

Report violence, chief urges homosexuals

By Jim Dickey
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San Jose Police Chief Joseph McNamara has told a group of homosexuals to "get on our case" and report incidents of gay violence and harassment directly to his office.

"When I don't hear from a gay group, I have the tendency to assume everything is OK," McNamara said Sunday, to an overflow audience of 240 members of High Tech Gays at the Billy De Frank Gay and Lesbian Center in downtown San Jose. "You have to get on our case."

McNamara had been asked several weeks ago to speak to the homosexuals employed in Silicon Valley electronics firms on the topic of violent crimes against homosexuals. Initially he declined, declaring gay-bashing is not a major problem in the San Jose area.

Later, he agreed to talk to the group after High Tech Gays President Rick Rudy sent him a U.S. Justice Department report and other information indicating gay-bashing was the most common hate crime in the nation and is highly under-reported because victims fear reprisals.

But McNamara dealt only briefly with the issue, saying "we are fortunate in San Jose that we don't have a consistent pattern" of gay-bashing. His talk consisted mostly of answering questions from the audience dealing with concerns such as recruitment of homosexuals to the department, undercover surveillance of gay cruising spots, and a proposal for a gay liaison with the police department.

McNamara told the mostly male audience that when he became chief 12 years ago, one of the first minority groups he met



Chief Joseph McNamara
... Talks of harassment

with consisted of homosexuals complaining about police harassment in and near gay bars on Stockton Avenue. He said he found that some officers were "twisting our procedures and harassing gays and others" in the area and that he "put a stop to it immediately."

But, he said, it "took years to develop a system of checks and balances" that prevented some police from discriminating against minorities. Police need to be carefully controlled and disciplined to prevent "society's prejudices from finding their way into police departments," he said.

While many people in the audience spoke of problems with treatment by police, most in the crowd seemed to think McNamara was supportive of gay causes.

The chief "obviously is educated and willing to connect with the gay community in a positive way, although he still has a contingent of officers who are biased against gay people," Rudy said.