

CULVER CITY CONFIDENTIAL

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ON THE STREETS, HE'S OLD SCHOOL, BUT INSIDE THE DEPARTMENT, THIS CHIEF OF POLICE IS JUST A GOOD OL' BOY

By Adrian Maher

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In the three years after he was captured on videotape kicking Rodney King and beating him with his baton, Los Angeles Police Department rookie officer Timothy Wind became one of the most unemployable cops in the country. He was suspended by Chief Daryl Gates, and despite two criminal trials where he was found not guilty, a civil suit where he was judged not liable and the recommendation of an LAPD review that he be reinstated, Chief Willie Williams fired Wind in June 1994. He was broke and discredited, and vilified as a symbol of racist policing - a song by rapper Ice Cube, titled "We Had To Tear This Motherfucker Up," promised he would be sent back to "Kansas in a casket."

But if Wind was repudiated by his department and his city, Culver City Police Chief Ted Cooke saw him as a victim. In August 1994, without a word to the press or to the Culver City Council, Cooke hired Wind for a desk job as a community-service officer. It was a civilian position, but one that opened the door to an armed, sworn position on the force.

The move prompted a sharp reaction against Wind, but more particularly against Chief Cooke. An ad hoc committee of citizen critics collected more than 700 signatures on a petition to have Wind fired, and flooded City Council meetings with protests. Soon after, the committee adopted the title Culver City Community Network, and organized around a call for a civilian review board to monitor the department. But Wind had supporters as well - "If he was protecting my life, I'd feel very comfortable," one declared at a city hearing - and the council voted unanimously to endorse Cooke's controversial hire.

It was a decision that spoke volumes about Culver City, and about the police chief who has come to dominate the politics and civic life of that 5-square-mile community. Brash, belligerent and bold, but also sly, wily and secretive, the 66-year-old Cooke has retained his post for the past 22 years, making him the third-longest-reigning active police chief in California.

All the while, the chief has established a command style from the dark side of the 1950s. Minority residents of the city say they are routinely harassed, as do women employees inside the department. And while the LAPD had its Christopher Commission, and the Sheriff's Department its Kolts Commission, no independent

authority has yet been charged with dragging Chief Cooke into the modern era of policing.

On the street, Cooke's officers administer tough, controversial tactics repudiated by other departments, such as the practice of hog-tying agitated suspects - a procedure that caused the deaths of two unarmed suspects while in the custody of Culver City officers. At the same time, Cooke has run his department as a personal fiefdom, dispensing hundreds of concealed-weapon permits to friends, allies and celebrities (see sidebar), operating his own for-profit business on the side, and occasionally spinning crude sexual yarns to stunned subordinates.

Cooke repeatedly declined to comment on these and other allegations, but more than 100 other people did agree to be interviewed in the course of research for this story, including city officials, longtime residents, and current and ex-police officers and department employees. Their statements were augmented by documents from lawsuits, police reports, department memos, correspondence and internal investigations. The picture that emerges is that of an overbearing figure who single-handedly sets the code within the department and in its relations with the city, a lawman who dominates Culver City like the sheriff of a small county in the Deep South.

Cooke's excesses have occasionally raised public ire, but never enough to threaten his standing in Culver City or his tenure as chief. Residents - at least the white ones - seem glad to trade the niceties of close attention to civil rights for a forceful police presence. The bottom line: Crime is down a "remarkable 57 percent" since 1980, according to a department press release, which also touted an "extremely high case-clearance rate" of 52 percent. The figures look even better in comparison to the three busy LAPD divisions that surround Culver City, all of which, until the early '90s, had steady annual increases in serious crimes.

Some current and former officers say the numbers are inflated, but for Cooke they translate into unqualified endorsement from Culver City's political and business establishment. "The community is delighted with life in this city and the high level of protection," says former Councilman Steve Gourley. "As a result, they are willing to put more faith and give greater latitude to the chief of police. If he's enforcing the law to their standards, then those are the only standards that he has to live up to."

