Street gangs expand sex trafficking in county

Police link teenage Yorba Linda stabbing victim to prostitution.

BY SALVADOR HERNANDEZ, DOUG IRVING and CLAUDIA KOERNER
STAFF WRITERS

With its high incomes and millions of visitors, Orange County has become a major stop on a sex-trafficking circuit that runs through the urban West and appears to have snared a teenage girl killed in Yorba Linda this week.

Criminal street gangs are playing a growing role in the human-trafficking industry, drawn by the preomise of easy money without the risks that come with dealing drugs or weapons, according to law enforcement officials. The victims in Orange County alone easily number in the hundreds, many of them teenage girls brought in from nearby counties.

Police say Aubreyanna Sade Parks, 17, was one such victim. She spent the last weeks of her life terrorized by a convicted felon who had her beaten, threatened her family and forced her onto the streets to sell sex, court records allege.

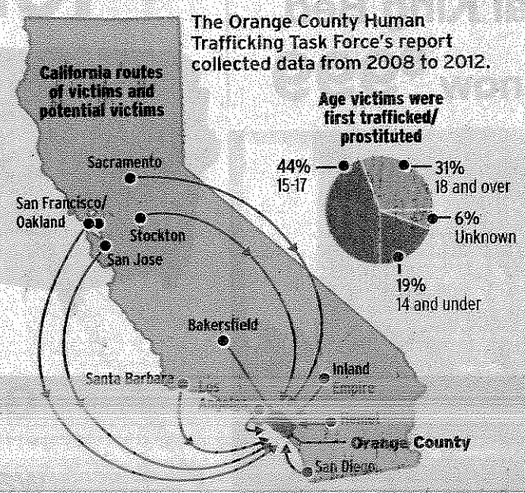
"She is terrified," wrote a detective who interviewed her days before she was found stabbed to death on a Yorba Linda street. The man she identified as her pimp "has knowledge of where her family resides and (she) believes that he will retaliate by 'killing someone' in her family."

Her case sheds light on a human-trafficking industry that thrives in the shadows of Orange County. Police and others who work with victims say the county lies on a trafficking circuit that reaches south to San Diego, east to Las Vegas and north to the Bay Area and beyond.

SEE TRAFFICKING • PAGE 20

Sex trade routes lead to O.C.

The Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force's report collected data from 2008 to 2012.



Source: Human Trafficking Task Force Human Trafficking Victim Report

MOLLY ZISK, STAFF GRAPHIC

Aubreyanna Sade Parks, left, told a detective that Marsalis Smith, right, had forced her into prostitution.

FROM PAGE 1

Traffickers spirit their victims from city to city, advertising them as "new in town," preventing them from getting their bearings. They look for large and diverse population centers with access to major highways, according to a 2012 report on human trafficking in California.

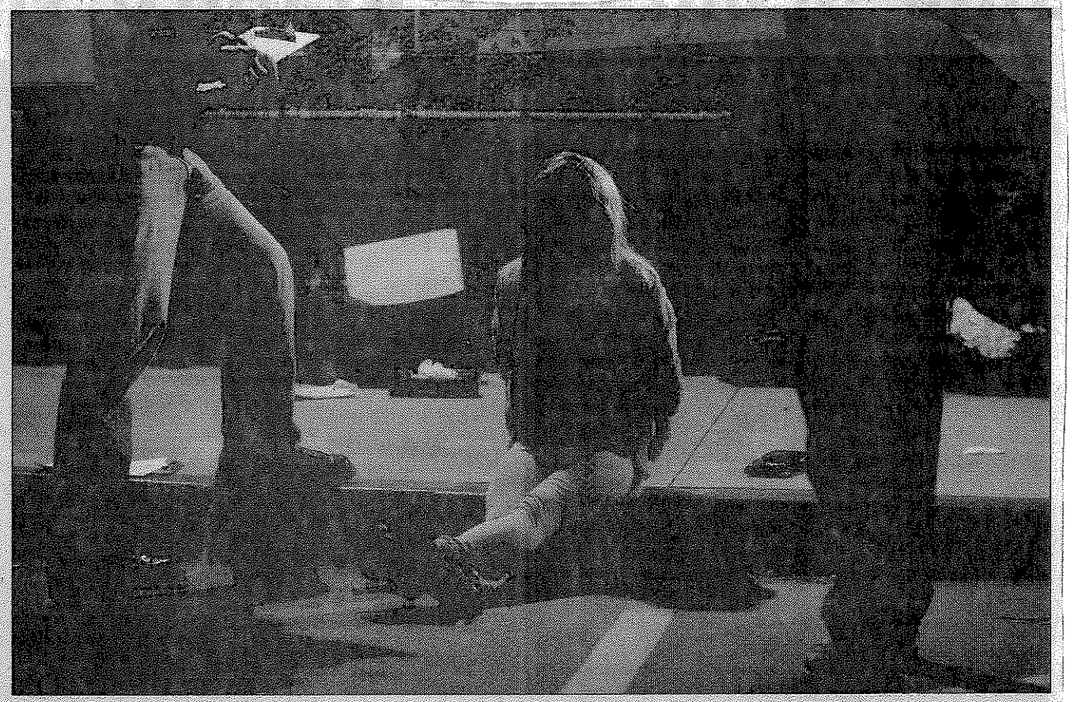
Most of the cases here still involve pimps working alone and controlling small groups of women, police say. But organized gangs are getting into the trafficking business, where they can keep selling the same victim, night after night.

