



## Perris News

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### Cops & Clergy Meet to Discuss Community Issues

Riverside County law enforcement officers and educators say they are defying the odds during this economic "Great Recession" by continuing to reduce major crimes and turn out record numbers of high school graduates with shrinking resources.

But the day of reckoning is coming.

Sheriff Stan Sniff and Riverside County Superintendent of Schools, Kenn Young, said during remarks in Perris that state and county budget cuts eventually will catch up with their efforts to keep students in the classroom and out of jail. The pair spoke this week during a meeting of the community-based group, Cops & Clergy.



Sheriff Sniff, Councilwoman Rogers and Superintendent Young pose for a portrait.



City Councilwoman Rita Rogers answers a question while Riverside County Sheriff Stan Sniff looks on during this week's Cops & Clergy gathering.

City Councilwoman Rita Rogers hosted the meeting. Cops & Clergy meets monthly to discuss issues important to both police and the pulpit.

"These are difficult times right now and it takes a real leader to achieve results like this," Rogers said. "These two are real leaders. There is no quick or easy solution to the state's budget woes. We have to manage the funds we have as best as we can. It is important for our church leaders to learn the good things that are going on despite the economy while keeping informed about the long-range challenges we face."

Rogers said she was pleased to learn that the sheriff's department will be hiring 142 people to staff an expanded correctional facility in Banning. The department will begin instructing those employees at the Ben Clark Training Center just west of Perris in the next few months.

Sniff, who took over as sheriff in 2007, said he has traveled 71,000 miles driving across Riverside County speaking to groups, meeting with municipal officials and lobbying for adequate funding. The sheriff department provides law enforcement services to 15 cities in the county, including Perris, and for about 400,000 residents living in unincorporated communities. The department includes 4,600 full-time sworn and civilian employees and another 1,500 volunteers. It has a \$510 million budget.

Sniff said that while major crimes like murder, armed robbery, rape and aggravated assault continue to decline—they fell almost 10 percent in the last six months in Perris—those trends likely will not continue if resources remain stretched.

He said officers already are seeing the result of what he called a shredded safety net—more reports of domestic violence, bullying in schools and bar fights.

"People are in despair and are hurting," he said. "Conditions are scary. It is getting more dangerous out there."

The sheriff said deputies are responding to more calls for service from people who have lost their homes and are forced to live with relatives or other families. The cause: government services for the stressed and underprivileged already have fallen to the budget axe.

"No one else is available 24-7," the sheriff said.

Young, in his remarks to the assembled clergy, also tempered his remarks with caution.

The good news, Young said, is that Riverside County graduated 26,000 students last year, more than ever. More than 80 percent of high school students receive a diploma, Young said. But with the state facing billions in budget cuts, public education is increasingly subject to the cutting block. It is likely in some school districts, Young said, that class days will be cut from 180 to 175 or even 170. That can only mean a more difficult challenge for California kids.

"It's going to get a lot tougher," Young said. "We are going backwards. We are cutting the education of our future generation and work force."

Young sounded a warning as he wrapped up his remarks. A high-school diploma is the measuring stick between freedom and incarceration. More than 80 percent of people in prison did not receive one.



Riverside County School Superintendent Kenn Young contemplates a discussion point during the Cops and Clergy meeting at Perris Police Headquarters.