Those who know him say Chief Cooke derives much of his effectiveness from a willful nature schooled under the tutelage of Chief William Parker - he was an LAPD officer for more than 20 years. Of sturdy build and medium height, he is said to possess a volatile temper, but also to be garrulous and at times charming, a person who keeps a "tickle file," to send birthday cards to officers.

Out of uniform, he is said to enjoy a good card game and has garish sartorial tastes.

He is a bedrock political conservative. His resume highlights his 42 years in law enforcement and past presidency of the California Police Chiefs' Association, and lists

his co-chairmanship of the successful effort to remove liberal justices Rose Bird, Joseph Grodin and Cruz Reynoso from the California State Supreme Court.

But while Cooke and his officers have a reputation as a tight band of crime-busters who brook criminals no quarter, an exploration of Cooke's department can be a journey to a parallel universe that has its own set of rules. Sources say that most Culver City officers play it by the book, but if you're the chief's kind of guy, then flexibility and benefit of the doubt are the order of the day. A good-old-boy network of officers is said to prevail - a "golden boys" cadre of rough riders who can do no wrong.

Sources say that while the chief has a healthy respect for competent officers, he also has an affinity for rogues and rascals. One current supervisor, while climbing through the ranks, was notorious for allegedly engaging in penis-measuring contests and is said to have once masturbated a dog at a police soiree. At one party, the officer committed a sex act so lewd that another officer reported the incident to his superiors, who took it to Cooke. The chief quickly quashed any talk of an investigation. Another officer, after a bumpy career that involved departures from two police agencies amid allegations of misconduct, was hired by Cooke. According to several sources, the officer was previously terminated from the Manhattan Beach Police Department because of his involvement in a contretemps at the Wild Goose, a strip bar near LAX. The officer, while off-duty, was reportedly in the establishment's parking lot with two other officers, one from the Inglewood Police Department and another from Culver City. Some banter took place about capping off a few rounds, and moments later, the Inglewood and Culver City officers began firing away. After the incident was reported to the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, both shooters received short suspensions, but the Manhattan Beach officer lost his job. About a year later, that officer was offered a job with his brethren at the Culver City P.D., where he's now employed as a training officer.

On occasion, Cooke will tolerate conduct by his sworn officers that could land ordinary civilians in jail. Officer Jason Tabach, for example, was cited for driving under the influence after being pursued by the LAPD at speeds up to 75 mph. Tabach received a one-day suspension from Cooke. In another instance, Tabach was arrested by Sheriff's deputies in West Hollywood with another Culver City cop, Officer Mark Hagen, both for discharging a firearm in a negligent manner, disorderly conduct and public drunkenness. The officers had been fighting each other in the street while off-duty. Both were suspended for 30 days. Each remains on the force.

"Cooke feels comfortable around people that he's got something on, then they won't be a threat to him," explains one ex-officer. "That's why he has a special fondness for the rascal."

This summer, Cooke did fire an officer for misconduct, but only after the case became the apparent target of an investigation by the state Attorney General's Office.

The episode began when two Culver City cops made a traffic stop and cited a woman for driving without a license. As it happened, the woman had recently dated another

officer from the force, a three-year policeman named Johnny Padilla. Weeks later, according to documents from an internal investigation, Padilla located and destroyed the citation against the woman, and erased the log entry of the officers who wrote up the citation. The incident was brought to the attention of Padilla's Culver City supervisors by an official at Corcoran State Prison, who recorded a conversation between the woman and a boyfriend - an inmate at the prison and a member of the Mexican Mafia. The woman was taped saying that she was dating a Culver City police officer who could fix tickets. When confronted, Padilla admitted his actions.

Cooke settled the matter by giving Padilla a one-day suspension, but the light response did not sit well with some in the department.

Within days, an anonymous memo was placed under the office door of Assistant Chief Paul Moncur enumerating other incidents of alleged misconduct by Padilla, including one in which he threatened another officer with his gun while off-duty. Cooke's handling of the ticket-fixing case became an overriding controversy within the department until someone, presumably a Culver City officer, sent a letter about the Padilla matter to the state Attorney General's Office. On August 3, following inquiries from the state Department of Justice, Padilla was forced to resign.