At least half of the suspects charged in Orange County trafficking cases in the past two months have "significant gang ties," said Susan Kang Schroeder, chief of staff of the District Attorney's Office.

A sex trafficker controlling four women, each forced to meet a typical quota of $500 a night, could make more than $600,000 a year, according to an anti-trafficking group called the Polaris Project.

"Wherever there's headlights, there's money," said a former prostitute who gave her name only as Hope, citing concerns about her safety. She said she used to work in Gardena, not far from where Aubreyanna grew up, but didn't know her.

Pimps often target younger girls, sending them away from their neighborhoods to disconnect them from family and friends, Hope said. That's why girls from Los Angeles County often turn up in Orange County, Northern California, Las Vegas.



FILE PHOTO: KEVIN SULLIVAN, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Santa Ana police officers process a woman suspected of prostitution along Harbor Boulevard in 2012.

Some fall under the spell of sweet-talking "Romeo pimps" and trust them as their boyfriends, said Lita Mercado, a program director at Orange County's Community Service Programs, which helps victims. Others are battered under the control of so-called "gorilla pimps" and fear for their safety if they try to escape.

"They're psychologically handcuffed," said Anaheim police Lt. Steve Davis, who heads the city's vice unit and is a member of the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force. "It's almost like this cult following where they get in the car and come down here."

> **"They're psychologically handcuffed. It's almost like this cult following where they get in the car and come down here."**
>
> LT. STEVE DAVIS
> ANAHEIM VICE UNIT

The task force identified 213 victims of human trafficking in Orange County in 2012, a snapshot of an ever-changing problem. Three-quarters of them were being trafficked for sex. Almost all were female, and more than a quarter said they started as minors. Most were U.S. citizens.

"No child grows up hoping that they will one day be sold for sex," District Attorney Tony Rackauckas said in April 2013 as he announced a special unit to prosecute human traffickers. The unit has since sent 17 traffickers to prison, put 10 others on probation and has 49 open cases.

"These victims are not throwaways," Rackauckas said.

• • •

Aubreyanna Sade Parks wanted to be a lawyer. She had recently been accepted at Northern Arizona University and would have been the first in her family to attend college. Friends and family knew her as Aubrey – "a playful, fun-loving, joyful, happy child," her godmother, Georgia Smith, said.

Police stopped her early on the morning of Jan. 24, after she solicited an undercover officer during a vice sting on Harbor Boulevard, according to court papers. She told a detective that a man named Marsalis Smith had forced her to work as a street walker and post prostitution ads online, the court papers say.

Smith's criminal record in Los Angeles includes convictions for battery, resisting arrest and assault with a deadly weapon, records show. He served five months in prison in 2012 for possessing a firearm as a felon.

Aubreyanna told the detective that Smith's friends once beat her as he watched and that he forced her to sleep naked – a pimp's precaution to keep her from escaping, according to court records. She said he collected any money she made for gas, food, clothing – even a $180 stereo for his car.

Smith was arrested and has pleaded not guilty to trafficking a minor by force, pimping and pandering. He has been held since late January in Orange County

Rev. Cavalain Hawkins spotted her. He invited her to get some food at a nearby Chili's, then took her to get new clothes that, he said, would be more fitting for church. At one point, he said, she shrank from a man she said was a member of the gang that had pimped her.

