

Just 11 of 33 in latest Oakland police academy class receive badges

By Kimberly Veklerov | December 21, 2017 | Updated: December 23, 2017 5:03pm

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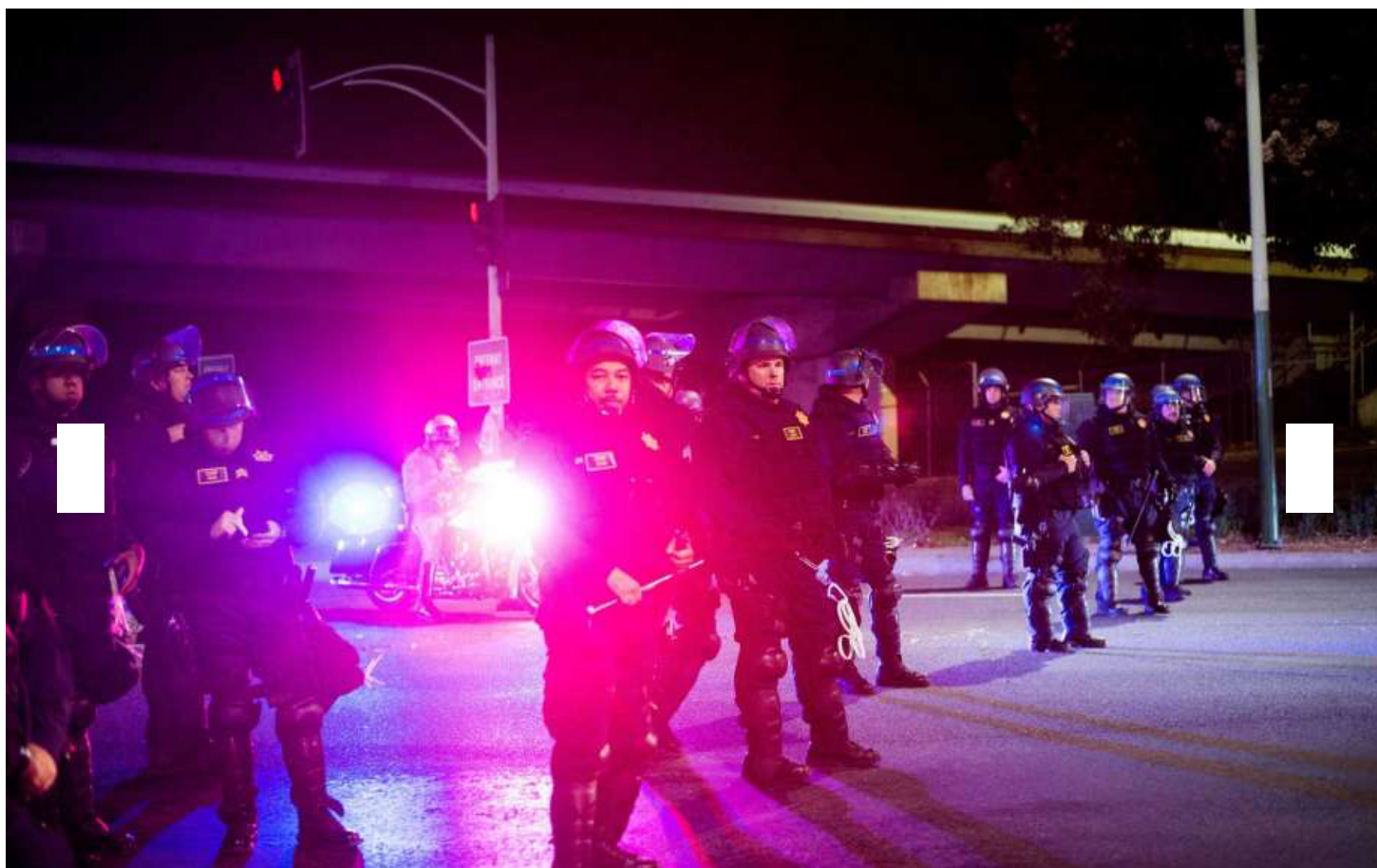




Photo: Noah Berger / Noah Berger / Special To The Chronicle 2016

IMAGE 1 OF 3

Oakland officers guard a freeway entrance near where protesters were marching against Donald Trump's election Nov. 12, 2016.

