



Chuck Rogers | The Jambar

Campus closes off for Bush visit

Local streets and highways surrounding Youngstown State blocked off for hours

By Michael J. Balale

THE JAMBAR

The usually candid chief of Youngstown State University's Police Department had little to say about the security measures taken prior to President George W. Bush's visit to campus.

YSU police Chief Jack Gocala is one of hundreds of law enforcement officials who helped secure the grounds on or near campus Tuesday.

Gocala was told about a week ago that Bush might be coming to campus, but he said the final decision was not made until late last week. Presidential handlers were considering other Youngstown-area locations.

When the final decision was made, Gocala said he and other officers had dozens of details to address.

Two hours Air Force One took off from the Vienna Air Base with Bush and those who travel with him, Gocala reflected about the day.

"Overall, I think it went really well," Gocala said. "There were no problems and the area was secured all

over campus."

Hours before Bush's 2 p.m. address began, Secret Service agents and dozens of uniformed police officers combed through campus.

Roads surrounding Bliss Hall, where Bush delivered his address, were closed and traffic was rerouted along Market Street and Interstate 680.

Standing on the corner of Wick Avenue and University Plaza stood packs of Bush supporters mixed with several protestors who came with signs blasting Bush for the war in Iraq and other issues, but they were surrounded by police and kept away from the front entrance of Bliss.

At the request of the Secret Service, officials also scoured the inside of Bliss Hall, emptying students' lockers and searching for any dangers. One student whose locker was emptied said she found out her locker was emptied without any notification.

"I went to my locker and there was a sign on it that said all of my stuff could be picked up in the deans office," junior Kim D'Angelo said. "I'm sure it was

see SECURITY, page 4

SECURITY continued...

just a safety measure but I wish they would have told us before hand."

D'Angelo said any students in Bliss hall that had locks on their lockers had their belongings removed from the lockers and placed in cardboard boxes in the Dean's office.

"I know that some other students were notified beforehand but I wasn't," D'Angelo said. "I'm not being ignorant but I would have really appreciated a phone call saying they were going to take my belongings."

Gocala said the U.S. Secret Service had local officials "planning security strategies" just days before the event and if students' items were removed, it was just a precautionary measure.

"We were asked to do a site overview and plan security strategies accordingly," Gocala said.

Gocala said several police departments were put on watch and security was tight at all locations on or near campus.

"We had 24 officers just from campus," Gocala said. "There were secret service agents on rooftops and dump trucks barricading the front doors of Bliss Hall."

Captain Marty Kane of the Youngstown Police Department also said little about the heightened security prior to Bush's visit to the valley but said his officers were working with other law enforcement officials to ensure the president arrived and departed safely.

Kane said, "We switched some officers' assignments to provide extra security until the president leaves campus."

Before Bush's speech, Vice President for Administration John Habat said that security would be as tight as it has ever been on campus.

"I do know that every locker in Bliss Hall that was opened was asked to be cleared out by the Secret Service," Habat said

Gocala said he was not told about the lockers but was aware that classes in Bliss Hall were cancelled.

"The building was closed and arrangements were made for all classes in Bliss Hall to be taught elsewhere," Gocala said.

Habat said he has been involved in presidential visits in the past and said the Secret Service releases little information about the arrival and departure of the president.

He said he learned about the visit just five days before Air Force One would land in Vienna. Gocala, however, said having the president on campus is a great opportunity for YSU.

"I first heard of the visit last Thursday when it was just a possibility," Habat said. "They keep you in the dark as long as possible. They come in, and in the blink of an eye, they're out."

Because of their familiarity with the area, Gocala's team was responsible for securing various segments of campus.

Gocala said he was also prepared for the protestors but later said that nobody reported any problems to the YSUPD or the Youngstown Police Department.