A Police Department source says Cooke is apoplectic over the leak and is conducting a relentless investigation to determine the author of the anonymous memo. So far, Cooke's investigators have determined the date and departmental computer terminal on which the memo was written; sources say the handful of officers with access to that terminal at that time are now subject to intense scrutiny.

While male officers are sometimes treated as good ol' boys, female officers tend to be treated as girls. Cooke apparently feels comfortable with a sexual ethos that has long since been banned in other workplaces. Several women employees of the Culver City department claim to have been showered with sexual innuendos and crude behavior, primarily by the chief.

In April 1997, police detective Yvette Smith filed a \$3 million claim against the city alleging harassment and discrimination perpetrated by Cooke and several high-ranking officers.

In her 22-page claim, Smith asserted, "One day, in front of my husband [Lieutenant Greg Smith] and several others, Chief Cooke pointed to a door and made a comment to me that the pattern on the door was Greg's butt print from the last woman he made love to." In another instance, Smith alleges, "Chief Cooke stated that he would pay \$200 to spend the night with me. He said this in front of many employees."

In the claim, Smith also alleges she was ordered to perform CPR on a man who was already dead from a self-inflicted gunshot to the head. Later tests revealed the man to have hepatitis B, which Smith also contracted.

City Attorney Carol Schwab could not comment on Smith's case.

Several other female officers rumored to have suffered harassment inside the department refuse to talk about their experiences. Several ex-department employees, however, speak of harrowing encounters with the chief.

One ex-employee who insists on anonymity says she was often called in for "talks." Once in his office and behind a closed door, the chief would allegedly regale her with descriptions of sexual techniques, different women he'd had sex with and graphic sexual experiences. She says he propositioned her - "Let's just do it once" - and once asked her to undress in front of him.

"We'd go as long as an hour, just sitting there across the desk," says the woman, still shuddering at the experience. "I should have walked out, but I'd just sit there and listen . . . I needed the job. I felt dirty and angry, and guilty because I didn't say anything. It's all him, he sets the tone, he does such crude sexual things and enjoys the power of getting away with it . . . seeing us squirm. He'd have this piercing look, nothing said in a humorous way, but in an intimidating, evil, leering way."

Another female employee says she abruptly quit after years of being barraged by the chief with sexual chatter and off-color jokes, which were repeated ad nauseam. "He'd say black people are sexy because they have pubic hair on their heads, or 'Why would you worry about money, when you're sitting on a gold mine?'" said the former employee.

"He has a real problem," the woman says. "It's like you'd be talking about glaciers in Alaska and then right into the sexual content. He just has rampant disrespect for women. It was a nonstop, day-to-day thing . . . he'd love having the power to say things and no one could say anything. He just wanted to see how you'd react."

Some in Culver City who have worked closely with the chief say he was the prime mover in diversifying the ranks, and say they are mystified by any allegations of misconduct toward women.

"Women officers were treated with respect. There seemed a camaraderie, and any off-color remarks would be totally out of character for him," says former Councilman Gourley. "Being a policeman, I'm sure there's an earthy side to him, but he was always quite correct about what he said and how he said it. I'd be stunned if these accusations were true."

Others are more inclined to accept the idea of Cooke as something of a rascal, suggesting it was an attribute he picked up as a rugged kid growing up on the Westside of L.A. By all accounts, Cooke was a rabble-rouser as a young teen while enrolled in Venice High School. Running with a rough crowd and later as an amateur boxer, Cooke was eventually straightened out by Charles Lugo, a now-deceased former police captain in Culver City.

"He was close to a juvenile delinquent, a tough kid . . . Trouble was his middle name," says Julie Lugo-Cerra, Captain Lugo's daughter and Culver City's official historian. "But Ted's a survivor. He straightened himself out and is the antithesis of what he was as a kid. He knows all the angles, and that's why he's such a good police chief."

