

# The Belgard influence

## Police chief's performance draws rave reviews

By DAN YOUNG

It is the absolute responsibility of each aspiring employee to acquire the knowledge necessary to appreciate the various exclusive characteristics of the City of Watsonville — its history, organization, political components, and citizenry. Once this knowledge is acquired, it is expected that a degree of sensitivity be ever present in dealing with these various elements that comprise the City of Watsonville.

It sounds like a requirement for advancement that City Manager John Radin might make of higher-up employees at City Hall.

But it comes from the desk of Police Chief Ray Belgard, and it is just one of 13 standards by which he evaluates all his police department employees — from captains to patrolmen to clerks.

It's quite a change from the way "things used to be" 10, 15, 20 years ago in Watsonville, when the police department was considered by many who dealt with it to be a somewhat insular organization that did things its own way.

"The Watsonville Police Department didn't have a lot of respect from the police community," said assistant city manager Vern Hamilton, recalling

past times. "But because of his (Belgard's) background with the DA's office, he's seen what it's like for (the WPD) to screw up a case — and he can tell them why."

Watsonville Municipal Court Judge John Marlo agrees.

"I think they're considered to be a very competent organization," the judge said. "They've brought in some new men with a more professional attitude, and they have a great interest in perfecting the search-warrant process."

"And there certainly is a greater spirit of cooperation with other agencies in the county," Marlo added. "They are not the isolated, small-town police department" of old.

"There is more of a team effort, they are willing to explore new ideas, and they are much more professional than in the past," he said. "Ray is the catalyst."

With "progress," of course, comes some dissension — refer to it as growing pains, if you wish — but increasing public awareness has forced police departments everywhere to update attitudes, and to set different priorities.

Quick response to a crime is still high on the priority list, obviously, but maybe even just as important now is how the department reacts, and what it

does in an effort to eliminate the need to react — in other words, what it does to prevent crime.

Those closest to the Watsonville operation think Chief Belgard, who just recently celebrated his second anniversary as head of the department, is making changes and setting personal examples and departmental trends that not only point the police department in a positive direction, but will have long-range effects.

Not only have the changes introduced by the new chief created a better working atmosphere for most members of the department, but with the "new look" comes respect. Respect from citizens of the city, other law enforcement agencies in the area and other departments within the city.

Assistant City Manager Hamilton may have put it best when he said there is an attitude of self-respect in the department that has long been missing, and "the attitude of any organization is a mirror of its leader."

Belgard, who grew up in Watsonville, started his law enforcement career in Salinas in 1954, went on to the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's office, where he was chief of the investigative division, and came to Watsonville fully aware of the problems in the department.

"I knew there were some problems internally," Belgard said in discussing his first two years as chief. "I heard there were some problems with the chief and deputy chief, but they were both gone by then."