Hawkins said he was going to take Aubreyanna to a shelter, but she parted ways with him. All she had was a pocket book, he said.

A few days later, on Tuesday morning, two bicyclists taking an early ride through a neighborhood of multimillion-dollar homes found Aubreyanna's body lying on a curb. She was fully clothed but had no identification, and had been stabbed multiple times in the upper body.

Police arrested Larry Soo Shin in connection with her murder. Shin, 35, lived with his mother in a townhouse more than a mile away. Prosecutors say he had been communicating with Aubreyanna and had asked her to meet him in Yorba Linda.

"It breaks my heart," Hawkins said. "She's a child. She hasn't even breathed yet, and her life is over."

Staff writer Scott Schwebke contributed to this report.

CONTACT THE WRITER:
714-704-3777 or
dirving@ocregister.com

L.A. COUNTY JAIL

Sat 2-8-14 Daily Breeze

Two more deputies are indicted

By Christina Villacorte
christina.villacorte@langnews.com
@LADNvillacorte on Twitter

A federal grand jury late Thursday indicted two more sheriff's deputies for allegedly beating an inmate in 2009, bringing to 20 the number of Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department employees indicted in an ongoing probe of alleged abuses at Men's Central Jail.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Margaret Carter said the indictment charged Joey Aguiar, 26, and Mariano Ramirez, 38, of using illegal force against an inmate under color of authority and then falsely accusing their victim of attacking them.

Their allegedly bogus reports on the incident were submitted to the county District Attorney's Office to be used as the basis for prosecuting the inmate.

"The indictment alleges these deputies assaulted an inmate, identified only as B.P., on the 3000 floor of Men's Central Jail by striking him, kicking him, hitting him with a flashlight and pepper-spraying him — all while he was handcuffed and waist-chained," Carter said.

She did not indicate whether either deputy has been arrested but noted both were summoned to appear in federal court on March 6.

"All told, each defendant faces a total maximum of 40 years, if convicted on everything," Carter said.

Los Angeles County Sheriff John Scott, sworn in Jan. 30 as interim chief replacing the retiring Sheriff Lee Baca, responded to the developments: "As I stated when I took office last week, my Number One priority is to ensure that the Department continues the substantial progress it has made in reforming and improving our jail system and culture.

"Although today's indictment should not be taken as a reflection of the outstanding work that the overwhelming majority of deputies perform every day, it does underscore that everyone in this Department should and will be held accountable for their actions. Abuse of authority will not be tolerated."

According to the indictment, the alleged beating took place Feb. 11, 2009. It said Aguiar's report "falsely stated, among other things, that victim-inmate BP had attempted to head butt deputy Aguiar's face and that victim-inmate BP violently kicked at deputy Aguiar" when the victim had done neither. Ramirez's account, meanwhile, claimed the inmate "viciously kicked his legs at deputies."

American Civil Liberties Union legal director Peter Eliasberg said chaplain Paulino Juarez witnessed the beating and revealed details in a sworn declaration.

In a video released by the ACLU, Juarez said, "The deputies are kicking him on the head, on the body, here (pointing to his neck).

"They were saying (to him), 'Stop fighting! Stop fighting!' He wasn't fighting. I saw the body lying down on the floor with blood around his head. I think he was unconscious."

"The fact that the feds have filed indictments," Eliasberg said, "confirmed what we've been saying for years — that there was terrible stuff going on at the jails."

These dual indictments are only the latest in the continuing investigation of alleged abuses at Men's Central Jail, located in downtown Los Angeles, not far from Union Station.

In December, U.S. Attorney Andre Birotte announced the first batch of indictments against 18 other Sheriff's Department employees. He accused them of various acts of misconduct, including beating visitors, putting handcuffs on a consular official without justification, threatening an FBI agent at her home and hiding an informant from the FBI.

Those deputies, sergeants and lieutenants, who have all pleaded not guilty, are scheduled for trial later this year.

The scandal helped drive Baca into retirement. One of the candidates running to replace him in the June 3 election, former jail commander Bob Olmsted, immediately tried to use the latest indictments to taint his rivals, who were members of Baca's executive team.

"This latest round of indictments is likely by no means the last round," Olmsted said, "and it is a testament to the corruption and mismanagement that has plagued the L.A. County Sheriff's Department under the leadership of Lee Baca, Paul Tanaka, James Hellmold and Todd Rogers.

