

CHP answers the call

Agency covers Monterey County from two area offices

By RIA MEGNIN
The Salinas Californian

Fifteen thousand times last year, someone in the King City area had contact with the California Highway Patrol.

It didn't always go well. "Public response to law enforcement has declined over the years," said Cmdr. Mark Mann of the CHP's King City area unit. "It doesn't seem there's a real love for law enforcement.

"My guys get yelled at, spit on. It happens. But we also get people showing appreciation all the time. They say, 'Hey, your officer really took care of me.' And that makes you feel good. We're very service-minded."

The CHP is responsible for traffic law enforcement on all county and state roads outside city limits. That can mean assisting drivers with directions or a vehicle breakdown, providing workshops on bicycle safety and the proper use of child safety seats, investigating crashes, collecting dumped cars, holding sobriety checkpoints, chasing down criminals, and more.

"Because we live in a mobile society and people have a tendency to hit the road after they've done something wrong, we have a very real chance of encountering criminals on the highway," Mann said. "If it's something we can handle, we follow it to conclusion. If appropriate, we turn it over to other law enforcement, like the (Monterey County) Sheriff's Office or city police."

Monterey County is covered by two area offices of the CHP: the Monterey area unit and the King City area unit.

The King City office started in 1952 as a substation of the Monterey unit and became independent in 1969. Today, it patrols from the San Luis Obis-



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Cmdr. Mark Mann, right, talks to Special Duty Officer Daniel Wheeler at the California Highway Patrol office in King City.

po County line north to Soledad, while the Monterey unit covers the remainder of south county, from Soledad north to the Santa Cruz and San Benito county lines.

In 2004, the Monterey unit moved into new offices at Blanco Road and Abbott Street in Salinas, making it the area with the newest headquarters

in the state, said Officer Larry Starkey, the Monterey-area spokesman for the CHP.

Crash numbers see drop

Last year, officers from that unit increased enforcement on Highway 101 between Salinas and Soledad, cutting the number of collisions in 2005 to about 200, half the previous

year's numbers, and helping drop the number of fatal accidents from 12 in 2004 to zero on that stretch of highway.

"To be able to do that in a one-year period just by adding officers shows the difference it makes to have additional officers on the road," Starkey said.

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