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## Excessive force against gangs is denied

By Randall Hackley  
The Register

SANTA ANA — City Manager Robert Bobb denied allegations Sunday that police use excessive force to combat Santa Ana street gangs, saying patrolmen involved in the recent incident that led to an F Troop gang member's death have been found faultless.

"The case is closed," said Robb, speaking at Laborers Union Hall to a sometimes hostile crowd of 40 that included two F Troop gang members, the founder of the gang and the brother of the late Thomas Maciel.

The meeting was called by F Troop founder Jose Ramirez. City officials, two pastors and local police attended the meeting and had hoped to talk with gang members about ways to quell further street violence in Santa Ana, where four F Troop members have died since July.

Maciel was an alleged drug overdose victim who died Aug. 30 in Orange County Jail, one day after he was arrested on suspicion of being under the influence of heroin. Circumstances surrounding Maciel's death are being investigated by county coroners.

Two F Troop members died and a third was wounded Sept. 8 in a drive-by shooting in Santa Ana. Police suspect a Los Angeles gang was involved in the shootings, and have arrested three suspects.

F Troop member Ezequiel Flores Larios, 25, died July 10 after suffering skull injuries while resisting arrest.

Police still are defending themselves from critics who claim Larios' death was a result of a beating by two overly aggressive patrolmen. Larios' head was cracked open by baton-swinging officers during a struggle after his

arrest, Ramirez, a former gang member, charged Sunday.

"The officers ... acted appropriately (and) have been exonerated," Bobb responded. "We did not hide anything. We only spoke the truth (after the results of an internal investigation)."

Some of the crowd felt differently. Three men got up, shaking their heads angrily, and walked out of the hall.

Ed Maciel, brother of Thomas Maciel, charged that Larios was beaten by the police even though he "was smaller than my wife."

Ramirez, 33, accused police of covering up their investigation into the Larios case. "He was beaten up by the police officers. We know this (from witnesses' statements)."

But Ramirez and Maciel urged restraint to the two F Troop members in the audience. "Whether he

was beaten up, you know it needs to be stopped," Maciel said.

F Troop members have threatened to retaliate against those responsible for the drive-by shooting, despite three arrests in the case.

The majority of the gang, which has an estimated 200 members, refused to attend the meeting Sunday because patrol cars were parked outside the hall, said the department's Hispanic affairs officer, Jose Vargas. Officers were present to prevent incidents such as another drive-by shooting, he said.

Most gang members abhor publicity and any police presence, Vargas said.

But county Human Relations Commission director Rusty Kennedy applauded Ramirez's meeting, saying restraint urged by a former gang leader who is respected in the barrio could cause some gang youth to act more responsibly.

Others who attended the 90-minute meeting included two Santa Ana gang detail investigators: Santa Ana League of United Latin American Citizens chapter head Clara Perez; two Santa Ana pastors and a school psychologist.

A second meeting will be held in two weeks in the hopes of forming an ad hoc city coalition to list possible remedies for gang violence, Perez said.



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F Troop founder Jose Ramirez speaks, as Santa Ana League of United Latin American Citizens chapter head Clara Perez, left, and Jack Rife of the Police Department's gang detail wait to talk at Sunday's meeting.