One angle Cooke has added to the usual police manual involves private enterprise. In several cases, Culver City officers have been allowed use of the Police Department in running private businesses. For several years, beginning in 1983, recently retired Captain Jerry Dalven listed the Police Department at 4040 Duquesne Ave. with the secretary of state as his corporate business address for J&G Ammunition Distributors Inc. Another officer, Leon Moore, listed the Police Department in 1990 as his business address in a fictitious-name filing with L.A. County, for Letron Protection Agency. Neither officer returned phone calls.

Other police departments strictly prohibit the use of their public facilities for private purposes.

"None of our officers are allowed to receive private mail or phone calls," says Lieutenant Ed Kreins of the Beverly Hills Police Department. "Can you imagine more than 100 officers with private businesses - who's going to sort all that mail?"

For years, Cooke himself was an officer in the Beverly Hills Gun Club Inc., a corporation that ran a shooting-range, gun-training and weapons-sales company of the same name in West Los Angeles. In statement papers filed with California's secretary of state in February 1994, Cooke is named as the corporation's president. Sources say that, over the years, many recipients of concealed-weapons permits issued by the chief were members of the gun club.

"There was also some bitching within the department about 'appearances,' when the police vending car [staffed with department personnel] which stocked up candy machines at headquarters would make a run over to the gun club," an ex-officer recalls.

The corporation declared bankruptcy in 1996. For a number of years, Cooke has also run a private security business in Culver City called Cooke Protective Services that routinely employs many off-duty Culver City Police Department officers. The company's brochure highlights Cooke's long experience in law enforcement and lists referrals such as the University of West Los Angeles, Artin Jewelry in Beverly Hills and the Washington Medical Center in Culver City.

"It does make me feel better knowing the chief owns the business, makes me more secure," says Jim Gilmore, until recently a security director at the medical center, who adds that he has had excellent service.

But another security business complains that it's hard to compete with the chief on his home turf.

"It's a conflict and a tremendous advantage," says Bob Foston, an ex-office manager at Lanour Security, which does business in Culver City. "Say a warehouse is burglarized 10 times. Who else is going to know about it but the Police Department? Cooke just has to contact a sales rep from his private company and contact the warehouse. There'd be a whole list of leads right there, that only he's privy to."

In one recent incident, the competitors Cooke bested came from his own department. The job was a request for extra security at an opening of the newly built King Sahad Mosque in Culver City. A source says representatives from the mosque called the department and spoke to a lieutenant, who was eager to land some off-duty business for himself and other officers. The lieutenant went to get a work permit and clearance from the chief, the source says, but Cooke denied the permit, saying it would represent a conflict of interest for the department. Shortly thereafter, at the mosque inaugural festivities in July, several security personnel from Cooke Protective Services were hired to guard the mosque (a sight also captured by a Weekly photographer).

"There's been grumbling to high heaven on this one," says an officer.

City Attorney Schwab says she is unaware of the chief's security business or the possible conflict of interest with city laws, and says, "There are circumstances where city employees can have outside businesses."

That sort of complacency represents more than a simple endorsement of the chief. After a tenure of more than two decades, Cooke's persona has become indistinguishable from that of the city he serves, and by all measures, that city has prospered. Since 1976, Culver City has evolved from a sleepy bedroom burg to a booming entertainment hub, with an estimated 250,000 business employees now swelling the municipality on weekdays. MGM's old studio lots were renovated with Sony's move to the city in 1990. The Fox Hills Mall is thriving.

During that same period, Culver City has shed its lily-white roots and has become a model of diversity. According to the latest census figures, of a total population of 41,000 about 58 percent are white, 19 percent Hispanic, 12 percent Asian and 10 percent black.

Interviews with residents and a review of court records show that Chief Cooke has met the growing minority presence with intense vigilance. Many blacks and Latinos, especially youth, say they live under constant police surveillance, and believe they are being targeted. Victor Barraza, an 18-year-old Hispanic graduate of Culver High School, who ran track and played on the basketball team, says he has been pulled over four times by the Culver City police in the last year alone. On one occasion, he says, he was told by officers that a stolen car matched his car's description. Another explanation was a cross hanging from his rear-view mirror. Other times he was given no reason, but said his car was pulled over, he was searched and his identification examined. Not once, he says, did he receive a citation.

