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CA County Hires Ex-Inmates as Part of Six-Month Pilot Program

Martin Estacio, Daily Press

Posted: December 20, 2020



"It's almost like a dream come true, it's too good to be true," said one of the released inmates employed to make up **San Bernardino County Fire Department's** newly formed Endeavor Hand Crew.

Haroon Hasmain said he wanted to be a firefighter ever since kindergarten, when he saw a "Stop, Drop and Roll" video, but subsequent events delayed that goal.

"I had a lot of potential growing up, and I had a lot of hope for the future, and just things that ended up happening in my life led me down a completely different path, unfortunately," he said.

But now, that aspiration has become a reality..

Hasmain is one of nine former inmates hired earlier this month by the San Bernardino County Fire Department. He is now a member of the newly formed Endeavor Hand Crew.

The crew is part of a six-month pilot program that hires released inmates "in good standing" who will work to reduce fuels and provide other fire-related services, the department said.

In addition to the nine hired on Dec. 7 as Public Safety Employees who then began five weeks of training, six more are going through the background stage. The goal is to have a 20-member hand crew, county fire officials said last week.

"It's almost like a dream come true, it's too good to be true," Hasmain said in a department video. "There's still a chance to get on the right side of the fence."

More firefighters are needed as California saw a record-breaking wildfire season in 2020 that has so far burned more than 4.2 million acres, according to Cal Fire.

"With fire season being year-round and the amount of fuel reduction projects, the need for additional resources in our County is more prevalent than ever," said SBCFD Chief Dan Munsey. "Fuels reduction crews have proven to be an invaluable resource in more ways than one."

The pilot crew program was funded with \$300,000 in start-up costs from the county Probation Department's share of state revenue provided through the California Public Safety Realignment Act.

The act, passed in 2011, requires that state prisons reduce their number of inmates by transferring low-level offenders to the supervision of counties, according to the SBCFD.

The program is scheduled to last from Oct. 6 through June 30, 2021.

Officials are hoping the program will lead to employment for the former inmates and reduce the number of repeat offenses.

Gabriel Dekker, another crew member hired in December, said he started going to jail "a little early" but was now "fixing it" through the Endeavor Crew.

"I definitely believe in second chances," he said in a department video. "I didn't until this program."

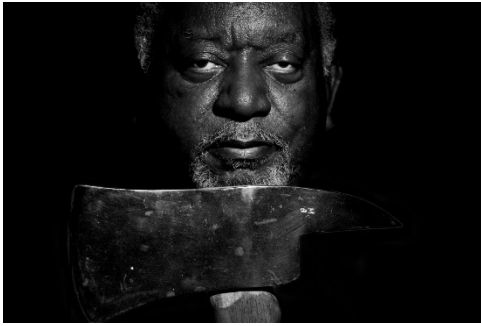
Former inmates interested in the program can only be admitted with a positive referral from the county probation and sheriff's departments and must have already served on a state or inmate hand crew.

<https://www.firehouse.com/operations-training/wildland/news/21203348/ca-county-hires-exinmates-as-part-of-sixmonth-pilot-program>

Jimmy Jews, who broke color barrier as San Bernardino firefighter, dies

David Allen, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Posted: December 20, 2020 at 9:00 AM



Jimmy B. Jews, the first Black firefighter in San Bernardino, was hired in 1971 and retired 25 years later as a captain. He died Nov. 17 at age 79. (File photo by Terry Pierson, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

He was a Black man whose last name was Jews. If someone were inclined to be prejudiced, that might have been two strikes against Jimmy Jews. When introduced, he got jokes and double-takes.

“That’s my name. We just gotta deal with it,” Jews would say, putting people at ease.

He had more significant hurdles than his name, and he overcame those too. Jews was the first Black firefighter in San Bernardino.

I bring this up because Jews died last month at age 79. And his story is a fascinating one.

Jews had tested for the Fire Department and flunked in 1963, right after getting out of the U.S. Navy, according to a 1971 Sun-Telegram story. So he spent a year at Cal Poly Pomona and a year at San Bernardino Valley College, where he studied criminal justice.

Meanwhile, he worked at San Bernardino General Hospital as an X-ray technician. That’s where he met his wife, Veatrice, who was interning as a medical technician.

Jews took both the Police Department and Highway Patrol tests and passed both. The police hired him in 1969. He was one of six Black officers at that time of civic and cultural tension.

Two years later he switched teams, as it were, from police to fire. Activists wanted someone to break the color barrier at the San Bernardino Fire Department, which was all White. Other minorities had failed the entry test as he had. Jews was willing to try, and already being a city employee meant he would only need to transfer.

As a Black cop, he told the newspaper, “I was caught in the middle.” And maybe having failed the fire test gave him extra determination to succeed.

His transfer took place Jan. 25, 1971. After six weeks of training, he was assigned to Station 4 for his six-month probationary period. The Sun-Telegram wrote about him that March 29

“The firemen have accepted him and he has accepted them,” Fire Chief Harry Wainwright said. Battalion Chief Raymond Shaw said there hadn’t been any problems, but allowed there had been some initial tension between Jews and the other firemen who shared the station 60 hours per week.

“He’s a new fireman, and he is treated like any other new fireman,” said Gerry Newcombe, department spokesman.