"Cases like this were exactly why I blew the whistle on the corruption within the department when I was in charge of Men's Central jail," he added. "The L.A. County Sheriff's Department needs new leadership — leadership that will clean house among all of Lee Baca's cronies who either were complicit in these crimes or who did nothing to stop them."

Supes to review system outcomes

Report finds kids assigned private lawyers fare worse

2-12-14

By Christina Villacorte
christina.villacorte@langnews.com
@LADNvillacorte on Twitter

The Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to take a closer look at the juvenile justice system after a recent study concluded indigent juvenile delinquents tended to receive harsher punishments when represented by private lawyers contracted by the county rather than public defenders.

"This is about the protection of rights of young people," Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas said.

When youths cannot afford an attorney, the county provides a public defender. If there is a conflict of interest — for example, the public defender is already representing another party in the case — the county instead contracts with a member of a panel of attorneys who is paid a flat fee from $219 to $515, regardless of how much effort he or she puts into helping the client.

After analyzing about 3,000 cases from 2004 to 2007, the Loyola Law School Center for Juvenile Law and Policy concluded in a report that these so-called panel attorneys are "less active" and that their clients are convicted of more serious offenses and are subject to more severe dispositions.

Addressing the board, Claremont Graduate University professor and study co-author Tarek Azzam said, "Our findings suggested that, public defenders (when contrasted with panel attorneys) were more likely to file motions on behalf of their clients, actually request expert witnesses and actually request to dismiss the trial."

"And, when (panel attorneys) were representing the youth, there was a significant increase in the length of sentences — by approximately 15 percent."

The county should do a better of job of helping juvenile delinquents, about 70 percent of whom are believed to have mental health problems and/or learning disabilities, said Esther Lim, the American Civil Liberties

JUVENILES » PAGE 8

Juveniles

FROM PAGE 3

Union's Jails Project director.

"It's a fundamental principle of our U.S. Constitution that defendants are entitled to the assistance of counsel in criminal proceedings," Lim told the board. "The right applies at all critical stages of a proceeding, and is not satisfied by merely the presence of an attorney in the courtroom."

Carol Chodroff, a juvenile policy attorney, said the quality of legal representation is critical.

"The children in the justice system need trained attorneys who can obtain critical records and advocate for their medical, educational, mental health, housing, social and emotional needs," she told the board.

"These same attorneys must also protect children's constitutional rights by interviewing the child, employing investigators, having expert witnesses appointed, objecting to inadmissible evidence at adjudicatory hearings, advocating for the least restrictive alternative at disposition, and pressing at every stage for the child's interest," she added.

Alarmed by the report, Ridley-Thomas filed a motion directing staff to assess the impact of ending the flat fee compensation model for panel attorneys, and determine whether a change is needed.

Supervisor Gloria Molina also urged that the board should consider the recommendations already made by Juvenile Court Presiding Judge Michael Nash to improve the system.

"I have been watching this since I was 20 and working as a community organizer, and I've seen the misrepresentation or lack of representation of many of these children," Molina said.

Francisco Carillo told the board that his panel attorney bungled his case when he was 16 years old, so that he ended up spending 20 years behind bars for a crime he didn't commit, before being exonerated. Carrillo was found guilty in the 1991 shooting death of a man in Lynwood. His conviction was reversed in March 2011, after witnesses recanted their identification of him as the shooter.

"I feel sort of robbed," he said. "As a child, (I felt that) I wasn't taken seriously, or that my life wasn't taken seriously."

"The children in the justice system need trained attorneys who can obtain critical records and advocate for their medical, educational, mental health, housing, social and emotional needs."

— Carol Chodroff, a juvenile policy attorney

D.A. reviewing Ridley-Thomas' garage project

WED 2-12-14.

LA Times

County is examining whether taxpayer money was misspent during work at the supervisor's home.

By Paul Pringle and Jack Leonard

Luis Sinco Los Angeles Times

RIDLEY-THOMAS reimbursed the county $3,759, which he says is all that was owed.

The Los Angeles County district attorney's office is looking into whether thousands of dollars in taxpayer money was misspent on improvements to Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas' home last year, an office spokeswoman said Tuesday.

Newly released records show that a contractor charged the county $6,239 to perform work during a project to install a security system that included replacing interior walls in Ridley-Thomas' converted garage and trenching the property for an electrical upgrade.