"Every person that I know who has been sweated by the cops is a minority," says Barraza animatedly. "We discuss it in my high school class a lot, and there is not a single Caucasian that I've spoken to that's been pulled over. I drive in L.A., Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, going to work or to pick up my mom, and I've never once been stopped."

A few years ago, Carlos Valverde, 25, a teacher at Culver High School, filed a complaint with the Culver City Police Department after being pulled over.

"What's interesting is they never cite you for it. They search you, search the car, and then they end up letting you go," Valverde says. "And then, the classic phrase, 'Hey, today is your lucky day.'"

Some minorities liken driving through Culver City at night to running a gauntlet. Odie Lopez, a 22-year-old African-American, who until recently worked the graveyard shift at the Target store in Culver City. He's been pulled over three times in the last year.

"They always ask, 'What are you doing in Culver City at this time?' - then they let me go," says Lopez as he sits in his car in the employee parking lot. "I honestly believe they've had no reason to pull me over."

The city's white majority, however, measures Cooke's performance by another standard, and credits the department's proactive policing and swift response time with helping Culver City retain a small-town feel amid the L.A. megalopolis. Cooke says proactive policing and swift apprehension and punishment are the main forces keeping crime at bay. With about 70 percent of officers in the field, average response time in 1997 was about 12 minutes, three minutes in emergencies. Well-educated and well-trained policemen are the standard. Of 119 officers, more than 60 have college degrees.

"The department is extremely well organized and efficient, and has great respect from the community," says former mayor and current City Councilman Albert Vera. "Whenever there's a problem in the city, the chief says, 'Okay, Mayor, I'll be right down,' and before I open my mouth, he has a list of things he's already done."

Many Culver City residents echo Vera's endorsement. Rich Hibbs recalls returning home one day a few years ago to find a back window pried off and his stereo equipment missing. He called the cops.

"Within two, three minutes the police were there," Hibbs says appreciatively, leaning back in his desk chair and looking out the window at his tidy street. "Within five minutes they were dusting the window sills - I'd never heard of police taking fingerprints unless there had been some huge jewel heist."

Mia Roop, 35, moved to Culver City recently and soon had her first encounter with the police. While driving, she tossed a desiccated old leaf out her driver-side window, and

was promptly pulled over. Feathers and water, the officer patiently explained as he held up the offending leaf, are legal throwaways. Not leaves.

"I heard they were like the Gestapo," says Roop, "but if they're fighting crime, that's okay with me."

But what about the race factor? Is Culver City ready to condone, in the name of law and order, the routine harassment of its minority residents? Here as elsewhere, Cooke enjoys unwavering support from City Hall, where the department's defenders say the police are just reacting to crime trends in society.

"We can't blame the messenger," says current Mayor Sandi Levin. "The statistics are disheartening. They show patterns by race, and that's a societal problem we need to address, rather than blaming the Police Department for a pattern that exists."

On some occasions, Cooke's old-school approach to policing can prove deadly. A fleeing drug suspect was killed in a hail of bullets by Culver City police officers after a high-speed chase ended in Torrance in September 1997.

In another incident, 18-year-old Anthony Garrett died after being shot during a traffic stop by a Culver City police officer in January 1996. Garrett allegedly had a handgun in his lap. An attorney for Garrett's family concedes that Garrett had a gun in the car, but says it wasn't loaded. His brother and driver, 24-year-old Alan Belton, was wounded in the forearm. Garrett and Belton's mother has since sued the department in federal court for deprivation of civil rights and wrongful death. The case goes to trial on December 15.

Of course, every department has its share of controversial and sometimes dangerous cases, but some such situations can be avoided. The LAPD, for example, took steps in 1994 to end the practice of hog-tying people in custody - lashing suspects' wrists and ankles together behind the back so they can be manhandled like bales of cotton. Cooke, however, continues to authorize the practice.

Since then, coroner's investigations have concluded that hog-ties led to the deaths of seven in-custody suspects in the whole of L.A. County, encompassing 58 police agencies. Two of them died at the hands of Culver City officers. The first was Jorge Salinas.

