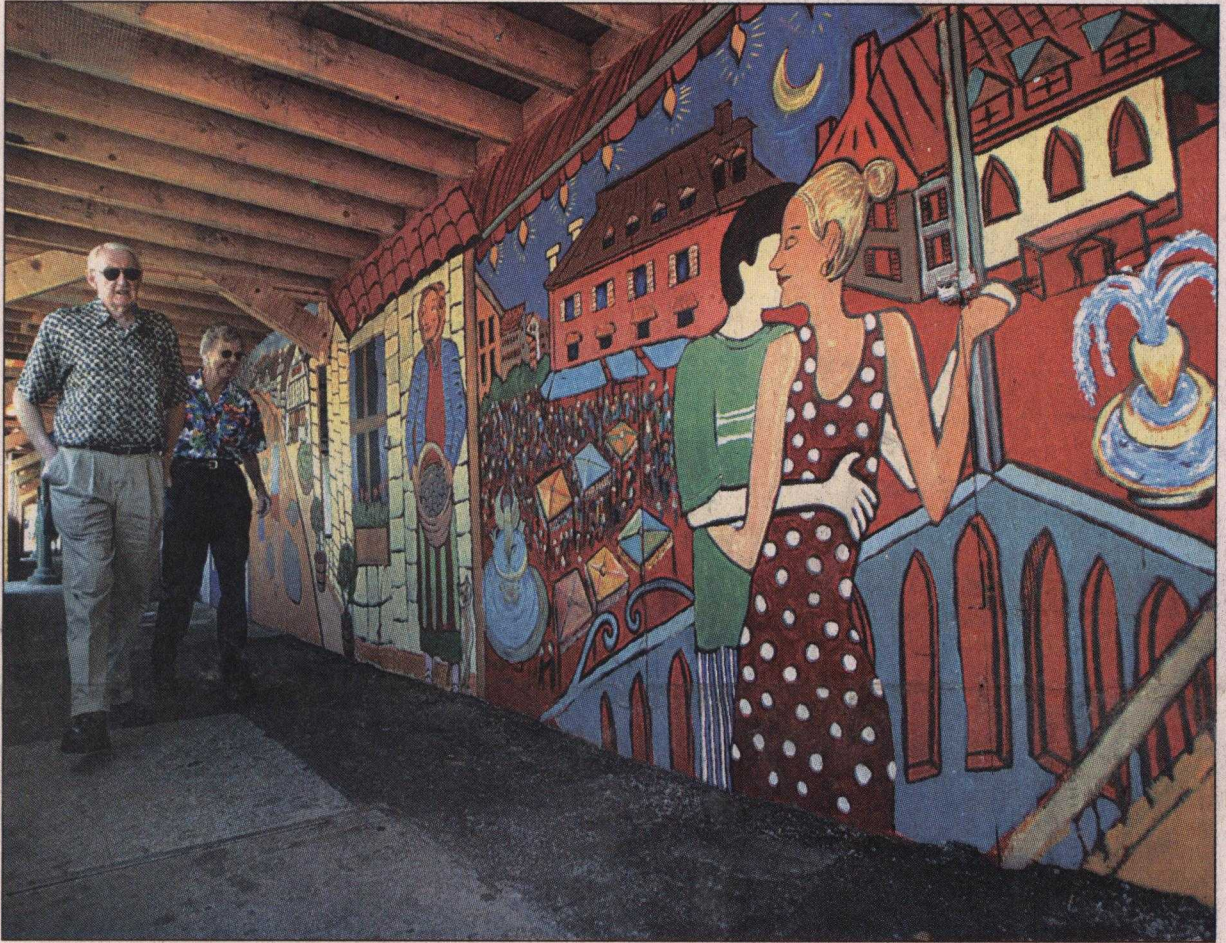


Wiping out graffiti



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Pedestrians walk along a 180-foot section of temporary walkway covered with a mural on Pacific Avenue.

Community organizes to clean up after taggers

Crime & Criminals - Graffiti

by DAN WHITE

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SANTA CRUZ — Westside residents, downtowners, high school kids and muralists have joined forces to blot out Magic Marker squiggles, taggings and graffiti blobs throughout the city.

