

CITY OF AVENAL

SYNOPSIS

The discovery of oil in the early 1900s brought attention to the area of what is today the City of Avenal. The population increased as workers came to work in the oil fields. Until 2011 the law enforcement has been and will be provided by the Kings County Sheriff's Department. The city has now hired its own Police Chief, who is in the process of building a police force, which will be in full operation January 1, 2011. The citizens voted to incorporate in 1978 to allow the construction of the Avenal State Prison.

WHY THE GRAND JURY INVESTIGATED

Public interest.

AUTHORITY

Penal Code 925a. The Grand Jury may, at any time, examine the books and records of any incorporated city in the county.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The Grand Jury toured the City of Avenal, and reviewed information received from the Avenal City Manager.

BACKGROUND AND FACTS

In the middle of the 19th Century the first settlers near Avenal were farmers and ranchers. The first oil well was drilled in 1900, but it wasn't until 1928 that oil was found. This transformed Avenal into a boom town. By 1936 the population was 3,000, most of them being oil workers. In 1940 the town had grown to over 4,000. In 1937 a township was established. A Constable and Justice of the Peace were appointed. Aiding them were a Deputy Sheriff, deputy, county assessor and deputy county treasurer. The community continued to use Kings County Sheriff's Department to enforce the law.

The city actively solicited the State of California asking for the new state prison to be located in Avenal. It was necessary for the city to become incorporated in

order to have the prison located there. The citizens voted in 1978 to incorporate and this was accomplished in September 1979. The prison was opened in 1987, and contributes to the local economy by providing many jobs to residents. Other residents work in agriculture or other local businesses.

In 2010 the Avenal City Council hired a Chief of Police. The new Chief of Police will be responsible for establishing a police force which will be ready to assume their duties on January 1, 2011. After the initial start up costs for staff, facilities, etc., the City's budget for law enforcement will remain about the same as it is now. The city will have a constant police presence. There will be a total of 16 officers, four of whom will be sergeants. Kings County Sheriff's deputies will continue to patrol in Avenal until December 31, 2010.

A privately-owned airport was seen on the edge of town where gliders were parked. The Avenal Glider port is home to the Central California Soaring Club. It is one of only a few in the entire United States that owns and operates its own airport. A soaring contest is held there every spring.

The Grand Jury was informed there is also a sand drag racetrack within the city limits. The sand drags have become an increasingly popular annual event, and draws thousands of visitors to Avenal.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

None

RESPONSE REQUIRED

None