

A judge sentenced Roger Magaña July 13 to 94 years in prison for 42 counts of using his police status and power to rape, sexually abuse, sodomize, kidnap, coerce and/or harass a dozen women.

Before the verdict, Magaña made a lengthy personal attack against many of his victims, denying any crimes and calling them liars, drug users and criminals and vowing to appeal.

"You're still trying to victimize the women," Judge Karsten Rasmussen said. The judge called Magaña a "pathological liar" and cited "absolutely overwhelming" evidence that he was "a petty tyrant, preying on vulnerable women."

With the criminal trial over for Magaña and Juan Lara, another officer sentenced to five years this year for similar crimes, police are vowing reform to restore trust and prevent future police abuses.

"There is a question of trust, there is a question of accountability," Eugene's new Police Chief Robert Lehner acknowledges. Noting that the cases made many in the community fear and distrust police, Lehner says, "they're going to show fear until we show they don't need to feel fear."

That will be easier said than done. Efforts to reform police through strengthened internal or external review face many obstacles. The tradition of police policing themselves without public accountability and oversight is deeply entrenched in Eugene.

But the Magaña and Lara cases have given police reform a new urgency. The city can't continue to live in fear of its own police department. A woman Magaña raped testified this week that she recently saw a police officer while out shopping and quickly locked her car doors, turned around and drove home. "I panicked."

INVESTIGATING THEMSELVES

Lehner says EPD will launch an internal investigation to determine how Magaña and Lara were able to use their badges to sexually prey on more than a dozen women for nearly a decade without fellow officers stopping them. More than a year after the accusations first came to light, no other officers have so far been disciplined for anything relating to the Magaña and Lara cases, according to Lehner.

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— ATTORNEY LAUREN REGAN

The public Magaña trial provided many examples of EPD officers failing to stop the officer's sex crime spree (see side story). Two police officers and a supervisor ignored one woman's complaints that Magaña was coercing oral sex from her, according to testimony. Magaña didn't ignore the complaint. He put a gun to the women's genitalia and threatened that if she told anyone again, "I'll blow you up from the inside out," she testified. "Why the hell didn't they listen to me?" she asked.

Lehner's review will look into the hiring, training and supervision of the two convicted officers and could result in discipline or criminal prosecution of other officers if it's

MORE MAGAÑAS?

WILL EPD STOP COPS FROM PREYING ON WOMEN AGAIN?
BY ALAN PITTMAN



Eugene's new media savvy Police Chief Robert Lehner holds up Magaña's and Lara's badges.

found that they failed to act to stop Magaña or were involved in the crimes, Lehner says. "We must enlighten the shadows of the past in order to move forward."

Lehner says he has already made some reforms as "baby steps" toward bigger changes to come. Lehner says he increased supervision of patrol officers, imposed stricter deadlines for responding to complaints, will hold supervisors responsible for how complaints against officers are handled

and will seek to release more information on complaints to the public.

WIDESPREAD PROBLEMS

Lehner's talk of reform has impressed some observers. "He shows all the right signs of leadership on this issue," says Mayor-elect Kitty Piercy.

"Chief Lehner takes the department's problems very seriously," says Dave Fidanque, director of the Oregon chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

But concerns about the police investigating themselves remain.

"I don't think there is anything being done to change things so it doesn't happen again," says Lauren Regan, a local attorney with seven years of experience helping people file complaints against police.

Regan says she fears Magaña and Lara are "fall guys" and the department won't discipline others or make needed changes. "They're just using them as scapegoats, as hangmen. They have found their two and that's all there's going to be."

"There are some widespread problems," Regan says. "There's a broader sweep that needs to happen."

With Magaña and Lara, "there are multiple other officers that were aware, that participated, that potentially acquiesced," Regan

says. "At a supervisory level there was a lot of misconduct."

City Councilor Betty Taylor says it won't be credible if the department's investigation results in no other officers held responsible. Given the number of victims and years of abuse, "there have to be people involved besides the two," she says. "I think they need to look at every person who could or should have known."

But there are already indications that police may look no further than Magaña and Lara for bad apples in the department. "This was an anomaly," proclaimed EPD Police Capt. Steve Swenson shortly after the Magaña verdict. When pressed, Swenson acknowledged that before the internal investigation had even begun, he didn't know for sure if such conduct was in fact an anomaly in the department.

Regan says the police need to improve hiring, training and screening to knock down the "blue wall, police club" mentality that makes police impenetrable to outside complaints. Regan says in the seven years she's helped people file complaints, she has never seen police acknowledge they did "even the most miniscule" thing wrong.

She says with the department's reputation, many people don't bother filing complaints to avoid the police hassle and "further slap in the face."

(continued on next page)