

Police will get new unit to fight gangs

By Robert Davis
and Philip Wattle

MAYOR BYRNE and Police Supt. Richard Brzeczek on Thursday announced the formation of a gang crimes bureau in the Chicago Police Department, marking a significant shift of emphasis aimed at curbing gang crime and influence.

The unit, the Bureau of Gang Crime Suppression, will be headed by Joseph McCarthy, commander of the Wood Street Police District.

Mrs. Byrne, in a City Hall news conference with Brzeczek and McCarthy, said McCarthy will be promoted to deputy police superintendent, placing him among the seven top-ranking police officers in the city.

It also marks the first time a new deputy superintendent post has been created since the late O.W. Wilson reorganized the department 20 years ago.

THE GANG bureau will draw some 400 officers from the existing Gang Crimes Unit and Special Operations Group Tactical Unit.

Although the bureau initially will not have any more police than are currently working on gang crime activities, Brzeczek said that for the first time the two units will be coordinated by one commander. In the past, Brzeczek said, the two separate police units operated with "minimum coordination."

This is not the first time the department has restructured its gang crimes unit. In the 1960s, the Gang Intelligence Division was formed. That unit was later changed to the Gang Crimes Division, but the change had little effect. It was decentralized to North, West, and South, and credited with breaking up extortion of school children, confiscation of guns, and drugs. The units also helped to break up some larger gangs, sending some leaders to prison.

THE GANG crime problem came to the forefront again when Mrs. Byrne moved into Cabrini-Green, where many gang leaders went to live after being released from prison.

McCarthy said gang problems exist in most Chicago neighborhoods and he does not expect to eliminate them. But he said better coordination of police activities can result in more effective gang control.

The mayor praised McCarthy as a police commander who took over the gang-tormented Wood Street District, on the West Side, where Latino street gangs were responsible for several deaths.

In just two years, she said, McCarthy sharply reduced the number of gang-related homicides.

THE MAYOR said she expects to hire more police next year, but that will depend on the new budget. Last May, when she ordered that 100 police officers be transferred to the gang crimes unit, she said additional officers would be hired. According to a spokesman for the police department, no additional hiring—other than that made for attrition—has been done.

Mrs. Byrne said that the crackdown on street gang activity was intensified this week, punctuated by the indictment of many gang members on drug charges. A total of 72 persons were indicted, and police on Thursday were arresting suspects named in suppressed indictments.

Brzeczek said he expected that the new bureau would be operating in 7 to 10 days and McCarthy will take over his new duties immediately.

THE PROMOTION of McCarthy prompted Brzeczek to make other personnel changes. John Walsh, commander of the Rogers Park District, replaces McCarthy as Wood Street commander, and Lt. Nestor Chakonas replaces Walsh. Chakonas had been assigned to the Traffic Division and was commander of the old Shakespeare Area burglary unit.

Edward Pleines, commander of the gang crimes section—was moved laterally to become commander of the South Gang Crimes Division. Edward Wodnicki was promoted to commander of the North Gang Crimes division. He was the commander of the Belmont Area property crimes unit for the detective division and has spent a large part of his career working in tactical units in the Fillmore and East Chicago Avenue Districts. He is regarded as an expert in gang problems.

Later Thursday, Byrne and Brzeczek addressed the Concerned Citizens of Little Village, telling the group what steps they would take to curb gang activity in the area.

"Little Village is a priority area," Brzeczek said. "We (police) will be your spokesmen to tell the gangs they will no longer be tolerated."