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## NEWS

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## Police recruits to be trained at Tranquility Bay

BY GARFIELD MYERS, Editor-at-large south/central bureau  
Thursday, June 04, 2009

TREASURE BEACH, St Elizabeth - It's confirmed.

The Tranquility Bay facility at Treasure Beach which was previously used as an offshore reform school for rebellious children, mostly from the United States, will now be used to train police recruits for at least the next two years.

At a meeting Tuesday with Treasure Beach residents and in subsequent response to journalists' questions, Deputy Commissioner of Police in charge of administration, Jevene Bent said training "operations" would begin "somewhere in the middle of the month".

The complex sited on two and a half acres of beach front land, referred to by locals as Old Whard, was controversially used for 12 years by the United States group, World Wide Association of Speciality Programmes and Schools (WWASP) as a 'boot camp' for teenagers. It was closed in January.

The Jamaica Constabulary Force's two-year lease on the privately-owned facility begun on June 1.

"We are putting all our preparations in place to bring in our people," said Bent, who travelled to Treasure Beach to explain the JCF's plans to residents.

She said the facility would provide training for 180-200 recruits "at any one time" and was part of the drive to accelerate police numbers from the current just over 8,000 to the proposed establishment figure of 12,000. Training for new JCF recruits lasts about

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six months.

When pressed by journalists, she declined to give any timelines for increasing the numbers to the new figure but said the first target was to get the numbers to 10,000. ".We are working with 10,000 now, we have eight thousand plus trying to get up to 10,000 and then to 12,000.," she said.

The training facility will be run by a faculty of 35, including police officers and civilians. Bent said there would be a separate civilian component drawn mainly from the surrounding community, including an administrator, electricians, office staff, cooks, cleaners and groundsmen.

The JCF's use of the facility for training fresh recruits was first signalled by new Minister of National Security Senator Dwight Nelson in an address to the nation last month. There was considerable confusion following word that after the Armadale fire which left five teenagers dead just over a week ago, Prime Minister Bruce Golding had also fingered Tranquility Bay as a sight to house wards of the state. But the prime minister was apparently referring to a facility further east close to Alligator Pond on the St Elizabeth/Manchester border.

Bent said the lease on the property had been limited to two years since expanded facilities to be built at the Police Academy at Twickenham Park were expected to be completed by then.

Flanked by Assistant Commissioner Delworth Keith who is in charge of training in the Jamaica Constabulary and Director of Communications Karl Angell, Bent fielded a range of questions from Treasure Beach residents focusing on how the new development will affect them.

South St Elizabeth businessman Merrick Gayle said Treasure Beach should welcome the new police training school with open arms in light of an alarming upsurge in criminal activity in St Elizabeth.

Once a quiet fishing village, Treasure Beach has in recent decades acquired a reputation as a leading "community-style" tourist destination on the Jamaican south coast.

Claiming he was speaking with "desperation", Gayle said the community needed the "extra police focus" in light of the increased incidence of shootings, robberies, break-ins and rapes in southern St Elizabeth communities. He warned that while Treasure Beach had so far escaped any significant criminal activity it was "getting closer".

Bent agreed, arguing that the increased police presence could only help. Bent said she, too, was extremely concerned at rising crime levels in this south-westerly parish, highlighted last week by the police seizure of six illegal guns during a raid in Newton, Northern St Elizabeth and the murder of a 90-year-old woman in the vicinity of Pedro Plains on Monday.

Bent and Keith - both natives of St Elizabeth - assured residents that the training project would be "managed and controlled" with the interests of the community in mind. There would be no shooting range in the area and efforts would be made to maintain communication links and to involve locals in training programmes whenever that was possible.

"It will be a partnership," pledged Bent.

Following the meeting, head of the Greater Treasure Beach Citizens Alert Group

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Elliston DeLeon said the community was satisfied.


"Our fears were allayed, we can also express joy that employment will be created. and our farmers will be able to sell produce" to the institution, he said.

Another social activist, hotelier Jason Henzell, even while revealing that proposals had been made to have Tranquility Bay turned into a HEART training institution and also as an old people's home, welcomed the approach of "dialogue" and "partnership" from the police high command.



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