

Detective in corruption probe returning to job

By RICHARD COWEN
STAFF WRITER

Rae Galan, the Passaic County Sheriff's Department detective suspended last year following accusations that he tipped off drug dealers, is about to rejoin the force.

Galan has been reinstated as a sheriff's officer and will return to the job on Wednesday, department spokesman Bill Maer said on Thursday. Maer said Galan will not return as a narcotics detective, but has been assigned to the sheriff's unit that guards resources operated by the Passaic Valley Water Commission.

Galan was suspended 15 months ago without pay amid a corruption probe within the Sheriff's Department. At the time, Galan was a member of the narcotics squad but was sus-

pected of fraternizing and sharing information with known drug dealers in Paterson.

He was suspended April 8, 2009, after the Sheriff's Department brought administrative charges of official misconduct against him. He was also charged criminally with conspiracy to commit official misconduct. After surrendering to officers from the Sheriff's Department's internal affairs division, Galan was booked in Paterson Municipal Court and released after posting \$25,000 bail.

Three months ago, the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office dropped the criminal charge against Galan. At the time, the Prosecutor's Office said the matter was being dropped "in the interest of justice" but declined to say exactly why.

Often, the state will seek to drop a case "in

the interest of justice" if the evidence against a defendant is weak. Or the state could move to dismiss charges "in the interest of justice" if the defendant has cooperated with the investigation and provided information to authorities.

Maer said Galan worked out an agreement with the Sheriff's Department to resolve the administrative charges against him. As part of that agreement, Galan will not be entitled to back pay for the 15 months he was suspended, Maer said.

He also returns to his \$78,000-a-year post as a sheriff's officer and not a detective, Maer said. "The sheriff feels this is a fair outcome based on the particulars of this case," Maer said.

Galan could not be reached for comment on Thursday.

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ELIZABETH LARA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The city of Passaic was hoping to attract an office developer to buy and rehabilitate the Bank Tower, a downtown landmark.

Tower: Lack of bids a disappointment

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would entice a private developer to buy 663 Main.

In proposing the investment to the state, then-redevelopment director Glenn Carter hoped for the best but acknowledged that the worst could occur. In a 2007 state application for an additional \$1.4 million, Carter described how the UEZ, which purchased the building under a newly created non-profit called the Passaic Enterprise Zone Development Corp. would proceed if there was no deal with a private developer.

"In essence, the PEZDC would be acting as developer of last resort," Carter wrote. "Should no sale to a private developer be consummated, the PEZDC would continue to own, manage and lease the space. In any event, the lease or sale revenues would become second-generation funds."

Fast facts

■ 663 Main Ave., known as the Bank Tower, was built in 1931 to house the Peoples Bank and Trust Co.

■ Over the years, law firms, medical offices and professional services have been among its tenants. The tower, which pierces the city's skyline, has expansive street-level windows.

■ It has been vacant for two decades.

Furlong said Thursday that there were no plans to invest more UEZ funds, partly because the program has been gutted by Governor Christie's budget cuts. Still, the city must maintain insurance on the building, at a cost of about \$100,000 a year, according to a bill sub-

mitted to the state.

The problem some developers see with the building is that there is no parking attached to it and the cost to renovate the building, erected in 1931, is substantial. In its search for a developer, the city declined any efforts to build residential units there, which makes the financing difficult, according to some developers.

"There's not a lot of office requirements in Passaic," said Rick Doren Jr., a local developer. "How are you going to fill close to 80,000 square feet with professionals? Without residential, it doesn't make sense."

City Council President Gary Schaer said Thursday that he had hoped for more proposals.

"I was hopeful for not only a number of bids, but a number of bids that would represent different visions for the building," said Schaer, who sits on the UEZ board.

Portions of Jungle Habitat reopen

Search for bear in hiker attack continues

By KERI ANN FLACCOMIO
STAFF WRITER

WEST MILFORD — Portions of the Jungle Habitat site were reopened on Thursday, despite the continued search for a mother bear involved in a recent attack on the grounds.

