

State police release names of officers involved in shooting

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Official: Details forthcoming

On Aug. 16, New Mexico State Police released the names of the four Gallup Police Department officers involved in a recent deadly shooting.

City police officers responded July 24 to a report involving a Native American male, identified as Alvin R. Sylversmythe, 30, who was threatening people with at least two knives at the Arnold Street public housing.

GPD officers were the first to respond to the scene.

The officers involved in the incident were: Justin Benally, a three-year departmental veteran; Clarissa Morgan, a five-year police veteran; Dominic Molina, a two-year city police employee; and Steven Peshlakai, a six-year department veteran.

“The sequence of events leading up to the officers discharging their weapons is currently being investigated,” Sgt. Chad Pierce, spokesman for the NMSP, said. “No other information is available at this time.”

GPD Public Information Officer Capt. Marinda Spencer said the four officers were on paid administrative leave for four days after the incident as per departmental policy. Spencer said the GPD is conducting its own internal investigation – as also per departmental policy under such circumstances.

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The Gallup Police Department turned the case over to state police in order to avoid bias and impropriety, GPD Lt. Rosanne Morrisette said at the time of the shooting.

Officials at the GPD have been tight-lipped regarding details about incident. The names of the officers were made public after the Sun filed a New Mexico Inspection of Public Records Act request with the state Department of Public Safety. Pierce has said the matter will go before a district attorney for review.

Sylversmythe possessed prior run-ins with local law enforcement, and was described by witnesses as being “out of it” at the shooting scene, allegedly charging officers despite numerous commands to halt. The fatal incident occurred at about 12:45 am.

The New Mexico State Police have not released photos of the four police officers involved.

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