

COSTA MESA POA OBTAINS HIGHEST PAY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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It is always a pleasure to work with a city that understands the need to prioritize public safety. Not a city that simply claims public safety is the number one priority but a city that actually puts its money where its mouth is. Costa Mesa is one such city. Of course, the City did not come to this enlightened position on its own but did so after listening to the POA's negotiating team, led by Costa Mesa POA President, Jerry Hildeman. As a result of the hard work of Hildeman and the rest of his negotiating team, Alan Rieckhof, Paul Beckman, and Damian Stafford, Costa Mesa police officers are now the highest paid in Southern California, with top step base pay at \$7,551 per month.

As with most successful contract negotiations, this one started with good research and communications. The POA leadership, well in advance of negotiations began to become more active both politically and in the community at large. This required the leadership to attend numerous community events and fundraisers to strengthen their image in the City. Communication was strengthened with individual City Council members during this period to enhance the line of communication that is always a plus for future contract negotiations. Damian Stafford did much of the research involved in preparing for negotiations. This was critical for the POA at the bargaining table in addressing a number of issues raised by the City and to support the POA's position on key items. In having preparatory meetings with the negotiating team in advance of negotiations, I had little doubt that the hard work, effort and cohesiveness of the negotiating team would pay off for their members.

The plan came together in the end to catapult Costa Mesa officers \$500 per month above their next closest competition in Orange County and even higher above the rest of Southern California agencies. The 3-year contract calls for a salary increase in year one of 9.86% (8.32% for sergeants). In year two of the contract, top step will be increased by another 5% minimum. A total compensation survey will be conducted in years two and three to ensure Costa Mesa remains in its highly competitive position. One of the issues the POA educated the City on in negotiations was the critical impact of having motivated and qualified field training officers to enhance the future of the Department. As a result, FTO pay was increased to 12.5% which is paid to FTOs while having a trainee. Other miscellaneous benefits included increasing tuition reimbursement from \$1,000 to \$1,250 per year, increasing canine pay by an additional one hour per pay period, and increasing the medical allotment by \$150 per month.

With the law enforcement market continuing to be highly competitive, this contract alone will move the Southern California market upward. Many agencies in Orange County base their salaries on the average of pay of other agencies in the County. It is anticipated this increase will have significant impact in Orange County and trickle out to the rest of Southern California. Already at many of the negotiating tables I am at I

am utilizing the significant increases we achieved at Costa Mesa and other places to justify higher levels of compensation needed to compete for the shrinking pool of candidates in the law enforcement market.

Costa Mesa is yet another example of what can be achieved with the POA acting in concert for a common goal. I look forward to reporting on other agencies hopefully following Costa Mesa's lead in truly prioritizing public safety.

About the Author:

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