

	County	County	County	County	County
Salary	\$3,707	\$3,658	\$3,826	\$4,655	\$4,499
Retirement	\$364	\$1,043	\$326	\$1,217	\$1,885
Total compensation*	\$5,465	\$6,873	\$5,831	\$7,047	\$7,598

All figures are monthly.

\* Total compensation includes the value of retirement, health benefits, uniform costs, holiday and vacation pay, sick leave and other benefits.

Source: Ventura County Human Resources Agency

Star staff

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# Sheriff's employees get 25 percent raises

## Increase was in technicians' 1999 pact

By Charles Levin

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More than 150 civilian employees of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department recently received 25 percent salary raises, costing taxpayers \$2.1 million a year at a time when public safety and other county divisions already face deep budget cuts.

The so-called "parity" raises for sheriff's service technicians were designed to make their salaries comparable to those offered in other counties. The raises were guaranteed in the employees' 1999 labor contract, and current county officials said they had little choice but to grant them.

The raises, however, will

mean further cuts in the Sheriff's Department, including possible layoffs of service technicians, Sheriff Bob Brooks said Wednesday.

The technicians are "a loyal, hardworking group of people who deserve to be paid, but it will cause a lot of operational problems," Brooks said.

Louis Preiczner, president of the employees' union, the Ventura County Sheriff's Correctional Officers Association, did not return several phone calls this week.

Rob Wexler, the union's attorney, said he did not believe the raises would lead to layoffs

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the possible acquisition of Disney, Internet message boards filled up quickly from fans who feared everything from higher ticket prices at the corporation's theme parks to continued erosion of the Walt Disney legacy.

Angelica Chong, a 22-year-old from Ventura, worked at Disneyland for three years

ounded and those things aren't necessarily what's going on today," she said. "I'm not sure a bigger company will help what's already going on. I think there needs to be changes within the management structure."

The merger would create a massive media empire, with Comcast piping in cable to

preserved in the event of a purchase.

"For many, including myself, Disney is an emotional investment," he said. "It's not just black-and-white financials. But if you just look at the cold, hard facts, the evidence is all there that the company was going in the wrong direction with the stock trading at half of

The relevant question is, would anyone in their right mind substitute the word 'Comcast' for 'Disney' in a movie or a theme park?" he asked.

"Even if you think Comcast doesn't know much about movies or theme parks, rest assured they do know about cash flow."

# Budget cuts put technicians' jobs in danger

## RAISES

From A1

of union members. "The county had 5½ years to prepare for this increase," he said. "And if it caught them by surprise, they've got only themselves to blame."

Wexler said the union offered to delay the raises, but the county declined the offer.

The 156 technicians handle a variety of duties in the Sheriff's Department. Most work in county jails and handle radio communications, Brooks said. Others drive department cars to and from the county's fleet vehicle yard, handle clerical chores or work in the Todd Road jail orchards, Brooks said.

### Series of raises

The raises, which took effect Jan. 1, were the last in a series of salary increases called for in the union's five-year contract. A technician on the first step of the salary schedule now earns \$35,099 to \$51,523 a year — up from \$28,056 to \$41,186. Top-step technicians now earn

\$37,907 to \$55,645 — up from \$30,301 to \$44,481.

The contract called for a 2.5 percent raise in November 1999 and eight more raises between Dec. 26, 1999, and July 1, 2003.

Each of the last eight was to be the lesser of 2.5 percent or whatever it took to make the technicians' salaries comparable to those in Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside and San Diego counties.

In each case, the technicians got 2.5 percent, because that was the lesser amount.

But the contract called for a final raise in January 2004 creating parity, with no 2.5 percent option.

"When you start out by granting parity over years and leave the final pay date to the end, it's just going to be expensive," said John Nicoll, chief deputy county executive officer and labor negotiator. "The check finally comes due."

Asked why the county declined the union offer to delay the raises, Nicoll said, "We paid a large price at the end of this

contract, and we go forward from there. We did not want to extend our existing agreement."

The timing, however, couldn't have been worse. County administrators are projecting a \$41 million shortfall for the 2003-04 fiscal year if state lawmakers approve the governor's plan to shift property tax revenues away from local government.

### Sheriff must make cuts

Brooks, who along with District Attorney Greg Totten has sued the county to increase funding for public safety, said the technicians' raises mean cutting up to \$500,000 immediately and more than \$1 million a year starting in 2004-05.

"I don't begrudge raises they've negotiated for, but it's going to be very difficult, and it's going to have to come out of operations," Brooks said.

In the short term, it could mean closing the East Valley Jail, which was originally slated for closure under last year's round of budget cuts but was kept open part time at the last minute.

Brooks said technician jobs were in jeopardy before the raises, because of potential cuts in state funding. "This just increases those chances," Brooks said.

Board of Supervisors members Kathy Long, Judy Mikels and John Flynn were on the board when the contract was approved. Long said the balloon payment was the "unintended consequence" of guaranteed parity formulas.

The board approved the contract because the technicians were underpaid at the time. But guaranteed parity formulas fail because Ventura County has no control over pay raises in other counties, Long said.

Ventura County has since stopped making such guarantees during labor negotiations.

The technician union's contract expires in March, and attorney Wexler said the county could risk problems hiring and keeping technicians if the next contract lacks a parity clause.

But asked if the county would return to such formulas, Long responded, "Never."