After a series of scandals involving mostly rookie officers, the recruits who graduated last week from the Oakland Police Department's training academy made up one of the smallest classes in recent history — part of an effort, the department says, to weed out problem officers before they hit the streets.

Just 11 of the 33 who started the 177th Basic Recruit Academy received badges Wednesday. It was the first class fully under the direction of **Police Chief Anne Kirkpatrick**, and the first to come after **an audit** recommended changes to the department's hiring and training to better detect early warning signs for potential misconduct.

“If we thought there were any issues, like a lack of maturity, we removed them from the class early on,” Kirkpatrick said. Of the 22 who started the academy in May but didn't graduate, some simply quit or were injured, she said.

“We’ve been willing to have fewer officers on the street in order to have the best officers. I will take that trade-off and pay that price,” she added.

The department is still more than 40 officers short of the nearly 800 positions for which it’s budgeted.

The audit last year, which examined 78 recent cases of serious misconduct or unethical behavior, found that in more than a third of the cases the officer in question had been hired after 2012. All but one of the officers accused in the **sexual misconduct scandal** involving the teenage daughter of a police dispatcher had just a few years on the job.

The report concluded, in part, that **a hiring blitz that began in 2012** following “dire” police staffing levels during the economic downturn weakened the department’s risk-management strategies. The surge of new officers led to expedited background investigations, an “aggressively paced” academy schedule and less quality supervision and instruction.

The review conducted by the department’s inspector general and the city auditor led to a number of sweeping changes around how officers are evaluated and trained.

For one, the department no longer accepts recruits from non-Oakland academies run by departments like the Alameda County Sheriff’s Office or the San Francisco Police

Department, after the audit discovered that those trained by outside programs more often engaged in misconduct and, when they did, the severity was considered “egregious.”

The department now also formally uses written peer evaluations to determine how trainees are progressing after finding many of those who committed wrongdoing in recent years had gotten poor endorsements from their fellow recruits. One audited new officer who had engaged in bad behavior, for instance, was described by a peer as “not at all trustworthy.” Other peers characterized officers in question as “apathetic towards work,” “lacks integrity,” “immature,” “poor judgment” or “lewd/lascivious.”

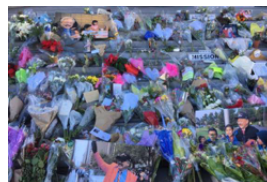
Beyond the audit’s recommendations, Kirkpatrick said the department has increased its training around procedural justice. The 11 recruits also went through linguistics training after a Stanford study this year used body-camera footage to show that **Oakland officers tend to speak less respectfully to black people** than to white people during traffic stops.

Venus Johnson, Mayor Libby Schaaf’s **director of public safety**, said officers in training now spend one full week embedded in the community, not patrolling or doing enforcement activity.

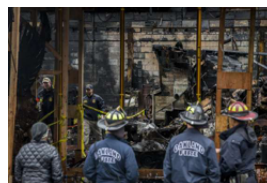
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“There’s been more of a concentrated effort with this chief to make sure we’re getting folks who will reflect the values of the Oakland Police Department,” Johnson said. “We’re not going to compromise on quality.”

As an example, Kirkpatrick said, if someone is power-hungry, lacks maturity or excessively drinks off duty, that person will be kicked out of the academy.

“We are looking for men and women with high moral character who are independent thinkers,” she said. “We want them to have that mind of being good stewards of their authority.”

The department is now expanding its marketing and outreach efforts to increase its applicant pool to find such candidates, especially those who grew up in Oakland.

But recruiting today for the profession is difficult everywhere, partly because of the tight labor market and partly because of the scrutiny law enforcement faces, said Sgt. Barry Donelan, president of the Oakland Police Officers’ Association. And the small graduation class reflects that trend, he said.

“It is a challenging recruiting environment for the vocation everywhere, probably more so in California and more so in expensive places like the Bay Area. A tough job, a public-service job, isn’t necessarily as attractive in a booming economy,” he said. “But numbers aren’t everything. We cannot afford to have somebody join our ranks who is less than the best.”

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