Court records state that on February 5, 1994, Salinas was arrested during an episode of bizarre behavior, apparently drug-induced. A 31-year-old engineer, Salinas was spotted spread-eagle on the roof of a car near the corner of National and Venice boulevards. He was naked except for a pair of socks, had blood on his face and hands, and repeatedly slammed his head against the car. Officer Kevin Hall had stopped to write a traffic ticket when he noticed Salinas, who slid off the car roof and slapped at vehicles trying to proceed around him. He gestured toward Hall, shouting, "You!" and then slammed his head against the top of a parking meter and advanced toward Hall.

Officer Hall sprayed Salinas with pepper spray, to no apparent effect. A backup unit arrived, and when the officers corralled Salinas, he was clubbed with a baton and again pepper-sprayed, according to the police report. Salinas finally stumbled and was handcuffed, but when he continued to thrash about, an Officer Massey "retrieved his hobble restraint and tightened it around Salinas' ankles and secured it to the handcuffs." He was held face down until paramedics arrived several minutes later. Salinas was then put face down on a gurney into the back of an ambulance, and was pronounced dead shortly thereafter at Brotman Medical Center.

The L.A. County coroner ruled the case a homicide and listed the immediate cause of death as "acute cocaine intoxication and restraint asphyxia." Salinas' family brought suit, but in April 1995 a federal judge ruled that the law did not clearly establish hog-tying as excessive force.

In January of last year, a second suspect died after being beaten and hog-tied by Culver City police. In April, the death was ruled a homicide by the L.A. County Coroner's Office, caused by "restraint procedures and cocaine intoxication."

According to the police arrest report, the incident occurred when officers sought to question an adult Latino standing in the driveway of an Econo Lodge Motel on Washington Boulevard. The officers noticed a black man twice peer out of one of the motel's rooms and quickly shut the door. As an officer went to investigate, the man, Kenneth Wayne Callis, 45, again opened the door, and allegedly the officer saw rock cocaine on top of a refrigerator inside the room. Callis allegedly pulled the officer into the room and dashed into the street. Officers gave chase and were finally able to subdue Callis, who allegedly vigorously resisted arrest.

In November, Callis' family sued Culver City and the Police Department, claiming officers "used unreasonable, unnecessary, excessive and deadly force upon decedent . . . then hog-tying him and placing him . . . face down on the seat of their patrol car." By the time Callis reached the station, he wasn't breathing.

"It is the ultimate form of police abuse," says Steffeny Holtz, an attorney for the Callis family. "The hog-tie technique is known to be a deadly use of force, which they used on a man unarmed, alone and terrified," she says.

Attorneys defending the Police Department in the suit refused to return phone calls. Culver City Police Department spokesman Lieutenant Ray Scheu says hog-tying, which he and others refer to as "hobbling," is an option for the department's officers, but must be approved by a supervisor. Officers are also made aware of the dangers caused by hog-tying obese detainees and placing detainees on their chests, Scheu said. Another department spokesperson refused to comment on whether there were internal investigations of either incident, or if any officers were disciplined.

To some observers, considering the repeated ethical flare-ups at the department, bang-up crime statistics are simply

not enough to explain Cooke's seeming immunity from civic censure. Indeed, sources say Cooke and his cops cast a pall of fear and intimidation across the city. Many department employees and ex-officers contacted for this story agreed to speak only off-the-record, if at all. Other employees and city officials seemed terrified of giving any candid comments about their police department, as did many residents.

One apparent target of the department's wrath is Alan Corlin, a member of the city's Civil Service Commission, that rules on many Police Department matters.

In December 1996, the chief requested that promotional exams for the positions of captain, lieutenant and sergeant be changed to exclude grading an applicant's prepared oral presentation and rely solely on an oral interview with Cooke and the department's supervisors.

The policy passed 4-1; Corlin cast the dissenting vote. Ever since, sources say, Corlin has received harassing phone calls, patrol cars have been cruising in front of his home – at times on a nightly basis – and passing patrol vehicles have beamed their searchlights into his residence.

