

2nd deputy accused of sex with Explorer

07:14 AM PDT on Friday, May 6, 2011

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The Press-Enterprise



Sheriff: Deputy had sex with Explorer

San Bernardino County Sheriff's deputy was arrested on suspicion of having sex with a female member of the Sheriff's Explorers.

Published: 5/5/2011 03:45 PM

San Bernardino County Sheriff Rod Hoops has suspended the ride-along program for Explorer Scouts for at least 60 days after a deputy was arrested on suspicion of having sex with a teenage girl who was part of the program.

It was the second time in two weeks that a **San Bernardino** County deputy has been accused of having sex with an underage Explorer Scout who was on a ride-along. The incidents involve different deputies and different teens.

Deputy Anthony Benjamin, 30, of Beaumont, was arrested Wednesday on suspicion of oral copulation with a person under 18 and sex with a foreign object with a person under 18, Hoops said at a news conference Thursday. The girl is 17.

On April 22, Deputy Nathan James Gastineau, 30, of Redlands, was arrested on suspicion of committing a lewd act with a minor, a 16-year-old girl. He is scheduled to be arraigned June 27 in San Bernardino Superior Court.

Hoops would not provide any further details of the incidents.

Benjamin, who has been with the department five years, was assigned to the Victorville station. Gastineau, who has worked with department 10 years, works at the Highland station where he supervises that station's Explorers program. Both deputies are on paid administrative leave.

"As the sheriff of San Bernardino County and a parent myself, this is very disheartening," Hoops said. "I'm alarmed."

Hoops said the department will examine all aspects of the Explorer program, including

training, evaluation and selection of the deputies who supervise the Explorers. A district attorney's investigator familiar with sex crimes and crimes against children will assist, Hoops said.

"We're going through our Explorer policy with a fine-tooth comb to see if there is anything we need to change to prevent this from happening again," the sheriff said. "I felt that we had everything in place."

Benjamin was arrested hours after investigators in the Victorville office received an anonymous tip that a deputy there might have had inappropriate sexual contact with an underage female, Hoops said.

Benjamin posted \$100,000 bail Thursday morning and was released. He could not be located for comment.

Popular PROGRAM

The sheriff's Explorer Scout program provides youths ages 14-21 who are interested in law-enforcement careers a chance to experience police work. There are 245 young people in the Sheriff's Department program.

Lt. Todd Paterson, who supervises the Emergency Operations Volunteer Forces Division, said potential Explorers attend three orientations and meet with advisers before signing up at one of the department's 15 stations. They then go through interviews before being accepted.

Explorers attend a two-week academy where they learn police procedures, firearms instruction and defensive techniques. They assist deputies at community events, do clerical work and direct traffic, among other duties.

After completing the academy, Explorers are then eligible to ride along with deputies on patrol. There, they learn police procedures, including how officers communicate by radio, handle particular situations and talk with the public, Paterson said.

Explorers generally do not stay out on patrol past 10 p.m., Paterson said.

Hoops said he still believes in the value of the Explorer program and that the safety of the youths is a priority.

"We have many fine deputies at all of our stations, who have been involved in Explorers for many years," he said.

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