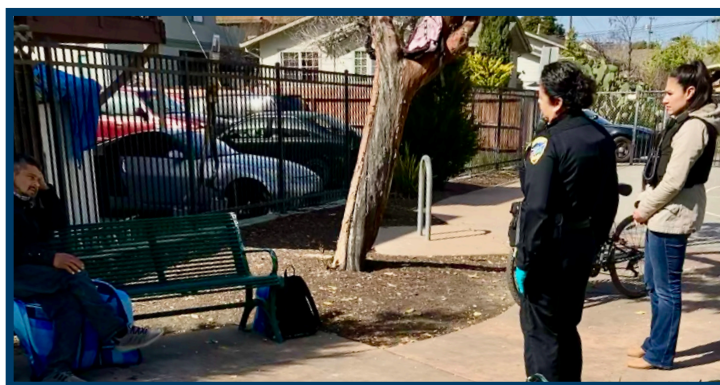
In 2023, the team responded to six incidents involving homicide suspects, armed suspects threatening to hurt themselves, and the arrest of a suspected shooter. The individuals involved in each incident surrendered peacefully and did not require any force to be used.

Crisis Assessment Response & Engagement

The Crisis Assessment Response & Engagement Team (CARE) is dedicated to providing coordinated, professional, and empathetic police response to individuals and families grappling with mental illness.

The team was formed in 2016 and has one full-time Watsonville Police Officer, and a Santa Cruz County Mental Health Clinician responding to calls involving persons in mental health crises.

This collaborative approach allows the Officer to address safety concerns while the clinician focuses on the clinical



needs of the person, ensuring that the person experiencing a mental health crisis receives the most suitable and comprehensive service. The CARE Team provided services nearly 400 times throughout 2023.

Special Assignments (Continued)



School Resource Officer

The School Resource Officer (SRO) is tasked with helping ensure campus safety, maintaining positive connections with students, parents, and faculty, and acting as a bridge between the school district and the police department.

We have one SRO assigned to Watsonville High School. However, the Officer is readily accessible to address incidents at any Pájaro Valley Unified School District school within the City of Watsonville, as needed.

Professional Standards Division

The Professional Standards Division (PSD) plays a crucial role in supporting our department's operations, handling a range of responsibilities.

The division's members are responsible for overseeing recruitment, training, pre-employment background investigations, and promotional functions. Additionally, they investigate both internal and citizen-generated complaints regarding alleged misconduct by department members. PSD maintains a continuous review of policies and procedures, ensuring that our Officers and professional staff are appropriately uniformed, equipped, and supported in their daily duties.



Santa Cruz County Auto Theft Reduction & Enforcement Task Force

Established in 1998, the Santa Cruz County Auto Theft Task Force primarily serves Santa Cruz County under the supervision of the California Highway Patrol and operation by the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office.

The team is comprised of Officers, Deputies, and Investigators from various local jurisdictions, including the Watsonville Police Department. Their primary responsibilities involve recovering stolen vehicles, investigating suspected auto theft operations, and educating local autobody shop owners about criminal practices.

Special Assignments (Continued)



Santa Cruz County Anti-Crime Team

The Santa Cruz County Anti-Crime Team has assigned personnel and resources from various law enforcement agencies in Santa Cruz County, including the Watsonville Police Department.

The team operates under the supervision of the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office. Members of the team focus on preventing and reducing violent crimes, addressing narcotics trafficking, and apprehending suspects involved in such criminal activities.

Officers' Training & Development

In 2023, our agency onboarded seven new hires and scheduled thousands of training hours for Officers and professional staff.

Our department offers group and individual training opportunities for everyone, including Implicit Bias, Managing the Needs of the Mentally Ill, Procedural Justice, Crisis Intervention Training, Child Forensic Interviewing, Child Abuse, Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement, Sexual Assault, Crisis Intervention Training, and Fentanyl Safety and Awareness.



Community Outreach Programs

We actively connect with our community through outreach programs that help us strengthen positive relationships and build trust. Our outreach programs, overseen by the Community Services Division, contribute to building a safer, stronger, and more united community.



Cadet Program

The program offers young individuals the chance to explore a potential career in law enforcement. Cadets rotate through different divisions to gain experience in various aspects of police work. They also assume diverse roles during community events, acting as liaisons between the police department and the youth in the community.

In 2023, we had 19 Cadets who dedicated nearly 4,000 hours to the program through volunteering opportunities, training, meetings, and operations.

Community Outreach Programs (Continued)

Police Youth Academy

The Police Youth Academy, a week-long summer program, offers local teens insights into law enforcement, police roles, community policing, and various career options. In 2023, nearly 40 teens aged 14 to 18 completed the academy with the support of police staff and generous contributions from local businesses and community members.



The program began in 2022 to provide a safe space for pro-social, educational, and recreational activities. It emphasizes teamwork, fosters positive self-esteem, and offers an opportunity to build positive relationships.



Police Activities League (PAL)

The Watsonville Police Activities League works alongside our agency and the City of Watsonville.

The program centers on offering resources to youth, including educational, athletic, and recreational activities. Creating a bond among police Officers, recreational leaders, youth, and their parents is one of the program's primary focuses, as this also serves as a youth crime prevention program. PAL provides diverse programs like boxing, martial arts, soccer, and leadership and team-building opportunities. In 2023, the program served more than 200 kids.

Camino Hacia el Éxito

Camino Hacia el Éxito, established in 2012, is a diversion program for Watsonville youth who commit a first-time misdemeanor.

Participants in the program commit to fulfilling specific requirements to divert their cases from being forwarded to the Santa Cruz County Probation Department. These requirements include completing community service hours, attending counseling sessions, participating in pro-social activities, attending management meetings, and engaging in a parenting component.



Community Outreach Programs (Continued)

Post-Incident Team

The Post-Incident Team, commonly known as PIT, consists of Officers and volunteers collaborating to keep residents well-informed.

This team is dedicated to assisting residents after significant incidents in our community, conducting door-to-door visits to calm fears, address rumors, and offer information on community resources and City services. In 2023, the team was deployed four times.



Agua Con La Chota

Agua con la Chota has provided local farmworkers with a safe space to interact with Officers and receive information and guidance since 2017.

We created the program in collaboration with community-based organizations to help break down barriers and build trust between the community and the police.

During several scheduled gatherings at local agricultural fields, farm workers can chat with our Officers over various topics such as immigration, and local and state laws. In 2023, we held three sessions, reaching dozens of farmworkers through this program.

Guest Speaker Program

This year-round initiative manages requests for Police Officer presentations at various events, including neighborhood watch meetings, business watch meetings, club gatherings, school visits, and police department tours.

Presentation topics cover crime prevention, personal safety, workplace violence, domestic violence, police services, K-9 program, drugs, and gangs. In 2023, our Guest Speaker Program connected with about 6,000 community members.





WATSONVILLE POLICE

We take extreme pride in our transparency and ongoing engagement with our community.

Our Communications Team works hard to provide timely and accurate information about incidents, crime trends, police department activities, and available community programs. One of our department's primary strategies for connecting with our community is through the use of several social media platforms.

CONNECT WITH US



**Like, Follow, Subscribe,
Download & Register**

Non-Emergency Police Dispatch: 831-471-1151

Crime Tip Line: 831-768-3544

Records: 831-768-3370

Investigations: 831-768-3350

Police Chief's Office: 831-768-3300

This Annual Report was written by Erika Vazquez, Police Media and Communications Assistant, and Michelle Pulido, Public Information Officer. The design was crafted by Suryel Vasquez, Multimedia & Communications Analyst.