

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Palm Springs Police Show a site to behold

Event was a favorite get-together for Rat Pack

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The village of Palm Springs played host to the largest throng of villagers and visitors in its history in 1951 for the New Year's celebration. It was also the best behaved celebration police Chief Gus Kettmann had ever seen.

"Anticipating a great deal of work, we had 36 men on duty. Sunday night every night spot was jammed, and I would estimate there were 25,000 people in the area. Yet there were no injury accidents, no fights, no cars broken into and no drunks obnoxious enough to be booked."

Kettmann graciously thanked the 16 auxiliary police who volunteered for weekend work and the regular officers who gave up time off to be on duty for the holiday.

The article appearing in The Desert Sun also noted the celebration was "not without humor, however. Recalling Western Week pranks, police located a stuffed dummy lying on North Indian avenue after several alarmed Villagers reported a 'body' in the road. Officer Bob White later carried the dummy in his patrol car, fooling several inebriated passengers who remarked on the sobriety of the plaid-coated thing."

Bob White was elected in 1951 to head the Police Officers' Association. White was an active member of the U.S. Marine reserve holding a rank of major, and had been Treasurer when the association was first formed in 1949 under the guidance of Bill Lux.

The association staged an annual police show that was a highly anticipated and glorious event. Everyone in town bought a ticket to support the police. Frank Bogert presided over the festivities. In 1951, President Bob White announced the show that year would be



Gus Kettmann and actress Jayne Mansfield backstage at the 1962 Police Show.
THE GEORGE AQUINO COLLECTION COURTESY OF THE BOGERT FAMILY

held at the polo grounds' rodeo field. By the 1960s, the show attracted so many attendees it was held at the huge ballroom at the Riviera Hotel in Palm Springs, at the corner of Indian Avenue and Vista Chino.

The Police Officers' Association was dedicated to the education and welfare of the police department. During its inaugural year under Sgt. Lux's leadership the association started a library of reference volumes on police science, contributed both labor and money to building of the new police range, purchased accident and health insurance for its members and inaugurated a move to develop a set of standards for city employees through a form of civil service.

In 1951, the Police Show was graced by resident stars including Bob Hope,

Dick Haymes, Frank Sinatra, Dinah Shore, Eddie Cantor, Gordon MacRae, Rudy Vallée all backed by Les Brown's Band of Renown. In addition to the singers, the Marx Brothers, local residents, performed. These were some of the biggest names in show business and they were supporting the police in Palm Springs.

The annual Police Show was a favorite get-together for the Rat Pack. Dean Martin and Sammy Davis, Jr. regularly joined Frank Sinatra for the hijinks and good fun for a good cause. Rosalind Russell, Peggy Lee and Jayne Mansfield entertained and lent glamour to the event.

By 1971, Frank Sinatra would headline at the Riviera with Nancy Sinatra, Vikki Carr, Vic Damone and Milton Berle performing, as did country western star

Glen Campbell. The event became so popular that it was noticed in papers around the Southland, attracting visitors to the desert for the occasion and a chance to see movie stars.

In 1949, the same year the Police Officers' Association was formed, the Palm Springs Mounted Police came into being "after numerous hastily organized organized rescues and searches over the years" had resulted in loss of equipment and injury for those dedicated individuals who combed the rugged terrain rescuing wayward hikers and riders.

Chief Kettmann directed patrolman and horseman John Hollinger to formally organize and before long the desert had a first-rate search and rescue team. Big Jim Maynard was the first captain with Joe Butler and Hollinger serving as lieutenants. Members were required to provide their own horse and trailer, saddle and all riding equipment, including uniform and gun. They received no pay or reimbursement of any kind but were of immense service to those lost in the wild mountains.

In February 1954, the mounted police served as the honor guard of President Eisenhower during his visit as a sitting president. And of course, the unit was a highly-sought-after participant in all sorts of parades. The mounted police had a rodeo each year to raise funds for much-needed equipment, and regularly attracted a long list of western movie stars.

Palm Springs continues to hold its police in the highest regard. The Palm Springs Mounted Police Search and Rescue still performs daring feats on the steep escarpment of San Jacinto rescuing lost and luckless hikers facing dehydration and death. The Police Officers' Association still does incredible good work supporting those who protect and serve.

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