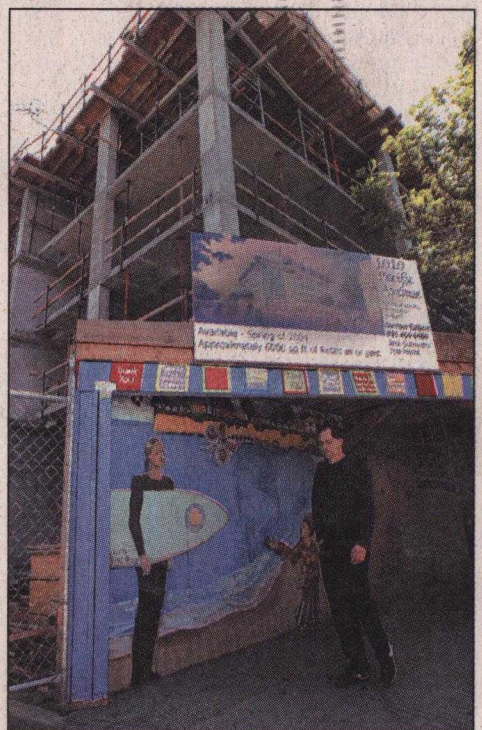
It doesn't take any creativity to spray tags on a wall or throw acid on someone's window. But the city's volunteer anti-graffiti shock troops are using their imaginations, and a measure of courage, to stop the ugliness.

The graffiti fighters range from teens to AARP members. Some are working all on their own. Others joined up with neighborhood groups or are affiliated with the Graffiti Free Santa Cruz program run through the city Redevelopment Agency in conjunction with the Volunteer Center.

Jill Baker, 15, a Harbor High School student, is one of those 78 people taking part in Graffiti Free Santa Cruz, with help from \$13,250 in Redevelopment Agency funds.

Baker, who is her sophomore class president, has been removing graffiti and convincing others to help her out.

She wanted to do something "because it just makes the school so



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

A Pacific Avenue construction site has a mural covering the temporary walkway.

See **GRAFFITI** on **BACK PAGE**



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Volunteers gathered in downtown Santa Cruz last fall to paint over graffiti.

Graffiti

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ugly. As soon as it goes up we try to get it." Some of the student groups' targets are permanent marker blotches and hard-to-remove vinyl stickers.

There have been some early setbacks. Baker and friends recently spent three hours cleaning up "and the very next day there was thousands of dollars in damage and graffiti and we had to clean it up again." But she hopes the vandals give up soon.

Sometimes fighting vandalism takes more than just persistence.

As Trini Mendez of Barson Street learned, it also takes a measure of bravery mixed with diplomacy.

Mendez has lived on the street for three years. She and 15 neighbors will also approach the vandals directly "and we just tell them that this is our street, we have adopted it, and we need for them

not to be putting graffiti there."

Mendez said the strategy is paying off. "One young boy was out there putting some graffiti on a telephone box," she said. "My granddaughters knew him. We called him over, we walked to him, and as a matter of fact, we said that next time we have a meeting we'd like him to come."

She also tried to convince him that something that may seem trivial to him has big consequences: "If someone puts graffiti on a fence pretty soon it's going to be horrible and the whole neighborhood's going to look terrible."

Volunteers, joining up with the Redevelopment Agency, had their clean-up kick off day Oct. 26, when they cleaned up behind the Grafix Pleasure store downtown.

Muralists are also part of the effort. Crystal Birns is the artist who designed a downtown mural in the temporary covered walkway at 1010 Pacific Avenue construction site. Kiwanis Club and Circle K members spent an entire weekend doing most of the painting, and

Birns spent many solo hours there.

Unfortunately, even the combined effort can't stop all the messes.

Julie Hendee, who works for the city Redevelopment Agency, and is helping the anti-graffiti group, happens to be the former owner of the now-defunct Cat N Canary business. She has watched as the building she once occupied gets vandalized again and again.

"It gets hit almost every day."

Windows or awnings at the Pacific Cookie Co., Logos Books, East Meets West, the Gap, World Market Bazaar and many other local businesses have been vandalized. Even murals and other organized "street art" are not immune. Hendee noted that the 1010 Pacific mural does get tagged, requiring the artist to paint over the mess.

Also on Wednesday, artist James Carl Aschbacher and Good Times columnist and author Lisa Jensen were out doing necessary touch-up work on their vibrantly colored "Song Of Santa Cruz" mural, which they painted two years

ago on Center Street.

The artists note that the mural's presence has made a tremendous difference on a wall that was once a regular target for hideous graffiti.

While they were saddened to see that someone had scratched up many of the characters in their artwork, they also noted that this is the first time they've had to touch up their project.

Aschbacher noted that there has been little actual tagging at the wall.

Instead, "people come up and decide to draw some genitalia on the figures," he said, ruefully. "Generally, it washes off."

Graffiti Free Santa Cruz can be reached at 420-5303. This is also the number of the 24-hour line for reporting graffiti on public or private property in the City of Santa Cruz.

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