

2 Newark cops 'benched' over bar videotape

Director gives pair desk duty

By KINGA BORONDY

Two Newark police officers were assigned to desk duty yesterday after the police director was shown a videotape of them drinking beer in a bar while on duty.

Officers Al Renzo, a 25-year veteran, and Lawrence Maloney, a 22-year veteran, were placed on paid administrative leave, said Director William Celester, explaining they will be behind desks until an investigation into the incident is completed by the department's Internal Affairs Bureau.

"It upset me very much watching what I saw on tape; I was appalled at what was on the tape," Celester said, adding that if the investigation backs up what the tape depicts, then he will take immediate and severe action. "I will not tolerate actions like this by any Newark police officer."

"Police are not supposed to drink while wearing their uniforms at all," Celester said, regardless of whether they are on or off duty.

The officers had been assigned to a walking post on Ferry Street, in the city's Ironbound area, famed for its Spanish and Portuguese restaurants and bars. Renzo had been on that post for about eight months, while Maloney had been walking the beat for about a year and a half, said Capt. John Dough, the East District commander.

"Both are exemplary officers, with clean records," Dough said.

Celester said the department cannot afford to have officers "sitting at bars, drinking at bars."

"The incident warrants an investigation," Celester said when confronted with the tape by a New York television station news crew that obtained the video from Priority Security Systems in Parsippany, a detective agency that investigates insurance fraud.

"We're treating this as an isolated incident," Celester said. But, he added, the investigation will encompass the questioning of bar owners in the neighborhood to determine the extent of the problem.

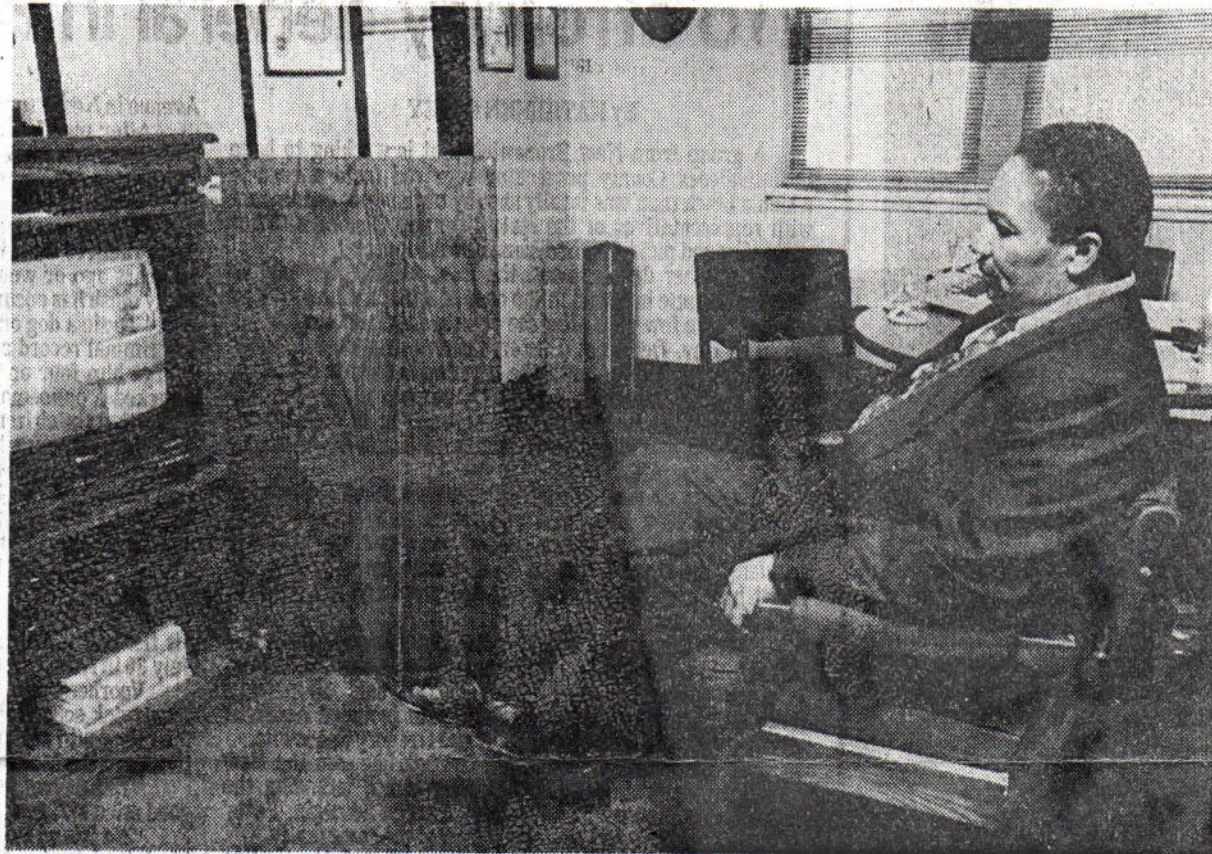


Photo by Arthur Cuffee

Newark Police Director William Celester watches the television news report in his office that alleged two officers were seen drinking on duty

borhood to determine the extent of the problem.

"The news team hinted that three other bars were involved," Celester said, adding all the taverns will be visited by IAB investigators.

The son of the owner of Tasca Do Pedras, one of the taverns where the officers were allegedly drinking, refused yesterday to comment on whether the officers had been in the bar.

Mike Martin, an owner of Priority Security Systems, said he was a member of the crew that filmed the Newark officers drinking.

Martin said he and co-workers had finished a job and stopped in for a beer when the officers entered. The private detectives recognized the officers as the same ones they had seen about two months earlier in the same bar.

Priority filmed them because they

had their hidden camera with them, Martin explained, adding he called the television station and gave them a copy of the videotape.

On the tape two silhouettes, recognizable as police officers, sit in a bar and drink out of glasses. They are also shown leaving a bar. One is smoking a cigar.

When approached by news personnel, the officers declined to comment.

"We learned of this yesterday when they called their supervisor to the area after being confronted by the news team," Celester said. The confrontation occurred about 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, and promptly was brought to Celester's attention.

"What bothers me is they showed no respect for the Newark Police Department or the people of Newark,"

Celester said of the officers' alleged drinking.

Newark's finest will be hearing a new message from the director during roll call for the next week prohibiting them from entering any establishment that sells only liquor unless they are called in by a citizen or responding there to an emergency.

"The memo will outline how police are expected to conduct themselves in public," Celester said. "If they are found in violation, they will be dealt with swiftly and severely."

Mayor Sharpe James, through spokeswoman Pamela Goldstein, urged residents to report any improprieties by police to Celester for investigation.

Celester said that videotaping police behavior seems to be increasing, and police must realize they will be held accountable.