

## VPD Sergeant Tom Higgins Coordinates Uniform Donation to the Bronx Zoo and Wildlife Conservation Society and in Turn Helps to Fight Poaching in Africa

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**Incident:** Ventura Police Department Sergeant Tom Higgins Coordinates Uniform Donation to the Bronx Zoo and Wildlife Conservation Society and in Turn Helps to Fight Poaching in Africa

**Contact:** Sergeant Tom Higgins: 805-339-4431

**Location:** City of Ventura, CA, Bronx Zoo, New York, and several National Parks throughout Africa

**Date of Release:** December 22, 2014

**Narrative:**

Recently Ventura Police Department (VPD) Sergeant Tom Higgins helped coordinate the delivery of approximately 450 pounds of old and previously used VPD uniforms to the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), based at the Bronx Zoo in New York, which in turn will be delivered to several National Parks throughout Africa to be used by Park Rangers in an effort to combat wildlife poaching.

As a law enforcement agency with 127 sworn officers, our agency, like countless others across the country, naturally finds itself with a significant turnover in uniforms whether it be from retirements, outdated, change in size, natural wear and tear, etc. Where and when possible we do our best to reuse or repurpose the uniforms. Other times we must dispose of the uniforms in a secure fashion (incineration) so they cannot be used by an individual(s) to pose as a uniformed law enforcement officer.

To this end, approximately five months ago VPD Sergeant Tom Higgins took it upon himself to find a solution and make use of the approximately 450 pounds of old VPD uniforms that had been accumulating for nearly four years. Said Sergeant Higgins, "To me it seemed wasteful to simply dispose of boxes and boxes of old, used, or worn uniforms that we no longer needed." As a result, Sergeant Higgins began contacting a number of social service agencies and business organizations to see if they had a need for the clothing.

After approximately four months Sergeant Higgins made contact with a representative from Patagonia (based in Ventura, CA) who in turn informed him that the Bronx Zoo in New York, and its partner, the WCS, may be able to use the uniforms. Said Higgins, "After speaking with representatives from the Bronx Zoo and the WCS, I learned they had a need for the uniforms, which could be worn by Park Rangers in Africa in an effort to help support their anti-poaching and conservation efforts in the region." Although the Bronx Zoo and WCS could use the uniforms, and coordinate delivery from New York to Africa, Sergeant Higgins would still need to be responsible for packing and shipping the 450 pounds of uniforms from Ventura to New York.

Said Higgins, "I was grateful to find an organization that could use the uniforms but shipping nearly 450 pounds of uniforms could be cost prohibitive and we did not want to use any tax payer dollars to transport the uniforms." Higgins thus began his next quest, which was to find a shipper at no cost. After another few weeks, and multiple phone calls and emails to various shipping companies and businesses, Sergeant Higgins received a phone call back from a representative at Walmart. "Walmart graciously agreed to handle the shipping of the uniforms from Irwindale, CA (approximately 90 miles south of Ventura) to New York, ..... I just had to pack them and get them down to Irwindale" said Higgins.

Sergeant Higgins then reached out to a local 4-H Youth Club to help with packing of the uniforms. Said Higgins, "I recalled a conversation I had one day with Dennis Kulzer, who is the City of Ventura's Fleet Maintenance Supervisor. I remembered Dennis mentioning a local 4-H Club called "Roots & Shoots", which his wife works with, and how the group worked on projects dedicated to protecting the environment, wildlife, and conservation.

Ultimately, Sergeant Higgins, with the assistance of eight to ten Roots & Shoots members, got together and packed up the uniforms into seven boxes totaling 450 pounds. Sergeant Higgins then drove to Irwindale and dropped off the boxes at a Walmart distribution center where they were then loaded onto a truck. Delivery was confirmed to the Bronx Zoo on December 20. The uniforms are scheduled to depart for Africa sometime in the near future.

Said Higgins of the experience, "I want to thank everyone who helped make this project a reality. I had no idea just how involved this would be. In the end it was well worth it and it's great to know that our old uniforms are helping to fight crime and illegal poaching half way around the world. I again want to thank Patagonia, the Bronx Zoo, Wildlife Conservation Society, Walmart, and our local 4-H Roots & Shoots Club for all of their assistance and efforts."