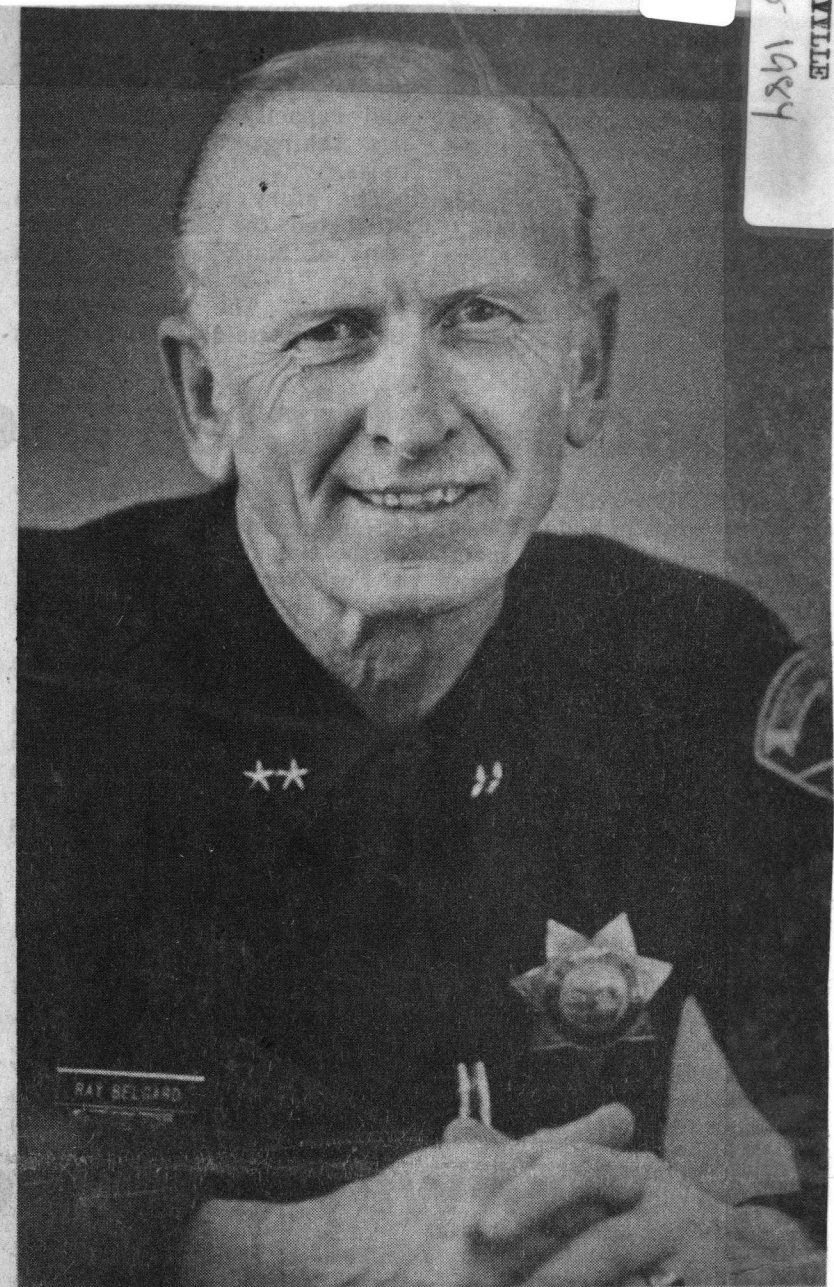
He immediately began an effort to improve both the morale and the image of the department — something he knew had to come hand-in-hand.

One of his first moves was to eliminate the position of deputy chief and recruit Terry Medina from his former staff of investigators at the district attorney's office as a captain, along with Chuck Carter. Carter, who was acting chief until Belgard's arrival, now heads the operations division, and Medina heads the administrative division (records, investigation).

Belgard espoused the team-effort concept — he even began wearing a uniform to show that the police chief's "no better than anyone else" — and made one of his top priorities the elimination of any feelings, both in and outside of the department, that the police station was off-limits to outsiders.

"We've tried to concentrate heavily on making people aware we are a public service agency, here to serve the public," said Belgard. "We've made some mistakes along the way, but

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RAY BELGARD — 'I knew there were some problems.'

Photo by Kurt Ellison

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when the public brings things to our attention — as in the Ramsay Park deal, where the public told us about the problems there — we take steps to correct the situation.

"The town (and department) needed a change of direction," he added. "We're trying to modernize it."

Capt. Carter, who took over as acting chief when Chief Al Williams resigned in the summer of '81, has no doubts as to who is responsible for the positive way in which the department now looks at the public — and vice versa.

"The department is more open now, and that has a lot to do with Ray Belgard," Carter said.

One measure of change is that the department offers several public-oriented "pro-active" programs that, until just a few years ago, were never even considered, let alone made available.

Maybe most important of the newly instituted projects are the youth programs, which are the result of the Belgard team-effort concept.

("The chief is the chairman of a committee that regularly meets and determines how best to help the community," said Carter.)

Some of the youth programs under way are:

—The "Officer Bill" program, which is geared for school children in kindergarten through fourth grades. Sgt. Manny Martinez, the department's juvenile officer who has been active in promoting the youth projects, visits classrooms and gives a 20-25 minute presentation to familiarize the children with their "friendly" policeman.

—The Pajaro Valley Youth Council (formerly the Gang Violence Reduction Committee), in its third year.

—The Truancy Abatement Crime Suppression program, which works to dissuade kids from cutting classes.

—A Talk-to-a-Cop program, in which officers go into junior high and senior high classrooms to talk out problems with the kids.