The incident occurred on the morning of June 24 when a hiker and his allegedly unleashed dog, traveling along an off-road bicycle trail, were charged by the bear. The hiker sustained minor cuts and bruises in his attempts to get away from the bear. The dog suffered more serious injuries, for which it received veterinary care.

With the black bear and her

cubs still roaming the woods of North Jersey, however, the central location of the recent attack on the Jungle Habitat site remains closed to the public.

Larry Ragonese, WEST MILFORD spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Protection, said Thursday there have been no new developments in the bear pursuit, but safety precautions have been taken.

"We have a series of traps that has been strategically set, camouflaged and baited — hopefully with some scent that the bear would like," said Ragonese. The traps, which wildlife experts have been monitoring, will stay in the target

area for the remainder of a 10-day period, ending on Sunday.

West Milford's annual Thunder in the Highlands fireworks display, originally scheduled for today, was postponed to July 9 as a result of the attack. Officials say the show will go on whether or not the

bear has been caught before the fireworks are set to light up the sky.

The mother bear in question has been labeled a Category 1 bear as a result of its aggressive behavior, and will be euthanized if caught. No other aggressive bear behavior has been reported in the area since the June 24 incident.

Ragonese said the traps are similar to giant barrels with trap doors, but are concealed and have been placed in areas that remain closed

off to park visitors — areas along the route where experts believe the mother bear and her cubs are likely to travel.

He likens the bears' travels to the familiar route some may follow to a breakfast shop as part of their morning ritual.

"That bear may get up in the morning and go for a certain berry patch," he said.

The mission at hand is to capture the mother bear, either by finding her alone or luring her in after trapping one of the cubs.

"What we're trying to do is make this as natural as possible so that the bear is comfortable there, so that we can be more successful in capturing it," Ragonese said.

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TRANSPORTATION

AAA says holiday expected to be a big getaway

By KAREN ROUSE
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Good weather and gas prices that are lower than in recent years will likely mean more New Jerseyans will be traveling during the July 4 holiday this year compared to 2009.

AAA New Jersey Automobile Club projects a nearly 20 percent spike in the number of Garden State residents traveling 50 or more miles from home during the traditional Independence Day holiday that begins today and ends Monday.

"Some of it depends on weather. Some of it depends on the economy and some of it depends on gas prices," said Cathleen Lewis, spokeswoman for the auto club. "New Jersey's gas prices are always slightly lower than the national average. For the last two months, gas prices have been falling," she said. "That sometimes comes into play."

The average price of gas this holiday in New Jersey is \$2.61 for a gallon of regular, compared with the national price of \$2.75, AAA says. In 2008, a gallon of regular cost \$3.98 — a record.

This year, 1,070,500 people will take a trip by vehicle, plane, bus, train or other travel mode, compared to 900,000 last year, according to the auto club. The 19 percent increase in travelers in New Jersey outpaces the national average — where a 17.1 percent increase is forecast, AAA officials said.

"It is encouraging to see such growth this summer as people head out to visit family, friends and great destinations," said Rick Zeckendorf, vice president of travel services for the AAA New Jersey Automobile Club.

Officials with the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, which operates the turnpike and Garden State Parkway, also expect to see an increase over last year, said spokesman Joe Orlando.

Last year, there were 4,515,706 million vehicles on the turnpike

Heading out of town

The estimated number of people AAA New Jersey Automobile Club anticipates will travel by auto, plane or other mode this year compared to last is as follows:

Auto

■ New Jersey — 945,000, up 19.7 percent

■ Nationally — 31.4 million, up 17.7 percent

Plane

■ New Jersey — 56,500, up 9.7 percent

■ Nationally — 1.56 million, up 8.2 percent

Train, bus, watercraft or other

■ New Jersey — 69,000, up 17 percent

■ Nationally — 1.9 million, up 15 percent

Source: AAA New Jersey Automobile Club

between July 1 and July 7, while roughly 9.5 million hit the parkway, figures show. This year, the agency projects 4,586,000 will travel on the turnpike, and 9,584,000 on the parkway.

