



EL OBSERVADOR



About 50 people march in downtown Portland on Friday to protest a grand jury's decision to clear police officers of any criminal wrongdoing in the shooting of a Mexican immigrant. (PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER)

No Fault Found in Police Shooting

STORY CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

fists. With five deputies now involved, deputies pinned his legs behind him, held them together with leg irons and handcuffed his wrists together behind his back.

About a half hour after Mejia was released from the jail, police found him crying and banging on the doors of the nearby federal building. An officer, unable to find out what was wrong or where Mejia lived, took him to Providence Crisis Triage Center, which referred him to the psychiatric hospital.

Friday, Portland Police Chief Mark Kroeker met with members of a Hispanic advisory council that advises the police bureau on Hispanic Affairs.

He said the Portland officer who killed Mejia was attempting to stop him, not kill him.

"As far as I know, there was no aiming for the head," Kroeker said.

He said officers are trained to shoot at the "critical mass," or abdominal part of the body but that some shots miss their mark.

Kroeker and Detective Sgt. John Brooks, who is heading the departmental investigation into the matter, gave a step-by-step account of what happened, from the time Mejia was detained after causing a disturbance on the bus until the shooting.

Kroeker said Brooks did not address witnesses reports that Mejia was beaten with a flashlight at the scene of the bus disturbance, saying that allegation was under internal investigation as a possible use of excessive force.

port contained no indication of blunt force trauma, which would be typical of such a beating.

Kroeker agreed with members of the council who said Portland needs more Hispanic Spanish-speaking officers and said he and others have been working for the past year to recruit such officers. "The results so far are quite disappointing," he said.

"It is of little consolation to any of us that the grand jury has taken the position that it did," Kroeker said. "The police officers acted with no malice. They did not act in a way of wanting to take a life."

Three officers — Jeffrey M. Bell, Christopher A. Davis and Jeffrey E. Nelson — were placed on administrative leave following the shooting. Bell, 25, who has been with the department for just over a year, fired the fatal shots.

Family members say Mejia suffered from epilepsy but not from mental illness.

The incident that led to the shooting started with a report of a patient out of control at Pacific Gateway.

Kroeker said the staff asked the officers who initially responded to leave their guns outside but since it was an emergency call they refused to do so.

They eventually got Mejia to give up pencils he had been using to threaten hospital staffers.

An hour later they got another call and were told Mejia had escaped from a locked "quiet room" because of a faulty lock.

The staff, all women at that hour, asked the officers to help them put him back, but they said that was not their duty.

Brooks said Mejia briefly trapped Davis in the "quiet room," leaning on the door and punching Bell in the face. During the struggle, Bell sprayed Mejia with pepper spray with no visible effect. After Mejia grabbed a hospital staff member, Davis shot Mejia twice with a non-lethal "beanbag gun," but that didn't stop him. Mejia meanwhile had pulled a metal bar from the lock mechanism of a door and was advancing toward the officers, Brooks said, so Davis ordered Bell three times to "shoot him."

Bell fired twice. The lethal bullet was to the head. Kroeker said the issue was not the language barrier, but said Spanish-speaking officers would have helped the situation. He also agreed there is a need for better ties between the Hispanic community and police.

He also said further training is needed to teach officers how to deal with mental disorders and disabilities such as epilepsy.

He said the police bureau has made progress in implementing recommendations mad by the Hispanic advisory group but said work remains to be done. He said the bureau would pay serious attention to their recommendations.

State mental health officials, meanwhile, pulled the mental hospital's license to operate secure holding rooms in its psychiatric wards, citing nearly a dozen conditions they say threaten the health and safety of patients.

The suspension followed the resignation of the hospital's chief executive officer, Karl Brady, amid the facility's bid to regain the blessings of Multnomah County regulators. State officials also submitted a list of

corrective actions that must be taken before the hospital can accept new patients. It includes a requirement that the hospital notify the state whenever police are called to handle unruly patients and a revocation of policies that allow police to bring their guns into secure units.