Asked to comment on the alleged campaign against him, Corlin did not respond directly, but voiced fear that his story might be published. “If anything happens to me or my family because of what you write, I will come after you,” said Corlin. “This is not a threat, but a promise.”

A source inside the department, however, confirms that Corlin put his complaints about the campaign against him in writing in a letter to the chief listing specific incidents of harassment. The letter spurred an internal investigation, and according to the source's reading of the report, Corlin said that he and his wife were constantly followed by patrol cars while driving, at times right into their driveway. Documents show that Corlin was scared for his safety and that of his family.

Culver City Police Captain Don Ruetz confirmed receipt of a letter from Corlin, but said he was unaware of its contents. The source who saw the report says nothing came of the internal inquiry, terming it a “whitewash.” However, Ruetz, at the request of the chief, met with Corlin and resolved what he called misunderstandings caused by a drug-surveillance operation conducted in the area by two other neighboring police departments.

How much influence such intimidation may have had on Corlin's voting record is questionable. But on a few key votes this year, Corlin has decided in favor of the department. In a January vote, Corlin supported the chief in a unanimous commission decision, which allowed the department to recruit existing officers, without the need to send new hires through academy training. In an April decision, Corlin voted in the majority to deny a grievance against the department by a lieutenant and in July voted to uphold the department's discipline of another officer.

Over the years, Cooke's clout has translated into substantial funding for his department. Of the city's annual general-fund budget – about \$47 million for 1997-98 – the police will receive about a third. By comparison, the police departments of Beverly Hills and Santa Monica each receive less than a quarter of their city's general-fund budgets.

Cooke's success is a source of frustration to his critics. "We have an Arts Committee, a Human Services Commission, a Planning Commission, but no Police Oversight Committee – we have a City Council that's completely uninterested," says Gary Silbiger, a member of the Culver City Community Network. "The City Council feels Cooke is just too powerful, and they don't want to risk their political careers. The police get a huge amount of the budget, and our schools and libraries need money."

Indeed, construction workers are midway through a \$3.2 million project to add 10,000 square feet of office space to the department and to renovate one-third of the station's facilities.

Ex-Police Department employees say much of the chief's political power flows from his mastery at controlling and publicly releasing crime statistics. They are propagated relentlessly, at Chamber of Commerce luncheons, in newsletters and at City Council meetings.

But sources who have worked in the department says the numbers are suspect. One former detective says there has always been an intense emphasis on underreporting and reclassifying crimes: changing armed robbery to grand theft, grand theft to petty theft, rape to battery, auto burglary to auto tampering.

"One year I went out on three to four rape calls, and at the end of the year there was no sign of them in the statistics," says the detective. "It all becomes very technical – we screw with it because we want it to look better. As the chief often used to say, 'It's perception vs. reality – if people think they're safe, then they're safe.'"

A typical technique, according to several sources inside the department, is to reclassify crime reports – whose totals must be reported to the Department of Justice – to "officer reports," which are buried in files at headquarters. One source supplied a copy of a crime report to the *Weekly* outlining an attempted robbery in Culver City on August 12, in which a woman was held up with an automatic handgun in her carport. The woman screamed. The suspect ran away. On the left-hand corner of the crime report, a detective has written, "Reclassify to ofc rpt." A source says the report has been filed away and will not be part of any statistics sent to the DOJ, or any investigation.

But a longtime officer at the department says he never witnessed any tampering.

"The supervisors keep a close eye on the statistics. They really delve into it – they want it properly classified," says Lieutenant Ellis Smith, a 25-year CCPD veteran. "I've never seen the chief or any supervisor attempt to coach the statistics one way or the other."

Several resident cite those figures in attributing Cooke's good fortune in Culver City less to the fear he inspires than to simple self-interest. "It's a symbiotic relationship with the City Council – 'Hey, congratulations, crime is down for another year,'" says one observer who has followed the chief closely for years. "Property values stay up, the schools keep their reputation, and the City Council keeps getting re-elected. It's 'Cooke World' – he's built his little kingdom, and everyone goes along with it."