

911 call spurs review of incident

RIVERSIDE: A city official says a woman's accusations are unfounded.

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A Hemet woman called 911 last month, claiming that a man wearing a Riverside polo shirt had threatened her outside a Hemet Blockbuster and had retrieved a holstered gun and handcuffs from his car.

She didn't know the man was Tom DeSantis, Riverside assistant city manager, until a sheriff's deputy told her.

DeSantis, who lives in Hemet, denied the woman's accusations. He is not facing any criminal charges.

DeSantis acknowledged that he was displeased with remarks Celia Valenzuela made to his 18-year-old daughter, Carina, a Blockbuster employee. But, he denies making threats and says he had neither a gun nor handcuffs that night.

"I don't even own handcuffs," he said.

Riverside County Undersheriff Neil Lingle said his department will review the incident, in accordance with standard procedure, to see if it has any impact on DeSantis' entitlement to a concealed-weapon permit.

The Riverside County sheriff's deputy who responded to the call from Valenzuela wrote in his report that she did not want to press charges. But Valenzuela said Tuesday that the deputy was dismissive of her and didn't give her the option.

Sheriff's spokesman Sgt. Earl Quinata said Thursday that the deputy would contact her to see if there was a miscommunication or if Valenzuela has changed her mind about pressing charges.

By all accounts, the trouble started when Valenzuela had a disagreement with Carina DeSantis over the amount she was charged for some movie rentals.

"I never yelled at her," Valenzuela said. "I had my kids with me. All I said to her was ... 'I don't like your service, and I don't think you're a very good manager.'"

DeSantis, who was at the store that night, said his daughter told him that a woman had "berated and insulted her, reduced her to tears."

Valenzuela said a man, later identified as DeSantis, approached her as she and her children were getting into their car. He was wearing a polo shirt with a City of Riverside logo on it.

At first, she said, he was calm. "Then he started saying, 'What, you can't talk to an adult? You have to go in there and beat up a child?'" she said.

"He was pounding on my window, threatening me. 'You better watch your kids. You better watch your back,'" she said she recalls him saying.

DeSantis said he was at the store that night to gas up his daughter's car.

"I approached the woman," he said. "In no way did I identify myself. She asked me who I was and I said, 'I'm an interested party. And I have concerns over the way you speak to teenagers.'"

He said he did not raise his voice and didn't come close enough to touch her car.

DeSantis said that although he does own a gun, he was not armed at the time.

Deputy William Stokes, who responded to Valenzuela's 911 call and wrote the police report, stated that DeSantis told him that he had a concealed-weapons permit issued by the sheriff.

"I never asked him if he owned a gun," Stokes said in the report, "only if he had a gun in his car and if he removed it."

Stokes' police report says Valenzuela could not be positive the item she saw DeSantis holding was a gun. But Valenzuela, who said she was not aware a report had been written, said this week she was positive she saw a gun.

Valenzuela said the deputy never offered to take further action. "The deputy pretty much insisted that this was the end of it," she said.

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