A Last-minute Rush to Beat Visa Deadline

Immigrants hoping to stay in the country by saying "I do" before expiration of a federal law had a lot of company at marriage bureaus and INS offices nationwide. Waiting lines clogged corridors Monday from Albuquerque, where 200 people camped out overnight at the Immigration and Naturalization Service, to Fort Lauderdale, where marriage bureau workers herded hundreds of newlyweds via walkie-talkies.

As many as 10 times the average number of daily applications were being processed at some INS offices, at least 30 of which stayed open until the law's midnight deadline to sort through paperwork. The temporary law allowed immigrants who are in the country illegally to apply for legal status — without having to first return to their homeland — if they were married to a legal resident or citizen. Passed last December in the waning days of the Clinton presidency, the law briefly

lifted a requirement that can keep illegal immigrants who go back home to pursue residency from re-entering the USA for 10 years. The INS says as many as 640,000 illegal immigrants were eligible to pursue legal status under the provision. The agency will not know for months how many applied, but the total for March has already broken a record of 131,000 legal-status applicants set in January 1998, when a similar immigration measure expired. "It makes me feel better that I've done the right thing," said Brazilian-born Vanessa Pereira, 21, married Monday amid a backdrop of silk roses at the Broward County courthouse here. "We were planning on being married in the future, but because of the law, we did it today."

Pereira, who has a 2-year-old daughter with her husband, said she was told the marriage would improve her chances of becoming a legal resident.

Vence plazo para situación de los ilegales

POR JUAN CARLOS CHÁVEZ

Miami-La extensión migratoria de la Sección 245 (I), que permite a ciertos extranjeros indocumentados en EE.UU. legalizar su status de permanencia, finalizará hoy en todo el país a la medianoche en medio de un clima de protestas y peticiones de último minuto para que los funcionarios del Gobierno prorroguen la fecha límite de entrega de solicitudes.

Sin embargo, nada indica que será modificado o, en el mejor de los casos, temporalmente reactivado después de que el Congreso estadounidense sesionó en diciembre a petición expresa del entonces mandatario Bill Clinton y de que lo hiciera con la condición de no exceder