The supervisor reimbursed the county $3,759 on Oct. 29 for an air conditioner and heater, a flat-screen television and a refrigerator the crews placed in the garage. Of that amount, $960 was for labor costs for installing the air conditioner and heater, according to the records.

The documents, which The Times obtained from the county under the California Public Records Act, provide the most complete picture yet of the scope and cost of the work in September and October at the supervisor's Leimert Park home.

District attorney's office spokeswoman Jean Guccione said the office's review grew out of a complaint that prosecutors received last month. She declined to elaborate. The Times first reported on the work performed at Ridley-Thomas' home in mid-January.

[See Garage, AA4]

[Garage, from AA1]

County supervisors are entitled to home security systems provided by the government, but not to unrelated improvements to their property at taxpayers' expense. Ridley-Thomas has insisted that the work at his home was completely proper and that he reimbursed the county for any items not related to the security system.

The total cost to taxpayers for the job was $10,038, according to Assistant County Counsel Judy Whitehurst.

The records show that the county contractor was given the task of removing wall paneling and drywall from the supervisor's detached garage and installing about 640 square feet of new drywall. The project included adding new baseboards as well as painting all new woodwork. Outside the garage, the contractor was to dig a trench through lawn and concrete from the home's electrical panel to the garage, the records say. The work was to entail planting up to 1,000 square feet of Bermuda grass sod. The records did not detail how much of the work was done.

The documents describe the project as a "security measure." The county redacted from the records descriptions of an additional $436 in work by the contractor, apparently because it was related to the security system. The name of the contractor was also withheld.

John Thompson, the county project manager who oversaw the work, previously told The Times that the trench was dug to bury conduit as part of electrical upgrades to make more power available to the garage.

Thompson said the garage already had standard current, but he believed the power upgrade was necessary for the security system. He added, however, that he was not an electrical expert.

Thompson said he recommended to Ridley-Thomas that the paneling be removed to make it easier to hide wiring in the walls for the alarms. He said dropping the wires behind the existing walls would have been difficult because the space was filled with insulation and the work would have damaged the wood paneling.

Thompson said he could not find the same style of paneling, so he suggested replacing it with drywall. He said he wanted the result to be appealing to the eye.

"It's a county supervisor and I'm going to make it look nice," Thompson said. "Our function is to keep the supervisors happy. They're our boss."

Alarm and electrical experts said in interviews that high-end security systems typically do not require extra power. Nigel Smithers, Southern California general manager for Absolute Security Alarms, said the electrical work at Ridley-Thomas' home would not be necessary for a security system. "It makes no sense," said Smithers, a former military and California state police officer.

He also said there would be no need to remove or replace walls to run the wiring for a system: "Ripping the walls out? That's ridiculous."

"Any reputable alarm company could easily fish the wires in the wall."

Ridley-Thomas has not responded to repeated requests for comment from The Times. His spokeswoman, Lisa Richardson, referred The Times to a statement the supervisor made Monday that she said was reported by the Los Angeles Wave newspaper.

The Wave quoted Ridley-Thomas as saying that the project manager recommended that crews "could also attend to other improvements in the same 300-square-foot room during the course of their work. This seemed to be the most secure and efficient course, avoiding incompatibility between the work of [county crews] and other contractors."

Ridley-Thomas said the county's Internal Services Division quoted him a price that he agreed to pay before the work was done, according to the Wave.

All of the improvements at Ridley-Thomas' home were made without permits required by the city of Los Angeles, according to the city Building and Safety Department.

After The Times reported on the upgrades to his garage, the department received a complaint and opened an investigation into whether the building had been converted into living space in violation of city codes.

Ridley-Thomas subsequently obtained a permit for work to make the conversion of the structure comply with the rules.

Plans filed for the permit call for construction of a carport to satisfy a requirement that homes have covered parking.

paul.pringle
@latimes.com
jack.leonard
@latimes.com

L.A. deputies indicted by U.S.

Sat 2-8-14 LA Times

Sheriff's officials originally rejected allegations that deputies beat a handcuffed inmate.

By Jack Leonard, Robert Faturechi and Richard Winton

Federal prosecutors announced charges Friday against two Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies accused of assaulting a handcuffed inmate in a case that broadens the FBI's ongoing inquiry and raises new questions about how the Sheriff's Department has investigated deputy misconduct in the nation's largest jail system.

