

# Developer pledges \$1 million to establish foundation for Merced police

By Thaddeus Miller  
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Developer Greg Hostetler pledged \$1 million this week to the Merced Police Department to go toward a foundation for officers, a donation that comes on the heels of a high-profile shooting that wounded an officer in Merced.

The announcement was made during the public comment section of the Merced City Council meeting Monday to the surprise of just about everyone in the room.

Chief Norm Andrade said most of the details still must be worked out, but said the department is grateful for the offer. The news of the donation was a surprise to him as well, he said.

The Police Department does not have a foundation, he said, which could help the department pay for equipment or aid the family of an officer killed in the line of duty.

“A lot of your bigger departments have a foundation,” he said.

Hostetler, owner of Hostetler Ranches, said the foundation would look something like the California Highway Patrol’s 11-99 Foundation or the Heritage Foundation, which he also set up to help fund the Merced County Spring Fair in Los Banos.

He said he’s done well enough in business to try to help others, and hopes those who can donate will do so.

“I decided it’s time to execute and take the lead to set up a foundation, so other people can join in,” he said. “If you set it up with \$1 million with matching from the community, then the rest of the people can rally around that.”

Like his other charitable donations in the county, Hostetler said the money for the foundation is in memory of his wife, who died about four years ago.

The City Council also made a number of decisions during the meeting, including one that dealt with Hostetler’s property. The council approved a \$58,250 contract with an independent contractor, who will conduct an environmental analysis of the undeveloped portion of Bellevue Ranch West.

Hostetler, who is looking to farm the land, would be responsible for reimbursing the city for the analysis, according to city records.

Hostetler said the shooting of a Merced police officer during a traffic stop Saturday played into his decision to make the “long overdue” donation, but the land in question did not.

“The ministerial act the council did (Monday) had not one thing to do with \$1 million matching donation to the Police Department,” he said. “It was the right thing to do.”

Though the donation announcement came on the same night as the council’s decision, Councilman Mike Murphy said there was no impropriety. He noted the council had already approved the plans related to farming on the site.

The council tentatively [approved the farming plan in December](#), assuming Hostetler met certain requirements.

“I think Mr. Hostetler is genuinely concerned about the well-being of our officers,” Murphy said.

He said the “generous” pledge will go a long way to helping a department that “needs every resource that it can get.”

Merced Detective Joe Deliman, who is president of the Merced Police Officers Association, said he appreciates the pledge, calling it “something great.” Deliman said the effort to establish a foundation is the first he’s aware of during his 18 years in Merced.

The money will benefit Merced police in the future, he said, but does not relieve what he sees as the City Council’s responsibility to add more officers. Adding officers will help ensure police are not overworked or otherwise put in danger, he told the Sun-Star.

Sgt. Robert Solis told the council on Monday that the officer shot during a traffic stop Saturday was scheduled to be off that day, an example of officers working extra hours. The officer has since been released from the hospital.

The department has a budget for 88 officers – though a few of those spots are empty. The number of officers peaked in 2007 at 111, but budget shortfalls in the city led to layoffs.

The council is expected to get its first look at a preliminary budget in May. Murphy said the council is looking at its options for discretionary funds and how to solve the city’s ills.

“Part of the solution has to be adding more officers,” he said.

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