

Armored vehicle bulks up rebuilding Rialto Police Dept.

Rialto officials say they want to send a clear message to the city's Police Department: you are here to stay and we support you.

The Rialto City Council's latest effort to convey the message came in the form of an 8-ton, diesel-powered, bullet-resistant BearCat armored vehicle.

The \$215,000 vehicle is the first of two components, said Chief Mark Kling. In July, the department will receive a large communications vehicle that will be deployed with the BearCat, he said.

"Planning and preparation are the two keys to success and we are acquiring the tools necessary in the event a catastrophe occurs," Kling said.

The communications vehicle will be equipped with televisions, fax machines, telephones and other such equipment, Kling said.

The council's agreement to purchase the vehicles speaks volumes of its commitment to the department, Kling said. "We are getting the type of equipment and support that we need to rebuild our police department into the premier department it was," he added.

The council voted 4-1 in September 2005 to disband the Police Department because of what the members said were chronic problems. The council had planned to contract with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department for Rialto's law enforcement.

In March 2006 the City Council ended its attempt to disband the department because the effort seemed hopelessly stalled and it appeared the issue could be taken out of their hands and put to a citywide vote.

Councilwoman Winnie Hanson said once the decision was made to retain the department, the council's support has been complete.

"The council and Police Department went through a greatly painful situation and we are now moving forward with an enthusiastic push of support," Hanson said. "If we are going to have a police



Greg Vojtko / The Press-Enterprise

Rialto, California Police officers look over a new BearCat armored vehicle. They will use it to serve high-risk search warrants and for the SWAT team. The City Council sees the purchase as a sign of support.

department, we don't want them to be understaffed or under-equipped."

Sgt. Jim Kurkoske said the BearCat has done wonders for the morale of the SWAT team, to which the vehicle is assigned.

"Knowing the council approved a \$215,000 piece of equipment shows they and the city have confidence in our department and that we will be around," Kurkoske said.

The SWAT team has been using an armored vehicle donated by a bank several years ago, Chief Kling said.

The Colton Police Department purchased an armored vehicle in 2006 with asset-seizure funds for about \$200,000. The Palm Springs department purchased a Lenco BearCat armored vehicle for a little more than \$200,000 the same year.

Although the Colton Police Department has promised to lend its armored vehicle to neighboring agencies, Kling said it benefits Rialto residents and the department to have its own vehicle.

The vehicle was purchased with developmental impact fees, said Kirby Warner, assistant city administrator.