

# 2 California Cities Share Grief Over Slain Officer

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EAST PALO ALTO, Calif., July 2 — For a few hours this week the East Palo Alto Police Department locked its doors, borrowed officers from neighboring suburbs to patrol the city's mean streets and turned out in dress blues to mourn the first local officer killed in the line of duty.

"It's a terrible thing to say, but we expected it earlier," said Sgt. Nick Bennett, one of 26 officers here charged with protecting the poorest, most crime-ridden community on the peninsula south of San Francisco. "And the other way around, too. It's a miracle we haven't killed anybody yet."

The death of the officer, Joel Davis, 25 years old, six weeks after his graduation from the Police Academy, sent ripples of fear and anger through the community, where crack has lately produced an outbreak of violent crime.

At first glance East Palo Alto looks like many other places where crack, the powerfully enhanced form of cocaine, has taken hold, but the decay here is particularly poignant because of the city's history.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's it was a hub for black political and economic aspirations and its residents considered renaming it Nairobi. The Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California at Berkeley called the community, most of whose population of 18,500 is black, a "model for neighborhood government."

### The High Cost of Identity

East Palo Alto incorporated as a city in 1985, no longer dependent on the services of San Mateo County or the wealthy county's tax revenue. The vote

on incorporation was contested, then upheld last year by a United States Supreme Court ruling. Now the new city is feeling the pressures of autonomy.

With a weak tax base and cutbacks in Federal aid, East Palo Alto's annual budget has shrunk to \$4.8 million this year from \$6.1 million at the time of incorporation. But the population has held fairly steady. Forty percent of the welfare recipients in San Mateo County live in East Palo Alto, which has an unemployment rate of 22 percent.

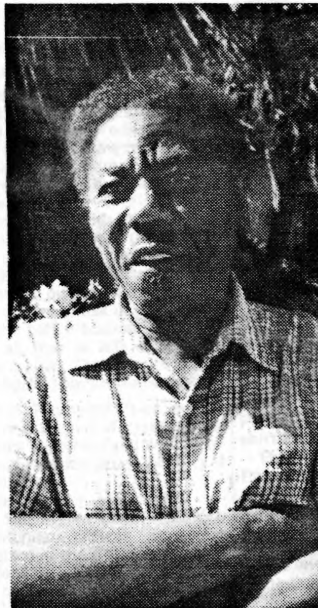
Among those 16 to 26 years old, 48 percent have never held a "meaningful" job, according to Mayor John B. Bostic of East Palo Alto.

According to Harriet Nathan, author of the report for the Institute of Governmental Studies, communities like East Palo Alto foundered because the Federal Government withdrew support for development, small business and housing. "You can pull yourself up by your bootstraps only so far," Ms. Nathan said.

### Not Much, 'but It's Ours'

But despite these financial problems, many residents say they are better off as a separate city. "It's a psychological advantage," said the Rev. Joseph Green, pastor of the Unity Missionary Baptist Church. "It may not look like much, but it's ours."

Nearly 60 percent of the city's budget is spent on the Police Department, which has steadily lost manpower to budget cutbacks, attrition and the lure of more lucrative jobs off the force. The killing of Officer Davis stirred debate about whether the city should be returned to the protection of the county Sheriff's Department, which was the



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The Rev. Joseph Green, who said that East Palo Alto "may not look like much, but it's ours."



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Sgt. Ron Sibley of the Police Department. "We do a whole lot with very little," he said.



The New York Times/Terre McCarthy

The coffin of Police Officer Joel Davis being carried to his grave in East Palo Alto, Calif.

situation before incorporation. But sentiment seems to be running toward maintaining an independent police force.

According to the pastor and other people, the current officers take local crime more seriously than those based in another community would, and respond more quickly to calls. According to Federal statistics, the rate of major felonies here is twice the national and county average. The department averages 300 arrests a month, a heavy workload for the 16 officers assigned to the streets. "We do a whole lot with very little," said Sgt. Ron Sibley.

#### When the Killing Came

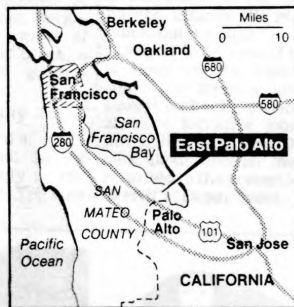
The situation on the night Officer Davis was killed was typical. He went off duty at 1 A.M. last Wednesday but volunteered to respond to a report of an armed robbery. "It's sometimes hard to peel yourself out of this place," said Sky Thurber, a reserve officer who shared an apartment with Mr. Davis.

Officer Davis was shot in the head as he chased the suspect through Jack Farrell Park, a haven for drug dealers. The chase began outside Mickey's Liquors, in the charred husk of a shopping mall near the police station. Mickey's Liquors is all that is left of the the Nairobi Shopping Center, its businesses now burned out or abandoned.

The suspect, Raymond Price, is said to have a long record of criminal offenses. He has been charged with murder and could face the death penalty if he is convicted.

While the suspect was being arraigned in San Mateo County Municipal Court Monday, Officer Davis was being eulogized at the Frost Amphitheater at Stanford University.

Under a canopy of maples and oaks, more than 1,500 police officers from all over the state stood by as the hearse drove through their ranks. Officer Davis was raised in Palo Alto, home of the university, Mayor Bostic spoke of



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East Palo Alto is a world apart, socially and economically, from its well-to-do neighbor, Palo Alto.

the officer's willingness to "come across the freeway to help someone in need."

The Bayshore Freeway is all that stands between the rubble-filled lots of East Palo Alto and the million-dollar homes of Palo Alto. The two communities have little in common, but their police officers often work together. This week they grieved together.

Sergeant Sibley worked round the clock after the killing and the Chief of Police of Palo Alto took him a clean shirt and a change of underwear.

The funeral was organized by the Palo Alto force; its officers, along with a contingent from nearby Mountain View, patrolled East Palo Alto to let Joel Davis's fellow officers attend the service.

The out-of-town officers, accustomed to tranquil suburbs, said they were stunned by what they saw: Drug dealers lined up along Fordham Street as if at a farmer's market; cocaine changing hands in the shadow of St. Samuel's Church of God in Christ; half a dozen

shiny Eldorados and souped-up Cougars crowded onto a driveway at the scene of a morning stabbing.

Officer Renaldo Rhodes of the East Palo Alto force said: "It's like a training experience. It's like a little Oakland."

Officer Rhodes was one of eight rookies in 1985. Four have left to join larger departments whose young officers make more than \$25,000 a year. After the funeral, two of the men who had left the force here phoned the stationhouse to say they were considering returning to a community that needs them so badly.