"Given the forecast that we're seeing right now, it could potentially be more than what we expected," Orlando said. The maximum number of lanes will be in use, he said.

Construction on the turnpike, parkway and other state highways will be suspended starting today through noon on Tuesday.

Motorists can access real-time traffic info at www.511nj.org. People can also dial 511, said Jim Simpson, state transportation commissioner.

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Road Warrior

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Most of the others involved drivers 21 to 29 years old.

Drinking isn't the only thing likely to get folks in trouble this weekend, said State Police Superintendent Rick Fuentes, whose troopers confiscate six to eight tons of illegal explosives each year. The penalties for possessing fireworks with intent to sell are 18 months in prison and fines as high as \$10,000.

If the last five reporting years are any guide, New Jersey boaters will also experience more than 100 accidents this year, with deaths ranging from four to 11.

Curiously, sober boat passengers are more likely to be injured than a captain or crew, according to Boat U.S., an industry trade group. "Someone who boats infrequently may not be familiar with wakes, docking or boarding, which increases chances of falling overboard," said Bob Adriance, the group's director of damage avoidance.

None of these dangers — nor the summer rise in gas prices — is expected to keep New Jerseyans from driving, flying or boating in record numbers this weekend. The New Jersey branch of the American Automobile Association estimates that 1 million Garden State residents will travel — 19 percent more than last year.

That isn't the only bright holiday news. State police reported a decrease to 246 road deaths for the first half of 2010 — 4.7 percent fewer than the same period

last year. At this pace, fatalities could dip 15.6 percent by year's end.

And if you drive in New York City, you might appreciate this faint praise: Although traffic is getting worse there, a two-year IBM commuter survey suggests the Big Apple is far from the world's worst commuter hub. IBM gives that distinction to Beijing followed by Mexico City and Johannesburg. The IBM scoreboard rates New York 17th among the world's 20 most congested cities.

As for ticket traps, the National Motorists Association ranks New York and New Jersey among the worst states — seventh and 10th, respectively. Check specific locations at nma.org.

Other transportation groups offered these tips for avoiding trouble this weekend:

■ Visit the New Jersey Department of Transportation's traffic information website at 511nj.org or call 511 on a hands-free mobile phone.

■ Call these numbers for roadside assistance: #95 for the New Jersey Turnpike, #477 for the Garden State Parkway and #77 to report aggressive driving.

■ Pull over to place a free call to mobi.traffic.com on a cell-phone or personal digital assistant to find traffic-free routes — in state and out.

■ Search for discounts. NJ Transit, for example, lets kids under 12 ride free on weekends.

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Paterson man sought in 'numerous' Hawthorne burglaries

By ERIN PATRICIA GRIFFITHS
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HAWTHORNE — The Police Department has issued a warrant for a Paterson man wanted in connection with several commercial burglaries in the borough.

Police say they are searching for Jose Serrano, 51, in connection with "numer-

ous" burglaries in the area of the Passaic River along Wagaraw Road.

Serrano was recently arrested in the borough on a charge of hindering apprehension. On May 21 at 10:31 a.m., a Hawthorne resident contacted police about an individual walking on the train tracks toward Paterson with a chain saw in his hand in the area of Washington Av-

enue and Washington Place. Witnesses provided a description of the man and police located him walking down the tracks.

As officers approached to question the man, whom they identified as Serrano, he dropped the chain saw into the river by the bridge. Officers ordered Serrano to get off the tracks. Police were unable to locate the chain saw, and they reported arresting Ser-

rano on charges of hindering apprehension, destroying evidence and resisting arrest. He was transported to the Passaic County Jail and later released after posting unspecified bail.

DNA results obtained by the Hawthorne Detective Bureau connect Serrano to several burglaries in the borough, said Hawthorne police Capt. Richard McAuli-

ffe. He is suspected of stealing scrap metal as well as power tools from industrial areas.

Police say he is known to frequent River Street in Paterson between Second and Fifth avenues, particularly the park at River Street and Third Avenue.

According to authorities, he is also sought by the Fair Lawn Police Department as a suspect in burglaries.