

# Police, school weigh La Venture station idea

## Satellite station would launch community policing effort

By PETER KELLEY  
Staff Writer

**MOUNT VERNON** — Teachers at LaVenture Middle School and neighborhood residents say they support the idea of a small police facility out behind the school.

But that support is not quite unanimous. So far, the only vocal opposition to the idea has come straight from the top — the president of the Mount Vernon School Board.

"I'm not opposed to the station, I'm opposed to having it on district property when it's not a district activity," School Board President Maryl Skjei said yesterday. "I'd rather see an alternative site developed."

At question is whether the Mount Vernon School District should agree to lease, for no payment, a spare portable classroom to the police department. Police say they would set up the portable in the back of the expansive fields behind the school, add some landscaping, and use it as a satellite station and resource center behind LaVenture.

Mount Vernon police Lt. Chris Cammock presented the idea to the School Board last fall, call-



ing such a station an educational source and tool for community-based policing. The portable, he said, would be linked up with telephone and computer wiring, and an officer would likely be stationed there. Representatives of social service groups might also use the station, he said.

Cammock said the portable would be more of an information resource than a hard-boiled police

station. But he also said the LaVenture area received more calls for police assistance than any other part of town. Most calls are for noise disturbances, he said, but there have also been many domestic violence calls.

Police would set up and maintain the station, he said. Mount Vernon police have already received \$17,000 in grants that would pay for landscaping and other needed work to convert the portable for police use.

Police Chief Mike Barsness said yesterday the project is unrelated to the city's upcoming bond to pay for a new police headquarters.

The school board has batted the idea around for several meetings, and may vote soon. District Superintendent Mack Armstrong said a vote has been delayed while attorneys for the district and the city review the language of the contract.

But some language in that contract concerns Skjei. She noted that the agreement would be renewed at five-year intervals. That could be inconvenient for a district with a laundry list of building projects, especially since remodeling at LaVenture is high on that list.

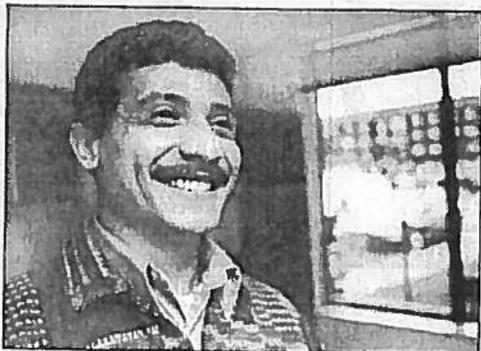
In nearby apartment complexes, residents and managers said they support the idea.

"I think people would feel more secure and comfortable," said Luis Villalta, manager of the Cascade West apartments. The complex near



Above, students exit LaVenture Middle School yesterday afternoon. Some said they support the police station proposal. Mount Vernon Officer Greg Booth, left, describes plans for a small police facility near LaVenture Middle School. As the forum's neighborhood resource officer, Booth would work in the remodeled portable classroom.

Matt Wallis / Skagit Valley Herald



Luis Villalta, manager of the Cascade West apartments, said he supports Mount Vernon police using a portable classroom at LaVenture Middle School as a satellite station and resource center.

Matt Wallis / Skagit Valley Herald

"I think people would feel more secure and comfortable . . . I've been telling people crime is going to go down."

— Luis Villalta, manager of Cascade West apartments

LaVenture on North 26th Street has more than 400 residents.

"I've been telling people crime is going to go down," Villalta said.

Marle Edwards, a resident of Skagit Valley Mobile Manor on

North 30th Street, said the idea should be expanded to all schools.

Mike McManus, a counselor at LaVenture, said he thinks the station would be good for the school, and might be a source of career education for some students.

Cammock said Mount Vernon High School students have helped design the portable's interior look and want to volunteer to do the remodeling. Work could begin almost immediately, he said.

Most School Board members have said they support the proposal, as does LaVenture Principal Tara Dowd.

Skjei said the board will vote on the matter soon.

"I think we owe it to them to make a decision," she said.