Sheriff's officials previously rejected allegations that the deputies used excessive force despite a jail chaplain coming forward to say that he witnessed the 2009 incident and believed the deputies beat a helpless inmate. The sheriff's watchdog reviewed the case but signed off on the department's findings.

A second inquiry by a special task force launched in 2011 to review accusations of brutality in the jails submitted its investigation to the district attorney's office nearly a year after the legal deadline for filing criminal charges in state court, according to a district attorney's memo obtained by The Times. The deputies were not disciplined by the department in connection with the incident, a sheriff's spokesman said. Including the new charges, 21 current and former sheriff's officials have been accused of crimes

[See Deputies, A9]

[Deputies from A1]

in the FBI's three-year investigation into brutality and other misconduct in the department.

Miriam Krinsky, executive director of a county commission that was created in response to the jail abuse scandal, said the indictment provides more evidence that the Sheriff's Department failed for years to hold its deputies accountable for misconduct.

"It's simply another example of the need to be terribly concerned about what checks and balances are in place within the department," she said.

Interim Sheriff John Scott said in a statement that the department was cooperating with federal authorities and that his "No. 1 priority is to ensure that the department continues the substantial progress it has made in reforming and improving our jail system and culture."

He said the indictment underscores "that everyone in this department should and will be held accountable for their actions. Abuse of authority will not be tolerated."

Federal authorities allege that Deputies Joey Aguiar, 26, and Mariano Ramirez, 38, violated the civil rights of the inmate by assaulting him Feb. 11, 2009, in the Men's Central Jail. The deputies could not be reached for comment.

Prosecutors contend that the man was handcuffed to a waist chain during the attack. The indictment accuses the deputies of kicking the inmate in the head and upper body, striking him with a flashlight and pepper-spraying him in the face.

The indictment identifies the inmate as BP, but the district attorney's memo identifies him as Brett Phillips.

The memo, written by Deputy Dist. Atty. Fernando Guzman, provides additional details about the incident, saying that four sheriff's deputies wrote reports explaining that the force was used after Phillips tried to assault Aguiar. Aguiar and Ramirez, the memo says, punched Phillips five to eight times in the rib area while Ramirez struck the inmate two to three times in the leg and elbow with a flashlight.

Sgt. Ernie Barbosa corroborated the deputies' account by saying that he saw the inmate try to kick the deputies, according to the memo, which identified the other deputies involved in the force as Mario Pinedo and Rene Madrid. (The federal indictment states that the grand jury knows of other people involved in the incident but does not identify anyone other than Aguiar and Ramirez.)

Medical records from the jail show that Phillips suffered two raised bruises on his forehead, including one with a cut, but no fractures. A nurse noted scrapes to both of the inmate's wrists and his left eyebrow, according to the memo.

Federal prosecutors say Aguiar and Ramirez submitted reports that falsely claimed the inmate tried to head-butt Aguiar and kick at deputies. The indictment says the Sheriff's Department used the reports to begin the process of referring the inmate to the district attorney's office for criminal prosecution. The office rejected filing charges, according to several sources.

A day after the incident, a chaplain said, he came forward to say that he was a witness. In a report that he gave to the department days later, Deacon Paulino Juarez wrote that he watched in horror as deputies beat the inmate bloody as the victim shouted, "Please stop!" He said the deputies kicked and stomped on the inmate.

"I felt that I had witnessed a crime," he wrote.

Nevertheless, the department concluded that the force was within policy.

More than two years later, the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California filed a sworn statement by Juarez about the incident in court, along with dozens of other declarations alleging mistreatment of other inmates in the county's jail system.

In his declaration, Juarez said he was fearful after witnessing the assault and said passing deputies would call him "rat" and other insults. After hearing nothing for two years, Juarez reached out to the department and was granted a meeting with Baca.

The sheriff, Juarez recalled, said he had never heard about the incident.

"This happened two years ago and I'm only finding out about it now?" Baca asked his executive staff, according to the chaplain. Baca looked over the file, about 10 pages long, and told the chaplain that his investigators had determined the inmate was schizophrenic. Juarez said Baca told him that deputies had to punch the inmate a couple of times to get him into the cell. "Punches are allowed, but kicks are not allowed in my department," Baca said, according to Juarez.

According to the chaplain, Baca said his investigators determined that the bruises were the result of being run over by a car before the inmate was incarcerated, not from a beating.

In response to the ACLU's complaints, a sheriff's task force launched an investigation into the incident in October 2011. The deadline for filing criminal charges in state court was four months later, but the Sheriff's Department did not forward the results to the district attorney's office until January 2013.

