

Two officers involved in fatal beating of man reassigned

By Jesus Mena
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SANTA ANA — Deputy Police Chief Gene Hansen told Hispanic community leaders Friday that the two officers involved in the fatal beating of a 25-year-old man have been reassigned to another area of the city.

Hansen said officers Steve Alegre, 27, and John Follo, 24, have been removed from their normal duty on the west side of town for the duration of the investigation in the death last week of Ezequiel Flores Larios.

"I had the officers moved to the east side of town because I did not want to further aggravate the already tense atmosphere on the west side," Hansen said at a meeting with three members of the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Orange County Human Relations Commission. The community leaders asked for the meeting as part of their preparation for a press conference Monday.

The officers struck Ezequiel Flores Larios, a known drug offender, when they caught up with him after a one-mile chase this past Saturday morning, police said.

The chase began when the officers spotted Larios sitting in a parked car near the Civic Center complex about 11:35 a.m. It ended near Larios' home at 2118 W. 10th St., where he fled and was caught by the officers as he tried to climb a fence, police said.

The officers are alleged to have struck Larios with nightsticks in trying to subdue him, police said.

Larios was taken to Western Medical Center where he was treated for cuts on the forehead. He went into convulsions nine hours

later in the Orange County Jail and was taken to UC-Irvine Medical Center, where he underwent surgery for complications from a fractured skull. He died late Monday at the hospital.

Police said preliminary investigations show that the officers only used the force required to subdue an uncooperative Larios. But witnesses contend police beat him after he was handcuffed.

Clara Perez, president of Santa Ana LULAC, said she talked to witnesses whose versions of the incident conflicted with police. Larios' neighbors also told her of other incidents of alleged police violence, she said.

Hansen said the department is conducting an investigation of the incident which includes a videotaped reenactment of the pursuit and interviews with witnesses. If wrongdoing is uncovered, he said, the officers will be disciplined.

Hansen showed the community leaders a mug shot of Larios taken when he was booked into Orange County Jail. The color photograph shows a bandage about four inches long extending from the right side of the forehead into the hairline. No bruises can be discerned on either the face or the chest of the shirtless Larios.

Perez said she also was concerned about the insistence by Larios' family that there were no drugs in Larios' system when he was apprehended.

Hansen said blood tests conducted by the Orange County Forensic laboratory showed a

substantial quantity of PCP and a lesser amount of cocaine and morphine. Capt. James Dittman said the blood sample was taken when Larios was being treated at the Western Medical Center.

Hansen said the allegations of other incidents of police misconduct in the west side would be investigated.