



NOAH BERGER

Oakland Chief of Police Richard Word (center) poses Friday with his six new sergeants. They are, from left, Caesar O. Basa Jr., Pedro "Pete" Espinoza, Michael F. Johnson, Word, Ronald R. Lighten, Russell H. Chew and Oliver K. Cunningham.

Six pleased police officers are promoted to sergeant

By Harry Harris
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — For five Oakland police officers promoted to sergeant Friday, it was a very special day.

It was even more special for the sixth, Michael Johnson.

Receiving his sergeant's badge and stripes ended a nearly three-year quest for Johnson, a police officer for 16 years who the city wanted to give a disability retirement after he lost hearing in his left ear from a weightlifting accident in May 1996.

"I just wanted to continue my career," a happy Johnson said Friday following the promotion ceremony. "I didn't want to have to go. I can still be productive. There are certain duties I cannot do, but I can still contribute to the department."

Chief of Police Richard Word, a classmate of Johnson's in the 111th recruit school, said Johnson "fought long and hard for this promotion and he deserves it."

Johnson and his attorneys had argued that even though he could not perform all police duties because of his hearing loss, his ability to handle assignments not involving street patrol was not hindered.

Johnson, who took and passed the sergeant's test in 1997 while recovering from his injury was passed over for promotion by then-Chief Joseph

Samuels Jr., who assigned him to a desk job.

That prompted the filing of a federal lawsuit under the Americans With Disabilities Act that was settled on Dec. 16 with Johnson being told he would be promoted and given back pay.

Besides Johnson, who will be a supervisor in the Communications Division, other new sergeants are: Oliver K. Cunningham, Russell H. Chew, Pedro "Pete" Espinoza, Caesar O. Basa Jr. and Ronald R. Lighten.

Cunningham, Chew, Espinoza and Lighten will be assigned to the Patrol Division, while Basa will be a supervisor in the jail.

Word said the six new sergeants "are all fine men who represent what we want to see at the Oakland Police Department, people with a wealth of experience and diversity."

Word thanked the entire department for its work in 1999, which saw crime drop at least 16 percent, the biggest since drop 1960, when such statistics were first reported to the FBI.

"But, our work has only just begun and there is still a lot more to do," he said.

Word said not all crime can be prevented or eliminated, "but we can certainly deal with the visible symptoms of crime and disorder — things such as street-level drug dealing, gambling on street corners and

reckless driving.

"These are things that we have absolute control over and can have an immediate impact on. But what it takes is aggressive police enforcement. It takes leadership and a sense of ownership. And this is where the work of sergeants is critical."

He urged them to continue to learn and grow professionally but to be certain to share that knowledge with others.

"It does no good to know many things but not to share that information with those around you," Word said.

Speaking for the promotees, Johnson said that by joining the department's leadership team they will play key roles in "improving the quality of life for our residents," who "deserve to live in a safe and vibrant community, free to carry on the activities of their daily lives."

To accomplish that goal and be successful as sergeants "each of us must have a combination of both competence and character."

"One or the other will not be sufficient. We have been selected for promotion because each of us possesses the necessary balance of character and competence to be effective leaders in our evolving department. We look forward to the opportunity we have been given and the challenges we will face in the future."