Sheriff's officials said Aguiar was relieved of duty in October 2012 for a separate issue while Ramirez has continued to work in the jails. Capt. Mike Parker said the department would begin the process of relieving Ramirez of duty without pay.

In December, 18 current and former deputies were charged with beating jail inmates and visitors, trying to intimidate an FBI agent, and other crimes after a two-year investigation of corruption in the jails. All of those defendants have pleaded not guilty.

A few weeks after the charges were filed, Sheriff Lee Baca decided to retire instead of seeking reelection to a fifth term.

Another former deputy, Gilbert Michel, has pleaded guilty to one count of bribery in connection with his role in bringing a cellphone into the jail for an inmate who was working as an FBI informant.

jack.leonard@latimes.com
robert.faturechi@latimes.com
richard.winton@latimes.com

Sheriff's Dept. issues outlined

2-11-14 Times

In town hall meeting, inspector general lists the challenges in reforming the agency.

By Kate Mather

The newly instated inspector general charged with overseeing the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department spoke to the public for the first time Monday, frankly laying out the problems facing the embattled agency.

"The bad news," read one of the first PowerPoint slides Max Huntsman showed in the Exposition Park meeting room. On his list: allegations of abuse in jails, gang activity among deputies, lax hiring policies and the ongoing federal investigation of the department.

"We have a challenge ahead of us," he said.

Huntsman's remarks were his first to the public since assuming the role of inspector general at the start of the year. Dozens of people — community leaders, politicians, residents and a handful of sheriff's deputies — attended the town hall meeting.

Huntsman's role was created on the recommendation of a blue-ribbon commission that investigated allegations of violence within Los Angeles County jails and determined that there was a pattern of excess force by deputies.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the accusations facing the Sheriff's Department, Huntsman said Monday, was that many were not appropriately handled by agency officials. He pointed to last week's indictment of two deputies accused of beating a chained inmate, the most recent federal charges against the agency.

"I don't know if those deputies are innocent or guilty," Huntsman said. "But I know for sure that that information should have gone up the chain of command ... and it didn't happen."

Huntsman acknowledged the challenges in reforming what he described as a vast, decentralized agency and the previous failed attempts in doing so. Part of the problem, he said, was that the position of sheriff [illegible]

He called Lee Baca's decision to retire last month rather than seek a fifth term in office "incredibly good."

"He could have won reelection — I think he probably would have," Huntsman said.

The audience groaned.

"But he decided not to push that," Huntsman said. "And as a result, what you get is a choice in the election that's coming up."

Huntsman called on the public to help hold the Sheriff's Department accountable. He cautioned that although his office might be slow to effect change, the public momentum was in their favor.

"It's not a problem you can fix and wake up tomorrow and say everything's great," he said.

PATT MORRISON ASKS | JOHN L. SCOTT

The new sheriff

WED 2-12-14 - LA Times

I OVERHEARD THIS OUTSIDE the L.A. County sheriff's headquarters in Monterey Park. "So, how's he doing?"

"He seems good so far. Everybody's just wait and see."

"He" is the interim sheriff, John L. Scott, chosen to replace Lee Baca, who retired as federal indictments were filed on 20 past and present deputies. "He" takes charge of a department widely seen as beset by a see-no-evil culture and favoritism in some of its upper reaches. Scott, who was an L.A. deputy for 36 years, is an insider, an outsider and a short-timer. Here's his to-do list.

CHRISTINA HOUSE / For The Times

Are more indictments coming?

I've asked for a meeting with the federal prosecutor to see whether I can find out.

You have at most 10 months before a new, elected sheriff comes in. What problems need fixing, and why did the Board of Supervisors believe you were the man to do it?

They were looking for an individual who was not going to run for the position, and I had the unique perspective of working both L.A. and Orange County with [some] similar issues: problems in the jail and badges [*issued to politicians or supporters*].

The image has been tarnished. Things were done that are being investigated that certainly were accountable for, but the vast majority of deputies are doing a very professional job.

One of my goals is to restore an image but also the confidence of our public. Then we have accountability. Some things that were in place when I left, I want to restore.

We had SCIF, Sheriff's Critical Incident Forum, a quarterly look at all the different factors that go into an operation. We determined if there were spikes or trends, and we analyzed why is this high or why is this low. It's good to take metrics and analyze them and take good ideas and apply them across the board.

