

Soledad police beat expands every day

Department struggles to keep connection with growing population

By **JANICE AUSTIN**
For The Salinas Californian

As Soledad continues to undergo rapid growth, its police officers say they hope to maintain a sense of small-town connection to the citizens they protect.

"We serve a population of 17,600, which is fast growing," said Lt. Jaime Fernandez. "The city of Soledad is expanding every single day, it seems like."

Fernandez believes that the quality of life is what makes Soledad unique.

"It still has that small-town atmosphere, even though we're growing," he said. "You still know people. It's nice to be able to walk around and know everybody out there. It's changing a little bit, but I think the feeling and that atmosphere are still there. As fast as we're growing, that will be our challenge to hold onto that."

The department began in 1921, with Constable George Brandt at the helm. Constable Jess Hansen took the reins from 1927 to 1961. Red Skinner became the city's first police chief in 1961.

Current Chief Richard Cox took over January 2004.

Fernandez said recruitment of officers is another challenge facing the department.

"We're competing with the (Monterey County) Sheriff's Office and with Salinas and Monterey," he said. "We've been able to do it. We have good officers here."

The Soledad Police Department building has been undergoing extensive remodeling since October 2005. The



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Soledad Police Department Chief Richard Cox stands at the entrance of the recently remodeled building that doubles the size of the department, on Feb. 27.

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Soledad Police Department

department has been temporarily housed in a modular building but expected to be back in its newly made-over building by the middle of this month.

"The evidence room has been completely redone," Fernandez said. "And our ser-

geants are getting an office."

Fernandez began with the Soledad Police Department in 1983. From 1999 to 2005 he was employed by the Monterey County Sheriff's Office. He returned to the Soledad Police Department in November 2005.

SOLEDAD POLICE DEPARTMENT

n **CHIEF:** Richard Cox

n **ADDRESS:** 236 Main St., Soledad.

n **STAFFING:** 19 full-time, one part-time.

n **HISTORY:** Established in Soledad in 1921. First constable was George Brandt.

n **ONLINE:** www.cityofsoledad.com/departments/pd.