

# **Providence Journal August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005**

## **City, firm agree to 3-year crossing-guard pact**

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CRANSTON -- The city has signed a three-year contract with a Providence security firm to provide crossing guard services, and will maintain the same number of crossing guards and posts throughout the city.

The city will pay NESCTC Security Agency \$348,000 a year to staff 37 crosswalks, work that traditionally had been done by unionized city employees. The contract contains options for two one-year extensions.

The city had been considering reducing the number of total posts -- which it still may do in the later years of the contract. But for now, city officials said that the city will continue to staff 37 crossing points.

Early in his first term, Republican Mayor Stephen P. Laffey made the city's generous contract with its crossing guards a symbol of the city's fiscal woes.

That contract, with Public Service Employees Local 1033 of the Laborers International Union of North America, cost the city \$850,000 a year.

The guards were paid \$45 daily for an hour's work, plus vacation time and paid holidays and family health care and dental and life insurance.

"The former contract represented everything that had gone wrong in Cranston - - deals cut in smoke-filled back rooms. The special interests were thriving at the expense of the city's fiscal stability and ultimately, the taxpayers," Laffey said on Friday, the day after the contract with NESCTC was signed.

In 2003, Laffey tried to fire the guards, but legal challenges put them back on the job until their contract expired, on June 30 of this year.

NESCTC's employees will be paid \$30 to \$35 a day, but they will enjoy far fewer benefits than the city workers had been afforded.

"Lower cost, increased services -- I'd say that's a good deal," Laffey said.

About 80 people, many of them former city crossing guards, are competing for just over 40 positions as guards and alternates, according to Michael Malloy, president of NESCTC.

Malloy said many of the guards were surprised by the scope of the company -- required 55-hour training course -- from CPR to recognizing hazardous materials, to disaster-response training and some elements of community policing.

"We want them to be extra eyes and ears for the Police Department," said Malloy, a former major in the Pawtucket Police Department. *\*Correction here: Major Crimes Detective and Supervisor—not a Major!*

There are several outstanding legal challenges stemming from Laffey's dismissal of the crossing guards in 2003 and his decision to privatize the service.

In January, Superior Court Judge Daniel Procaccini ruled that the no-layoffs clause in the guards' contract infringed upon the management rights of the mayor, and that Laffey could dismiss the guards. The union has appealed that finding to the state Supreme Court.

The union has also filed a grievance asserting that that the city did not give the union a contractually-mandated 120 days' notice that the contract would not be renewed. An arbitrator will hear that grievance in November.