

# INCOMING POLICE CHIEF OUTLINES STRATEGIES



LUCJAN SZEWCZYK — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Santa Cruz Police Chief Andy Mills talks Friday about his new job in Santa Cruz.

## Andy Mills to start Monday as Santa Cruz Police Department's top cop

By Michael Todd

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**SANTA CRUZ** » Santa Cruz Police Chief Andy Mills, 60, who starts work Monday, said in his deep voice that any police department has room for improvement. He's just not sure where that improvement will be in Santa Cruz.

During an interview with the Sentinel on Friday, just a week since the former Eureka police chief and Southern California

native moved with his family to a rental in Capitola, Mills said any department's success would rely on incremental change. He was referring to incremental reductions in crimes, for example. "You're not going to see holistic change," Mills said. "It's very rare in our society."

Mills, who will earn about \$197,000 a year, said citizens have been raising concerns to him about feeling unsafe in their homes and parks. He has heard about high levels of petty theft

and property crimes that he said likely stem from other problems, such as rampant drug addiction involving meth and heroin.

"The best you can do is to hope to reduce some of those problems," Mills said.

His official swearing-in will be Aug. 7, but he already has been studying the department's policies and meeting with local groups. Monday, Mills will start a tradition of having an open office. He plans to host open-office hours every Monday and he in-

tends to walk weekly downtown to meet with citizens. He said he hopes people will learn to feel comfortable telling him about their concerns and the things they are proud of in the "forward-thinking" city.

"I'm looking with a fresh set of eyes," said Mills, referring to his status as a newcomer to Santa Cruz. "I have no loyalties to one side or another. Sure, I wish I lived here forever. But sometimes, it takes some outside thinking to help us see our blind spots."



# Mills

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Solutions to certain types of crimes, such as petty theft, he said should be "tailor made" to an area facing that particular problem.

## Hiring process

Santa Cruz City Manager Martín Bernal said he met with diversity groups, such as the NAACP and ACLU, before the hiring process to help shape a profile of a suitable police chief. Then, a national recruiter was hired to seek out potential leaders. Also, three panels with panelists from the business community, schools and community groups. Six finalists interviewed with each of the panels. Among those finalists was one member of the police department and five candidates from elsewhere, Bernal said.

"He impressed a lot of people," Bernal said of Mills. "He really stood out. He had the leadership traits that would be a good fit for the city."

Santa Cruz Police Officers' Association President Carter Jones said it has been 30 years since the city looked outside for a new police chief.

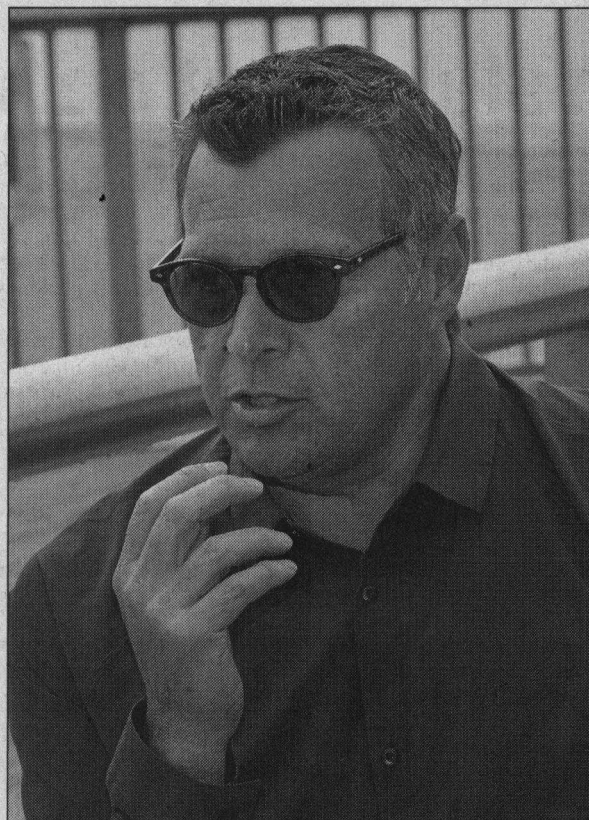
"The department, over the years, takes on the personality of the chief of police," Jones said. He also said he noticed Mills is active on social media and appears to be accessible.

"It's a positive change in a direction that the department hasn't necessarily seen in the past," Jones said, adding that he is excited to learn more about his new boss.

"He's obviously done his research on the department," Jones said.

## De-escalation training

Mills said police departments throughout the nation are bearing the weight of the absent planning federally for how to deal with mental-health patients in crisis. As a result, Mills said



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Andy Mills speaks Friday about his plans for the Santa Cruz Police Department. Mills takes over as police chief on Monday.

he plans to have senior officers initiate tactical de-escalation training that can help to respond in mental-health crises and calls that may result in the use of force.

"You learn to talk to people and calm them down. It's hard," Mills said. "I've got to keep my officers safe. This teaches the mechanics of how to stay safe: through time, talk and tactics."

A Santa Cruz police officer was responding to a mental-health crisis at the 200 block of Chace Street on the Westside when he shot and killed Sean Arlt, 32, 3:30 a.m. Oct. 16 after police said Arlt threatened them with a rake.

Officers were dispatched after Arlt, who reportedly suffered from a mental illness, was creating a disturbance at the home of an acquaintance, pounding on the door and making threats.

Mills declined to discuss

that case for his relative unfamiliarity but outlined his philosophy on responding to an officer-involved shooting.

"The way I choose to handle it up to this point is to get as much information out as quickly as possible," Mills said.

He said there is a state of sensitivity between the public and the police amid coverage of officer-involved shootings throughout the U.S.

"One thing we need to do is to ensure officers feel safe because if the officers feel safe, they're less likely to have to resort to lethal force," Mills said. He also said the police need to have a working relationship with their community to best understand its needs and concerns.

## Immigration

Mills said immigration, and the relationships with the federal agencies that enforce immigration, is a com-

plex issue. He was referring to the raid in February by Homeland Security Investigations that rounded up alleged criminals and people who face no criminal charges throughout Santa Cruz, Watsonville and Daly City. The raid followed a five-year inquiry of alleged MS-13, a transnational gang that originated with El Salvadorans in the U.S., and drug trafficking in Santa Cruz.

The police department and ICE had a falling-out after the police said ICE made false claims that federal agents only would target accused criminals — not just people who lack citizenship.

Mills said he chose to work with the immigrant community in Eureka to develop policies that were conducive to protecting the city.

"We are not going to be immigration cops," Mills said. "But here's the other side of the coin. You actually need a relationship with Homeland Security. They have access to intelligence about potential terrorist events. They have information on transnational gangs that may be wreaking havoc in your neighborhood. You have to have that relationship."

Mills also said federal immigration enforcement authorities don't always hold true to their promises to local police.

"This is our city and we're in charge of our city," Mills said. "But if (federal agents) are screaming for help and they're in trouble, we're going to go and support our fellow law-enforcement officers."

Mills said he looks forward to meeting with people whose voices may not have been heard in Santa Cruz.

"I believe people need to have access to their chief of police," Mills said. "I encourage them to do just that. Let me know their problems. But I want them to let me know what is going right. There's a ton that's going right here."