

13

SATURDAY  
DEC. 5, 1992

San Jose Mercury News

## PENINSULA

MOUNTAIN VIEW ♦ LOS ALTOS ♦ LOS ALTOS HILLS ♦ PALO ALTO

INSIDE

## State News

■ State watchdog agency closes; plans to reopen it are awaiting action. /3B

## Tensions mount after East P.A. killing

■ **Top story:** Cops call for assistance as gang rivalry flares.BY DAVID BANK  
Mercury News Staff Writer

East Palo Alto police called in reinforcements Friday after the city's 39th homicide of the year led to gunfire, escalating threats and racial tension between rival street gangs.

Squad cars from Palo Alto and Menlo Park cruised the streets of East Palo Alto after Police

Chief Burnham Matthews issued a Phase 1 alert requesting all police agencies in San Mateo County to stand by throughout the weekend in anticipation of additional violence.

Residents said carloads of youths were highly visible on East Palo Alto's streets Friday. Many residents were taking precautions, such as keeping away from front windows and yards, to escape the expected crossfire.

East Palo Alto's city council called an emergency closed session Friday evening to demand that Matthews control the violence in the nearly bankrupt city. The level of fear and frustration caused some council members to lash out at Matthews' under-

staffed and underfunded force. The city's murder rate, already the highest in the nation, soared in 1992.

"If he can't do the job, we call in somebody else who can," Councilwoman Nevada Butler said before the meeting. Butler said her 8-year-old son was awakened Thursday night by 20 rounds of gunfire near her Baylor Street house. "Maybe we need the National Guard."

Matthews said he needs to virtually double his 35-officer force to tackle the city's overwhelming crime problem.

"Until the commitment is made to make this police department large enough, you cannot expect

two or three officers on the street to be effective in being pro-active and taking on this overt violence," he said before the meeting.

Butler and Councilman R.B. Jones demanded that police immediately arrest a suspect, Bernardo Chacon, 20, in the latest homicide. Police said Chacon is the leader of the Sac Street gang, which allegedly controls sales of crack cocaine and marijuana on Sacramento Street, about two blocks from the police station. Police said the gang has about 30 members.

Jones, who lives on Sacramento Street, said that Chacon threatened his life two weeks ago when he was returning home from church. "He said if the

See **THREAT**, Page 4B

## Killing triggers gunfire, threats

■ **THREAT**

from Page 1B

police activities continue on this street, he would kill me," Jones said.

Capt. John Sterling said Chacon is a suspect in the killing of Lewis Sims, 26, of Menlo Park, on Wednesday afternoon. Police found Sims lying in Sacramento Street with a gunshot wound to the chest. He was pronounced dead at Stanford University Medical Center.

A San Mateo County judge last year issued a \$50,000 warrant for Chacon's arrest for assault with a deadly weapon in connection with a May 1991 shooting. Police said Chacon is a possible suspect in several other unsolved homicides and shootings in East Palo Alto.

"He's violent and he's a danger to the public and he has no regard for safety or human life," said Detective Tom Alipio.

Matthews said that East Palo Alto police, along with a regional team from Palo Alto and Menlo Park and San Mateo County sheriff's deputies had "spent literally hundreds of man-hours looking for this guy."

"We have been literally seconds behind him, but with the help of the community, he makes his escape good," Matthews said. "Certain elements are protecting him, hiding him."

Police are worried that the retaliatory violence will be racially tinged. The members of Sac Street are all Hispanic; Sims, who police say was a member of a Menlo Park gang, was black.

At least one retaliatory shooting appears directly linked to the killing of Sims, police said. On Thursday, a black youth leaned out of a car and pulled a 9mm handgun on a Hispanic youth and said, "Your friends shot a brother on Sac Street," before firing, Alipio said. The shot blew off the middle finger of the youth's left hand.