LA MESA INQUIRY: NO EXCESSIVE FORCE

Independent probe finds school resource officer not out of line with teen

BY KAREN PEARLMAN

LA MESA

An independent investigation into an incident involving a La Mesa police officer who twice body-slammed a handcuffed student at Helix Charter High School concluded the officer did not use excessive force, that his actions were not racially motivated and that he did not lose his temper during the incident.

The findings were disclosed Tuesday to the La Mesa City Council nearly a year after the incident, which occurred when school officials asked a school resource officer to escort a 17-year-old female student who refused to leave the campus.

The altercation between the student, who is black, and Officer Scott Williams, who is white, occurred on Jan. 18, 2018. Cellphone footage that has been shared widely on social media shows the officer flinging the student, who was handcuffed, over his hip and onto the cement and then body-slamming her a second time.

Scott Tiedemann, a lawyer representing investigator Barry Aning, told the City Council that concerns about the officer's conduct raised by the city were not supported by the evidence and were deemed unfounded, though he did not share publicly any of the specifics used to reach that conclusion.

Aning's investigation sought to make a determination about whether any La Mesa Police Department use-of-force policies or procedures were violated and whether race played a role.

The City Council was not given a copy of the report because of privacy laws that govern police personnel matters.

Mayor Mark Arapostathis pressed Tiedemann several times for more information, noting that the city had "waited a year" to get the report, which was originally supposed to be finished in 90 days, dating back to last February when Aning.

SEE FORCE: B3

CREATIVITY TAKES FLIGHT

Artist Manuel Molina installs some of the birds made by middle-schoolers as part of an exhibit called "Birds Without Paradise" at Liberty Station. The exhibit, opening today, is a cross-border project involving students from San Diego and Baja California.