Of the 60 reforms recommended by the Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence, how many have been done?

Close to 50.

So the hard parts are left?

It's hard in terms of financing. We have to find funding for some of the last components. Policy change and supervisorial monitoring are things we can do pretty quickly, but when you talk about a culture that exists, that takes more than a couple of years. But that doesn't mean you can't start.

We may elect a sheriff in June, or there may be a runoff in November. How can you work with that timing uncertainty?

My game plan is to push as much through as I can in 10 months. I feel it's highly unlikely that there's going to be a clear [winner] in June. I'm looking at this as a 10-month program but I'm concentrating heavily on the first four months. I'll [also] be reaching out to each of the candidates about their own plans and goals as we move forward.

In California, elected sheriffs are a constitutional requirement. But should it be an elected or an appointed job?

I truly think that it should be an elected position. That allows for independence within the county workforce.

There is that one element that is concerning when you campaign: Are they expecting something in return? Most people expect [you just to be] a good sheriff, but there are a few, as in any campaign, looking for a little more.

When you retired from the L.A. Sheriff's Department in 2005, you didn't agree with the way some things were being done.

Part of it was some people; I thought they were stepping away from some traditional values. And some processes that I just described were being set aside.

You mean accountability?

Yes, and to me, that opens the door to individual discretion and, in some cases, as we found at the jail, some abuse. And that's something that I didn't want to see. I spoke with Sheriff Baca [in 2005], and of course it's his prerogative on the selections he made, as it is mine today. I think Sheriff Baca is a good man with a good heart and was looking to put what he considered the best people in place. But I don't think that all those individuals necessarily were following the path that he was taking.

At your news conference, you spoke of wrong directions, of inaction and neglect. Where did that show?

If your focus is exclusively on one area, you're going to be missing things in another area, and I think Sheriff Baca had a tremendous focus about the community and the jail programs, but this is such a large department, he left it to his executive staff to handle [other areas]. I will be putting everybody on the same page. If they're fragmented, just dealing with their own little areas, it's not teamwork.

How much of the jails' problems is structural and how much is personnel?

The way it's designed has a definite bearing on how you supervise. Central Jail is an old linear style; the more open [style] is better — that way you can see things going on. The [linear] design calls for greater physical presence; you have to be walking the floor with more frequency. In the open [style], you can see things more readily. These individuals in jail, we have a responsibility for their safety and security.

Why wasn't that happening?

There was a point where a large number of inmates were concentrated in an area designed for a much smaller population. Then there's usually a certain amount of complacency; ultimately, if it's unchecked, if you don't have the proper supervision and balances, you can end up with abuse. [In Orange County,] they thought the jails would manage themselves to a certain extent. [*Deputies watched TV while inmates ran amok.*]

How do you fix that?

I haven't made any personnel changes per se. I've talked with assistant sheriffs and am working my way down to the chiefs for recommendations for change.

In the LAPD, new officers begin on patrol. In the Sheriff's Department, they start in the jail. Is that a better assignment for a rookie?

I'm a big proponent of starting newly trained deputies at the jail. That provides a foundation. You learn a great deal in jail because you're working with the very people you'll be assigned to handle on the street.

The problem is when there's not enough training in the jail about how that relates to patrol, and there's not enough change within the jail [for] continuing freshness in their duties.

I'd like to see them moved around a little bit more, and moved out earlier.

What are you hearing from rank-and-file deputies?

I've received literally hundreds of text messages, emails and phone calls. I have a real sense that they're hungry for a fresh approach.

Did the Board of Supervisors tell you what it wants done?

Nothing specific, other than to ensure I'm not a place-holder, that I'm going to take action. The jails are important, but they want to make sure the department is operating the way it was designed and make sure we receive less criticism. Image, but also performance.

What I'm doing right now [is] riding a cyclone. All that I'm trying to do is doable — the question is, 10 months? It's daunting but rewarding.

After we elect a new sheriff, you'll go back to your old job in Orange County. So the big question: Dodgers cap or Angels cap?

I grew up with the Dodgers, I go back to the Don Drysdale era. I lived in L.A. County until I was married and moved to Orange County. The Angels are closer to home, it's easier to get to the games, so I've got to go with: I'm a fan of both.

This interview has been edited and excerpted from a taped transcript.

patt.morrison@latimes.com.
Twitter: @pattmlatimes