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R44 Police Helicopter Provides New Airborne Service

Heli Expo 2004: Las Vegas, NV – Merced County Sheriff’s Department and Silver State Helicopters are at Heli Expo 2004 Booth 34 with their successful new airborne law enforcement service. Using a R44 Raven II Police Helicopter, Silver State designed a unique program to bring helicopter operations to police departments unable to afford their own aircraft.

What makes this program unique is the allocation of helicopter time. Based in Las Vegas, the R44 Police Helicopter and pilot fly monthly to Merced, Calif. and work for five consecutive days, without a maximum limit on flight hours. The aircraft then returns to Las Vegas or moves on to other contracts. This service is offered at a low rate, allowing law enforcement agencies to experience the benefits of airborne support without the massive capital investment. The agencies are free to increase their monthly allotment or request a helicopter all month at anytime. Silver State provides both aircraft and pilot.

“We talk to a lot of sheriffs who believe they need a big turbine helicopter, so they go without while they try to raise the funds,” explains Tim Nelson, Silver State law enforcement pilot and sworn police officer. “When we put them in the R44 they go crazy. They can’t believe it has the speed, visibility, and range of a turbine at one-third the price.”

Since the helicopter began operating in November 2003 it has made a large impact on Merced County. The R44 helped police apprehend gang members, find a missing 2-year-old girl, and recover important incriminating evidence. “The FLIR is an important piece of equipment that makes this program successful,” Nelson says. “We used the helicopter to follow a shooting suspect until he was apprehended, then flew back along his path with the FLIR looking for a weapon. We found the gun in a ditch. It glowed bright on the FLIR, still hot from being discharged.”

Merced County Sheriff Sergeant Nathan Todd sees the helicopter as a money saver for the agency. “It is working out really well. It’s cost effective for us, but we don’t have to pay the bills to maintain it. In fact, because we have the aircraft we can contain a larger area with less personnel.

We're saving money. I can't believe we've been going so long without a helicopter and we may now even expand."

Silver State chose the R44 Police Helicopter for this program due to its cost, equipment, and flexibility. "It has the equipment we need to provide first class service; FLIR, searchlight, video recorder, radios, and scanner. We can go from one department contract to the next and all we have to do is reprogram the police frequencies in the radio," Nelson explains.

Robinson Helicopter Company is the world's leading manufacturer of civil helicopters. For more information, visit Booths #939 and #34 or on the web at www.robinsonheli.com.

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