Sgt. Martinez, a 23-year veteran of the department, says that the "old officers" are quite receptive to the new programs,

and that public awareness is "on the upswing."

In other police department out-reach programs:

—Officers are instructing teachers on child-abuse laws, and how to recognize child-abuse victims.

—Presentations are made to groups of parents, "educating them to be aware of the pitfalls for their children" when it comes to the use of drugs.

—A continuing project, Neighborhood Watch, where neighbors help neighbors keep the neighborhood safe, has been updated.

—Staff members are working with parents and teachers on the well-known children's fingerprinting project.

But all the public-oriented programs in the world would do

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no good for the image of the department if the members were lacking the respect of their peers, both in the department and in other law enforcement agencies in the area."

This is, perhaps, where the Belgard influence has made its heaviest mark.

Certainly no single change implemented by Chief Belgard upon his arrival is responsible for the newfound respect the department now enjoys, but rather a combination of many. Among them:

—He strengthened the force by recruiting from the county sheriff's office Lt. Michael Aluffi, to head the detective bureau, Sgt. Benny Tumbaga, who works patrol division, and patrolman Jesse Valdez. At about the same time, patrolmen Chris Seymour and James Ihlen returned to the department after short absences.

—He set up the aforementioned list of advancement standards, a yardstick by which those seeking promotion would be measured.

—He emphasized the team concept. There was little, if any, room for individual glory, he preached.

—He distributed authority down his line of officers, and let it be known he favored participative management.

—He opened lines of communication with the Police Officers Assn. (union), and worked hard at ironing out their differences.

—He initiated an educational program, whereby officers were sent to in-service training schools, and in which the city paid tuition and for books for officers attending special schools and college. He also wangled invitations for several of his men to an 11-week FBI Academy program of intense law-enforcement programs in Quantico, Va.

—He stressed recognition where recognition was due. And he asked his officers to recognize a problem situation (in personnel) and solve it.

All of this (in addition to the cleaner working conditions at the new station, as opposed to the crowded, musty old headquarters) has led to higher morale — even during a time of poor economic conditions. Policemen received no raises last year.

And there probably isn't a man or woman in the department who wouldn't agree that the improvements have led to a greater self-respect.

"A lot of guys wished (under earlier administrations) things were better at work," said Capt. Carter. "They like work now. Ray was tremendously respected statewide, and he brought that aura with him to the department."

Capt. Medina, who worked under Belgard in the DA's office, said he was able to see him in a much different environment "and he has grown. And as he grows, everybody grows. His enthusiasm is contagious."

"The police department is the most visible form of government," he added. "We're scrutinized by the public more than any other part of government...and in Watsonville, they (the public) are very complimentary."

And it isn't just those on the



**Police Matron Doris Mann takes the fingerprints of Isabel Carranco of Green Valley Christian School, as Deb Silva and Pat Diamond look on. The police department's fingerprinting program, aimed at protecting schoolchildren, is one example of increased attempts to involve the public in police work.**

inside who have noticed the difference.

"Morale in the department has seen a complete turn-around," City Manager Radin said. "And as far as this office is concerned, things are much better (in dealing with the police department). We see more positive feedback from the public."

Assistant City Manager Hamilton, who sits in on contract negotiations with the policemen's union, said "last time around, we got through as well as can be expected, because of Ray and the attitude that he carries to his men. Coming out the way we did (with no raises given), with a minimum amount of unrest says something for Ray." Hamilton, who doubles as the city's fire chief, is doubly happy to see the improvement because, although his men are in a completely different department, the improved public image of the PD "will filter down" to the fire depart-

ment personnel.

And, said Hamilton, "their stock has gone up 10,000,000 percent. You cannot measure the difference in the detective bureau. Now if they go to court, they have a good chance of prosecution, and that's a big difference."

Doris Mann, who has worked in the records division for 22 years and often deals directly with the public, added another perspective.

Mrs. Mann said she had a direct line to the younger public's view of the department — her son is a high schooler. "The things he hears people say about the police department are generally good," she said. "I notice a big difference between that and what my three daughters (used to hear) 10 years ago. But most of those officers (the ones complained about 10 years ago) are gone now.

"Obviously, if things weren't good, I wouldn't still be here," she said.