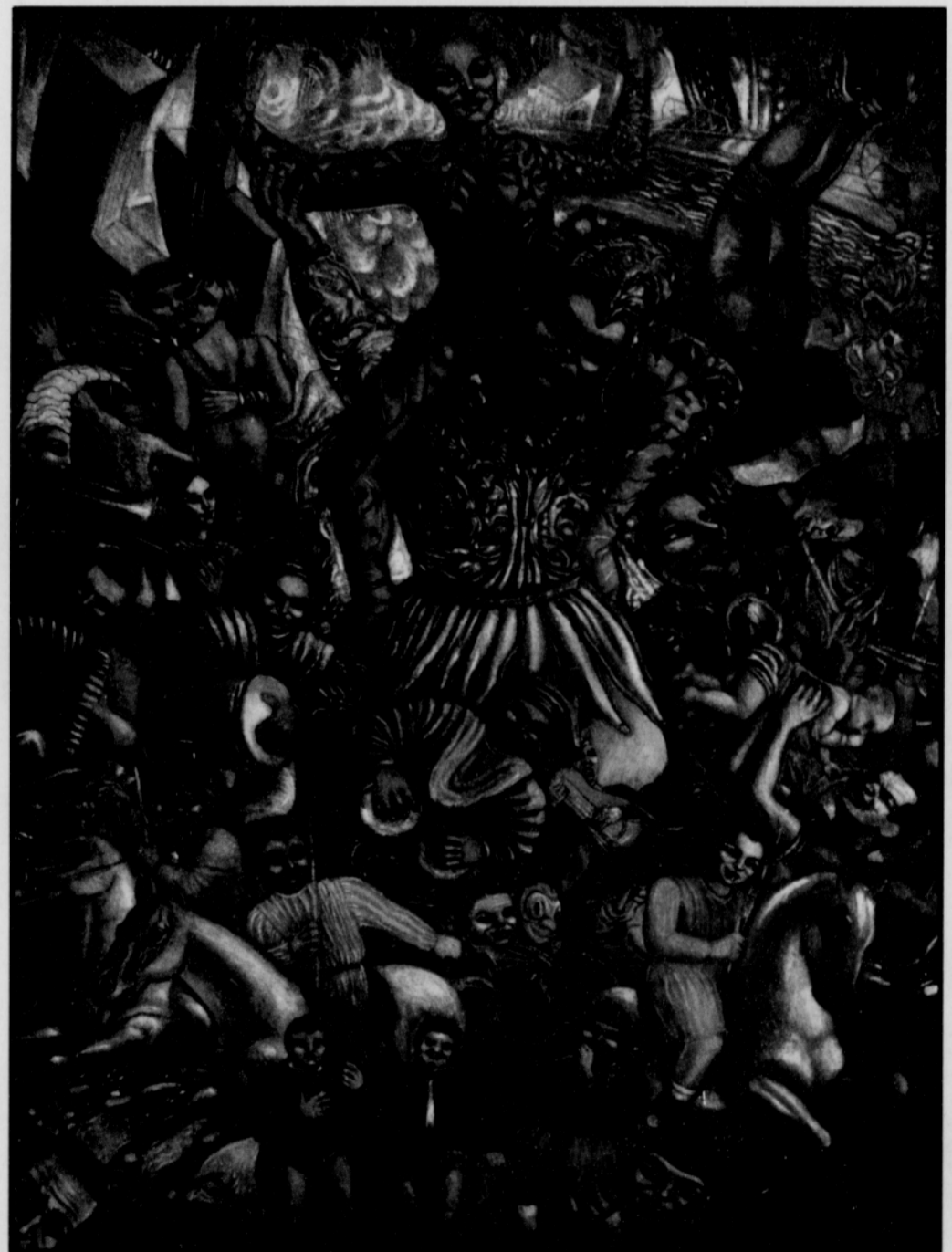
el plazo fijado del 30 de abril.

La Sección 245 (I) es vista por los expertos de inmigración como una especie de miniamnistía, que debería aliviar en algo la situación legal de miles de personas que no cuentan con un permiso de trabajo, y que por su condición de indocumentados no tenían derecho a la protección del Estado.

Según el Portavoz Nacional del INS, Daniel Kane, la presentación de formularios no significa que los solicitantes necesariamente serán aceptados. La razón: el peligro oculto de la norma, que beneficia sólo a los que son elegibles para una visa de inmigrante.

El proceso demora según número de visas disponibles. Y esto podría ser

Dos familias unidas en una sola celebración.

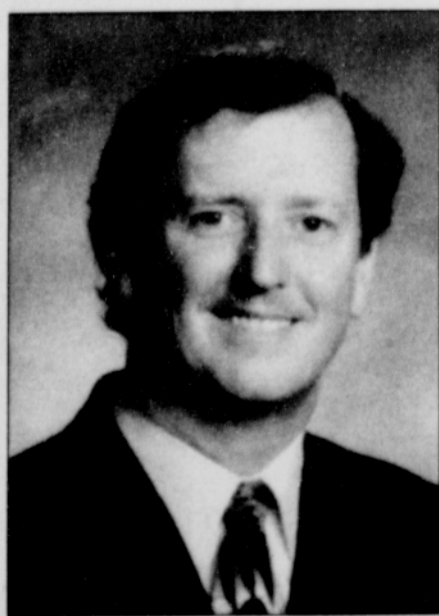


Mes De La Hispanidad



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A fresh perspective

VOTE FOR

James Sager

Multnomah County
Commissioner
District 1

"A well coordinated, cooperative, cost effective effort, utilizing the skills, expertise, and input of all county citizens is imperative."

Paid for by Committee to Elect James Sager