

PPB BLUES

Cops investigated for possible anti-gay hate crime by Jim Radosta

The Portland Police Bureau is investigating an alleged assault on a straight man by two off-duty officers who might have targeted him because he was perceived to be gay.

The cops, whose names are not being released, have been placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of the inquiry. One of the men is a trainee, and the other has been on the force for less than two years.

The incident occurred about 10 p.m. Jan. 24 in the area of Southwest 10th Avenue and Washington Street. A witness said a gay-related epithet was used during the altercation.

Investigators believe at least one other person, described as a slender white female in her 20s with a long red ponytail, might have driven by the scene in a dark pickup and stopped behind a taxicab. "The woman was reported to have had some conversation with the parties involved, indicating she had a cell phone and was going to call the police," said Cmdr. James Ferraris, who is in charge of the investigation and is anxious to interview her.

The detective said the men had been at Stephano's, a club located at 1135 S.W. Washington St., but he could not elaborate. He added that the victim sought medical attention at a hospital and is under a physician's care.

"These are very sensitive investigations because they involve employees, and we have an obligation to seek the truth," Ferraris said. "Our integrity in terms of how the public views us...is paramount, so we take great steps and great pains to make sure that we cover all of the bases."

Police Chief Mark Kroeker invited *Just Out* and members of the Sexual Minorities Roundtable to a meeting April 1 to discuss the incident. He emphasized that the bureau is taking the situation seriously.

Kroeker said that three full-time detectives are working long hours and that an FBI investigator and a U.S. attorney have been assigned to the inquiry. "We want to make sure that no piece of information is overlooked, and we're moving forward with a lot of focus and a lot of energy on this case."

The alleged assault was brought to the bureau's attention after the Independent Police Review Division received an anonymous complaint. Kroeker hinted that supervisors might have dragged their feet in initiating the inquiry.

"What is disturbing to me is that there was this delay in actually getting the investigation started," he said. "We want to make perfectly clear what happened at the initial time of this event, how was our first response...how was the supervisory review of the incident conducted and then—most importantly, of course—what actually happened and what is the nature of the assault."

The case is the latest in a string of situations that some say has caused a rift between the bureau and the sexual minorities community. Tension ran highest in October 2000, when Kroeker was revealed to have made anti-gay remarks about 10 years ago while addressing a group of Christian cops.

He said he doesn't think the comments could have caused the two officers to presume that bias is acceptable in Portland. He cited a number of outreach efforts he has initiated since the tape recordings were discovered, including cultural



The alleged assault occurred just down the street from Stephano's

awareness training that covered trans issues as well as his ongoing work with the roundtable.

"I'm confident that if anyone would pick up any indication from my work here in Portland

that I have less than a respectful position and less than a solid core value on this issue that they would be 100 percent misperceiving," Kroeker said. "In my heart I don't believe that there is any reason that anything could have been said to give them any leeway at all to conduct themselves in the manner in which they did."

More recently the bureau has dealt with lesbian officer Liani Reyna's allegation that the Special Emergency Response Team mistreated her because of her gender and her sexual orientation. After an 11-month inquiry, investigators found no "prohibited discrimination" occurred and proposed disciplinary action for 10 cops—including her.

Also, trans officer Damon Woodcock finally settled a two-year job stress claim after a co-worker vandalized his locker, causing him to fear for his safety. He received \$205,000 and agreed to resign.

"These cases...do offer the possibility of people having their confidence shaken," Kroeker said. "They also offer to us an opportunity...to discuss this and have an understanding of where we stand."

Kroeker noted that the SERT investigation and the Woodcock claim resulted from incidents that occurred before his arrival in Portland. Regardless, he added, the important thing is how the bureau handles the cases.

"We need [the sexual minorities community's] confidence in order to move forward and have a good, solid level of understanding and then to work just on problems that are universal to all neighborhoods," he said. "But in order to do that...we have to generate a good level of community approbation and support, and we can't lose that." □

Anyone with information regarding this incident is encouraged to call 503-823-0596.

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