Reserve officers handle crowds, not undercover work, in Oakland County

Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard, left, with 2014 Reserve Deputy of the Year, Daniel Schuh, right. Photo from Oakland County Sheriff

By Carol Hopkins, The Oakland Press

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It’s been a rough couple of months for reserve police officers.

First came the April 2 story of a Tulsa, Oklahoma reserve officer who says he thought he was Tasering a man but wound up killing him.

The Tulsa County Sheriff’s Office said Robert Bates, an insurance executive who was volunteering on an undercover operation in Tulsa, accidentally shot 44-year-old Eric Harris on April 2. Bates has been charged with second-degree manslaughter, punishable by up to four years in prison.

A video of the incident shows a deputy chase and tackle Harris, who authorities said tried to sell an illegal gun to an undercover officer.

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In March, news broke about the curious situation in the small Michigan town of Oakley — a city of 286 people north of Owosso that has 110 reserve officers, some of whom donate to the police department in exchange being able to wear a badge and carry a gun.

New documents obtained by the Detroit Free Press show that Kid Rock is authorized to be an Oakley reserve officer.

In Michigan, there are no training requirements attached to being a reserve police officer, said David Harvey, Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards executive director.

The Oakley situation — where Detroit area doctors, lawyers, rock musicians and athletes have been issued badges — happened because there are no regulations against it, said Harvey.

The danger isn’t just for the governments hiring untrained reserves, he said, it’s also about the reserve officer.
“It’s dangerous to that individual as well,” said Harvey, a former police chief.

“Police officers have rigorous training.”

The commission is behind Senate Bill No. 92, which sets hiring standards for police reserves. That bill is headed for the Senate floor, said Harvey, but would still have to go to the House for approval.

Here in Oakland County, department officials who use reserve deputies say they appreciate having them.

They also require the reserve officers be trained.

To be a reserve officer in the communities contacted by The Oakland Press, people must undergo a background check and graduate from a police reserve academy.

Most must supply their own gun and uniform — and they are not paid.

Everett Gard trains reserves at Oakland Community College. The fee to enroll in the 12-week academy is $975, he said, but students must have a sponsoring department or agency.

The best candidates, he said, have to have a “good attitude. They want to do the right thing.”

Gard said he believes “it’s a matter of time before the state sets up standards.

Sheriff Michael Bouchard has 101 reserve officers volunteering the equivalent of 20,000 hours a year.

He said he has been advocating more training for reserves for years.

Besides graduating from the academy, Sheriff reserves must 40 hours of training at the Sheriff’s Office, monthly in-service instruction and quarterly firearms training. They also must have CPR, first aid and AED training.

They work with full-time officers and must work 100 hours a year to maintain their reserve status.

“We think those standards should be statewide,” said Bouchard.

The Tulsa deputy was attempting to buy an illegal gun.

“Our reserves are never in high-risk situations and we would never put them on task forces,” said Bouchard.

Reserves are generally sent out at Woodward Dream Cruise, fireworks gatherings and parades, he said.
Dan Schuh, an honorably discharged Marine from Oakland County, said he has worked nights and weekends as a reserve since 2003.

“After 9/11, it hit home that I needed to serve and protect my community,” said Schuh, the Sheriff’s Office 2014 Reserve Deputy of the Year.

“It allows me to make it safer out there at night. It’s been an absolutely wonderful experience on all levels.”

Schuh, executive director of a consumer electronics company, has ridden with the same full-time deputy for years.

Schuh said he’s been on traffic stops, suicide runs and drug overdoses, to name a few.

People are calling 911, he said. “They’re not calling to thank you. The worst thing has taken place.”

He recalled being the second set of hands to help out with CPR during a medical run.

He wonders how many incidents would be different if a reserve wasn’t there.

“I’ve had my partner tell me about a guy who attacked him while he was alone,” he said.

When reserve and full-time deputy are together patrolling, said Schuh, that person might reconsider an attack knowing there are two to take down.

“How many attacks have reserves prevented?” asked Schuh, who praised the training he has received.

Bouchard said he is proud of the reserves.

“They’re incredible men and women giving a lot of time and effort, and willing to put themselves in harm’s way.”

Waterford has six reserve officers, and they are not used in any undercover activities, said Sgt. Will Dolehanty.

“They assist the department at special events, parades, open house, etc.,” he said.

In Waterford the police department purchases the uniform and guns for reserves.

*The first three reserves were sworn in December, 2013.*

Sylvan Lake has a dozen reserves. Officers can carry a gun if they have a concealed pistol license and qualify with their firearm.
How does the administration weed out troubled characters?

“With the review process, hopefully we can catch them,” said John Martin, police chief.

On the plus side, reserves are knowledgeable and another uniform is a deterrent — bad guys don’t know the difference, said Martin. They provide another set of eyes and ears on the street, and they offer automatic backup for the licensed officers.

“I believe they deter crime,” said Martin. “They’re great for special events like fireworks, parades, etc.”

The negatives are controllable, but still can be an issue, he said.

“Some want to go out and play ‘cop’ when they aren’t one. Some do very well working with the licensed officer on duty — and we always have a licensed officer on duty.

“Others really want to be by themselves. We had a few issues in the past, but they have been corrected.”

Lake Orion has 12 reserves.

Jerry Narsh, police chief, called the Tulsa and Oakley reserve situations an “affront to professional reserve officers and law enforcement.”

“No one purchases a badge here,” he said.

If a reserve is performing a certified police officer’s duties, he said, “Something is drastically wrong.”

In Lake Orion, reserves often serve as the second officer in a patrol car, and are supervised by certified police officers. The reserves receive 40 hours of training annually, he said.

Narsh recalled a reserve officer killed on duty in Taylor while controlling traffic.

In early February, a Highland Park reserve working off-duty as a security guard was killed outside a Detroit club.

Lake Orion reserves undergo background checks so anyone with a felony or domestic abuse in his/her history would not be hired. Their prior professions include military and even building trades.

“These are dedicated officers who perform a vital function for our city,” said Narsh.

Royal Oak has auxiliary police officers.
“They do not carry a gun or Taser and have no police powers,” said Corrigan O’Donohue, police chief.

“These do not ride with officers or serve as backup for police officers. They go through a thorough background check before being accepted into the program.”

Farmington Hills

When Police Chief Chuck Nebus took over his position five years ago, a few reserve officers were on staff.

“With the challenges of recruiting, various liabilities and the job becoming more complex, I discontinued it,” he said.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.