That all sounds nice, and the top brass may well have believed it, but behind the scenes, things were apparently very different.

A couple of decades into retirement, Jews talked about his experiences with Press-Enterprise columnist Cassie MacDuff in 2015.

“Boy, that was an interesting endeavor,” Jews recalled of breaking the color barrier.

On his first day, he was told to sleep in the engine bay with the fire trucks because his fellow firefighters didn’t want to share their living quarters with him. He declined and bunked alongside his colleagues.

The N-word was thrown around casually in station conversation. Jews didn’t let on that he cared. He just kept reading his newspaper rather than react.

He might not have passed his probationary period if one firefighter hadn’t taken him aside and instructed him privately. His superiors seemed uninterested in training him.

The 1971 story gives a hint of Jews’ resolve. He’d already been his hospital’s first Black X-ray technician. Now he was a pioneer in the local fire service.

“It’s nothing new. I’m very adaptive. I can adapt to most anything,” Jews said. “The only thing I ask is that I’m treated like a man and with respect.”

By the mid-1970s, Jews began testing to become a captain and never made the cut. On one try he scored a 96 and was told he needed a perfect 100.

He did advance in the ranks, first as a fire investigator and then as spokesman, earning what he told MacDuff were exceptional evaluations and also graduating with a degree from University of Redlands.

After a fellow firefighter tipped him off that his applications to become a captain were not considered and rejected but simply ignored, Jews filed a complaint with the city's equal opportunity officer. Jews was then made an acting captain for five years before finally getting promoted to full captain in January 1989.

The Sun story about his promotion said the department had "three dozen" captains. Yet for Jews, it was an exceedingly tough job to get.

Jews retired in 1996. His wife of 53 years, Veatrice, told me Tuesday that in retirement he served as an afterschool program supervisor in Rialto, where the couple lived, and volunteered with the Boys and Girls Club, among other activities.

"He believed in helping others, and that we're all here to support one another," she said.

He died Nov. 17 at Riverside Community Hospital of septic shock after a month of declining health.

I asked what had given her husband the grit to persevere.

"Being from Birmingham, Alabama, and growing up in a segregated era just motivated him," Mrs. Jews said.

"His motto was 'Act like a duck and let it roll off your back.' That's what he had to do."

<https://www.dailybulletin.com/2020/12/20/jimmy-jews-who-broke-color-barrier-as-san-bernardino-firefighter-dies/>

San Bernardino dedicates \$1 million to curbing public nuisances

Brian Whitehead, The Sun

Posted: December 21, 2020 at 7:30 AM



"We've got to change the image of this city and this is one way of doing that," councilman says

San Bernardino has reserved \$1 million in one-time funding to proactively curb public nuisances around town.

While simply conceptual at the moment, city officials said Wednesday, Dec. 16, they intend to flesh out the Nuisance Abatement Program in the coming weeks and bring before city leaders a more detailed plan with accurate cost estimates for outside services, staffing and legal guidance.

The new program would assist the city's depleted Code Enforcement Division, officials said, and go a long way in enhancing the quality of life in San Bernardino.

Council members Theodore Sanchez, Juan Figueroa, Fred Shorett and Kimberly Calvin agreed to set aside the \$1 million to support the initiative.

Council members Sandra Ibarra, Ben Reynoso and Damon Alexander opposed.

"This is a bleeding wound in the city," Sanchez said Wednesday ahead of the vote. "There are some places in my district and throughout the city that are in real bad shape. We have to offer a helping hand."

While those opposed to allocating the money at this time agreed the city's six full-time code enforcement officers are in need of assistance, they found the \$1 million allotment "excessive," especially without a final strategic plan.

Alexander proposed setting aside \$300,000 initially and having staff share the program's progress in six months.

Ibarra, meanwhile, argued several long-standing and unfunded capital improvement projects should take precedent.

"Conceptual frameworks don't cost \$1 million," Reynoso said. "I need tangibles. I would like to see some strategic plan. Show us the results."

City officials expect the program to become self-sustaining over time.

Among the objectives, the initiative would focus on abating problem buildings that require constant attention from a short-staffed division, sites that ultimately lead to an increase in criminal activity, deterioration and instability in neighborhoods. Code enforcement officers would work in close coordination with the Police Department, Fire Department and City Attorney's Office to identify and swiftly take care of such nuisances.

Once abatement at a site is complete, city officials said, a lien will be recorded against the property to cover the cost of the cleanup, staff time and related administrative expenses incurred by the city.

The \$1 million in one-time funding stems from a better-than-expected fiscal 2019-20, federal CARES Act money and savings from the refinancing of pension obligation bonds.

A formal strategic plan could be brought before city leaders as early as February.

"This is a critical program that we need to get started," Shorett said, noting "\$1 million sounds like a lot of money, and it is on an individual basis, but for a city our size and the problems we have, this is a 'Broken Windows' program frankly.

"These kind of abatements and problems we have throughout our city are adding to our crime problem," he added, "and the crime problem right now is out of hand with the numbers of homicides we have, shootings we have.

"We've got to change the image of this city and this is one way of doing that."

<https://www.pe.com/2020/12/21/san-bernardino-dedicates-1-million-to-curbing-public-nuisances/>