

COMPTON CREEK CLEANUP PROJECT

COMPTON STATION FIELD OPERATIONS REGION II

The City of Compton is the Sheriff's Department's newest contract city and it receives its law enforcement services from personnel assigned to the Compton Station. The Station is located in the Compton Civic Center in the building that formerly housed the Compton Police Department. The Station has been a part of Field Operations Region II since its inauguration.

The Sheriff's Department is committed to addressing and improving all aspects of the quality of life, wherever possible, in the communities that it serves. One of the first major issues identified as a persistent ongoing community problem was a concrete lined rivulet of water running through the City of Compton known as Compton Creek. Over the years, it had become an informal and illegal public dump containing old mattresses, television sets, broken and useless furniture, and the occasional animal carcass. Residents had long complained that it was unsightly, presented a health hazard, and often emitted a foul stench. The problem became a more widely recognized local topic of discussion when



PACE crew assisting with Compton Creek cleanup.



Compton Creek cleanup effort.



Los Angeles County Public Works crew assists with cleanup.



Captain Rhambo discusses the cleanup project.

it was reported by print and television media that dead, and occasionally, live animals had been tossed into the creek and were abandoned there, sometimes for weeks, until they eventually died. Frustrated citizens turned to their local elected officials for help, but were unable to gain any relief.

Exasperated local officials had, for years, attempted to get the Army Corps of Engineers, who has nominal jurisdiction, to set up a regular cleanup schedule for the Creek in order to keep the problem manageable. However, the bureaucratic "process" seemed unable to keep pace with the illegal dumping, therefore, the problem continued unabated.

Captain Cecil Rhambo, the commander of Compton Station, elected to take action soon after his arrival at the Station. He recruited and assembled the station person-

nel who would be charged with correcting this blight on the community. Working in collaboration with elected City officials, other Sheriff's Department units, and the Army Corps of Engineers, a cleanup plan was developed.

On August 29, 2001, deputies from the Compton Station COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) Team organized and took action to resolve the longstanding problem that was not previously resolved by other government agencies working independently for fourteen years.

Deputies from the COPS Team, contacted the Army Corps of Engineers, the governmental agency responsible for cleaning the Creek, to seek permission to enter and clean the area. Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite-Burke was also instrumental in providing County assistance for the cleanup effort.

Heavy equipment was brought in to deal with larger pieces of debris.



The COPS Team helped coordinate all concerned local agencies to facilitate and expedite the cleanup project. The City of Compton, along with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, Flood Maintenance Division, and the Sheriff's Department Prisoner Assistance Community Enhancement (PACE) crew, a work crew made up of jail inmates, also provided personnel and equipment for the project.

As the project got underway near El Segundo Boulevard and Parmalee Avenue, on the southern end of the City of Compton, members of the California Army National Guard offered their assistance to the program. Arrangements were made for HQ 240th Signal Battalion, 40th Infantry Division, to clean the right-of-way above the creek on September 8th & 9th, 2001. Approximately 150 soldiers raked leaves and chopped down bushes along the right-of-way. It had become overgrown and littered with all types of debris. The cleanup efforts put forth by the military prompted numerous private organizations, within the City, to also volunteer their time.

Eventually, many community-based organizations volunteered their time and energy to cleanup the Creek. Each of those groups felt that getting involved in this project gave them a "stake" in the community and, in this way, they all became "stakeholders."

This synergistic effect became the lifeblood of the cleanup project. As one group of volunteers



Captain Rhambo oversees the PACE crew and Public Works crew.

became involved, it would prompt others to show interest, ask questions, and, eventually, become actively involved as volunteers on the project.

The project extended through two Compton Municipal Council districts. Councilwoman Delores Zurita (District 1) and Councilwoman Yvonne Arceneaux (District 3) provided invaluable aid with the cleanup effort. They arranged for workers from the City of Compton to receive overtime pay while working on the project. This enabled the cleanup to continue on the weekends and reduced the length of the project from three weeks to just less than two weeks. The Councilwomen also provided food and refreshments for the National Guardsmen and City workers during the project.

Upon completion of the project, the *Los Angeles Times* printed a prom-

inent article commending the cleanup effort. Numerous members of the community also expressed their appreciation for the cleanup of the Creek.

Upon completion of the project, Captain Rhambo and the Sheriff's Department received numerous telephone calls and letters thanking Compton Station personnel for alleviating the health hazard to the City that the Creek had represented. The Compton County and City COPS Teams are continuing to monitor the state of the waterway to control any illegal dumping activity in and around the Creek area.

The clean up of Compton Creek is continuing on a biweekly schedule, with the Army Corps of Engineers, the Sheriff's Department, and community volunteers providing the manpower to maintain the Creek in a more pristine condition.

The efforts put forth by all of the concerned parties is an example of "community-based policing" in its highest and truest form. The cleanup project has had a very positive impact on the community and established excellent lines of communications between community organizations, individual citizens, and the Sheriff's Department.

Tractor clears debris and brush from the Creek.

