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To: Chief Harmon:

I thought you might be interested in the public relations steps being taken by the new Chief in L.A.

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CHIEF'S OFFICE

Dana Spitzer

BRIEFINGS

L.A.P.D. chief reshapes force's image



Willie L. Williams gives a thumbs-up after being formally sworn in as the new chief of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Sounding more like a public relations executive than the head of the nation's second-largest police force, Los Angeles Chief of Police Willie L. Williams introduced a series of communication strategies to rejuvenate the department's image-and the city's economy-in the wake of the L.A. riots.

Addressing 150 public relations professionals at an August luncheon hosted by PRSAs Los Angeles Chapter, Williams acknowledged that the police department has lost the public's trust and confidence. The city, already beset by economic hardship and soaring homicide rates, has struggled to regain its footing as a commerce center. Many businesses have announced that, due to fears of renewed civil disturbance, they will not reinvest in the riot-torn city.

Chief Williams perceives the L.A.P.D. as a key player in the effort to turn things around in the ethnically diverse city. "If law

enforcement cannot create a safe environment for businesses, people are going to put up stakes and leave," he said. The police chief, who replaced Daryl Gates on June 28th, set the tone for his message by referring to the L.A.P.D. as a "service organization," and identifying the 3.5 million residents of Los Angeles as his "customer base." "In order to be successful," the former Philadelphia police chief said, "you have to recognize where and who your customers are and understand they are stakeholders in the community."

Addressing the immediate challenge of restoring the department's tarnished image, Williams said the most critical challenge is to convince the public to "recognize the positive things about the L.A.P.D. and not to let the events of the past 18 months deter us from remembering the positive elements of our city." He asked the communicators in attendance to help him work toward that goal by portraying Los Angeles more positively.

Chief Williams introduced a series of internal and external communications programs designed to restore the pride and confidence of the department's officers and

commanders. He ordered the development of a unified values and mission statement, clearly identifying the goals and philosophy of the department for all 10,500 employees.

With widening distrust between the public and the department following the Rodney King controversy, Chief Williams pledged a renewed commitment by the department to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the community. "Traditionally, big-city police departments only communicate as the result of a crisis," he said. "We need to open our doors, let the public know what the budget and manpower is, and involve the community in the decision-making process so the public understands the logic which led to the policies."

The chief identified a number of programs he hopes will allow Los Angeles residents to once again trust the officer's creed. To Protect and to Serve." These programs are:

- *Open-door communications policy*-Envisioning the department as a public service organization responsive to the needs of the consumers, Chief Williams introduced an "Open-Door" policy. The public will now have direct access to the leadership of the L.A.P.D., both at headquarters and at local precincts.

- *Public evaluations*-Williams disclosed plans for citywide public evaluations of the department through written evaluations and community-based town meetings.

- *Updating training procedures*-In order to provide greater awareness of community needs and sensitivities, Chief Williams has ordered a review and, if necessary, a revamping of the department's training procedures.

- *Unified message points*- Chief Williams stressed the importance of the L.A.P.D. providing a unified message to the public. "It's okay to close the doors and argue over policy, but when the doors open, we have to go outside as a team to deliver our message," he said.

The 49-year-old chief concluded by underscoring the need for patience in allowing these programs to become fully effective. He cited his experiences in Philadelphia, where six years after announcing a restructuring of the department, only 70% of the goals had been met. "It's not going to happen overnight," he said. "But it will happen."- Ken Ferber, president, Ferber Communications, Los Angeles, CA.