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**MONDAY**

**JUNE 18, 2007**

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# El Paso Times

elpasotimes.com

## Hate crimes in El Paso fall by half during 2006

By Daniel Borunda  
El Paso Times

A swastika spray-painted on a sport utility vehicle was among "hate crimes" reported last year in El Paso that mirrored a statewide decline in crimes motivated by prejudice.

Four hate crimes were reported in El Paso last year, down from eight cases each reported in 2005 and 2004, according to figures recently released by the El Paso Police Department.

The 2006 hate crimes included a robbery, telephone harassment and two vandalism cases, including the swastika that was drawn on a vehicle belonging to a person of German descent, police department spokesman Javier Sambrano said.

"I think in our community we are very fortunate. We do not see a lot of bias related to race as some other cities our size and even smaller cities do experience," Sambrano said.

"We've had some homicides in the past related to hate crimes. We had a homicide related to a person's sexual orientation. This last year, fortunately, we didn't have anything of that magnitude," Sambrano said.

The number of hate crimes may be down, but that does not mean racial tensions don't exist, especially in schools with military-dependent children new to the area, said Dawn A. Thurmond, director of the YWCA El Paso del Norte Region's Racial Justice program, which provides training to schools and other organizations.

"What we are seeing is that El Pasoans are not as friendly racially as we once thought," said Thurmond, who received angry phone calls after a previous newspaper article.

"We are trying to be proactive," she said. "As the community, we have to work together. There is nothing worse than a woman whose husband is deployed to have her child called a (racial slur) every day. And that is happening."

The number of hate crimes statewide dropped 6.4 percent from 264 in 2005 to 247 last year, stated the annual "Crime in Texas" report by the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The report showed that the majority of hate crimes in Texas were anti-black with 99 cases, followed by 38 anti-gay cases and 35 anti-Hispanic offenses. National hate crime numbers were not yet available.

The total number of hate crimes was eight in El Paso in both 2005 and 2004. Ten cases were reported in 2003; 11 in 2002; seven in 2001; and nine in 2000, according to FBI and Texas Department of Public Safety figures.

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## Telling numbers

**300,000**

Number of "name check" cases pending in FBI offices across the nation. The checks are the "biggest obstacle to the timely and efficient delivery of immigration benefits."

**30,000**

Number of "name check" cases pending for more than two years and nine months.

## Inside

► **Closer look** at immigration delays 2A

► **Highlights** of the ombudsman report 2A

# FBI checks delay visa applications

By Louie Gilot  
El Paso Times

FBI background checks can slow down the processing of immigration applications for years, a recent report by Citizenship and Immigration Services officials revealed, leading some to wonder about the government's ability to handle millions of new visa applications under proposed immigration reform.

The annual report delivered last week by the CIS ombudsman called the FBI checks, known as "name checks," "the single biggest

obstacle to the timely and efficient delivery of immigration benefits."

The ombudsman reported that more than 300,000 name checks were pending around the nation, including 30,000 pending for more than two years and nine months. The backlog is only increasing. Last year, around 20,000 such long-running cases existed, according to the report.

El Pasoan Hector Piña, a Venezuelan businessman, has waited nearly four years for his background check. He applied for permanent residency with his wife. The Piñas were in-

terviewed by immigration officials a month and a half after filing their paperwork and everything was in order, Piña said. Because their daughter is an adult U.S. citizen, the Piñas' case should have taken months.

But they didn't count on the FBI name checks.

"We pay a visit to the (CIS) Hawkins (Boulevard) office every other month to check our status. It is unfortunate. We do have business here. There are a lot of oppor-

Please see **Visa** 2A

## DPS CRIME LAB NO 'CSI'



Victor Calzada / El Paso Times

Forensic scientist Nick Ronquillo views samples through a microscope at the Texas Department of Public Safety regional crime lab.

## EP facility hopes voters OK \$7 million upgrade

By Brandi Grissom  
Austin Bureau

AUSTIN — Ann Falknor hates "CSI," the CBS crime drama about forensic investigators.

"It gives people such unrealistic expectations of what we do and how fast we can do it," said Falknor, manager of the Texas Department of Public Safety's El

Paso crime laboratory.

They still won't be able to help police solve cases in a tidy hour like Gil Grissom and his team of TV scientists, but Falknor said a new, larger laboratory would reduce the wait for local investigators who need crime evidence analyzed.

Legislators, during the session that ended last month, approved

more than \$200 million to build and expand DPS facilities, including replacing the crime lab in El Paso. If Texas voters approve a bond issue in November, Falknor said a brand new \$7 million facility could be up and running in about three years.

The new lab would be three times as spacious as the current one, creating room for more sci-

entists, services and equipment, Falknor said.

"It's really overdue," she said. The DPS crime lab on El Paso's East Side, where Falknor and eight other analysts peer into evidence from criminal cases, was built in 1985.

It was meant, Falknor said, for

Please see **Crime lab** 2A

## FBI inquiry began with NCED, expanded

By Ramon Bracamontes  
El Paso Times

The recent FBI searches at the County Courthouse and the homes of county officials are related to a widespread public corruption investigation in El Paso that began in 2005, the top FBI official in El Paso said.

And while the case started at the National Center for Employment of the Disabled, and while NCED is still a part of that case, many other avenues are being examined by FBI agents, said Manuel Mora, special agent in charge in El Paso.

"This is the most pervasive public corruption case that I've been involved with," said Mora, who has been with the FBI since the early 1980s. "We are moving as aggressively as we can to resolve it."

The public corruption case became very public last month when several dozen FBI agents used a search warrant to take boxes of documents from the offices of County Judge Anthony Cobos, and Commissioners Miguel Terán and Luis Sariñana. Terán's home also was searched.

Several days after those searches, El Paso County Chief of Staff Travis Ketner resigned. On June 8, Ketner

Please see **FBI** 2A

### Online

See past stories on the case, plus court documents, photos and video at [elpasotimes.com/election](http://elpasotimes.com/election).

**101° / 72°**

**SUNNY**  
Details, 6B

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### INSIDE: MORE LOCAL NEWS

#### BORDERLAND

## Proud to be in the Navy

An El Pasoan on his third tour of duty in Iraq is glad he joined the Navy. **1B**

## Break from the heat

It's going to be hot today, but El Pasoans should get a break later in the week. **1B**

#### BUSINESS

## Savings challenge

Families are taking the GECU Savings Challenge, hoping to improve their finances and win cash. **1F**

#### HEALTH

## Expanded services

The new medical school in El Paso is expected to expand health services. **Inside**

### WEB TRACK

[elpasotimes.com](http://elpasotimes.com)

The five most-viewed stories on [elpasotimes.com](http://elpasotimes.com) as of 8:30 p.m. Sunday:

- **1. Luther Jones** has long political history in El Paso.
- **2. Domsday** prophecies have more than a few worried.
- **3. Crashes** kill man, teen.
- **4. Xeriscaping** at Fort Bliss upsets families of fallen.
- **5. See shuttle** orbit for 16 seconds tonight over El Paso.

