

# Shooting may be linked to gang

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Police are leaning toward a gang explanation for a shooting in downtown Santa Cruz on Tuesday that left two people wounded. The alleged gunman fired seven times at a fleeing van, then jogged away.

The incident involved two groups of young men.

"We're not ready yet to make a gang connection," said police Sgt. Kevin Vogel, but the gunman was "described by more than one witness as having the gun wrapped in a blue handkerchief" — the Su-reño gang color.

Of the two who were wounded, one, age 17, was taken to a San Jose hospital, while the other, 25, was taken to Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz. Both were treated and released, Vogel said.

The shooting occurred in a busy area of lower Pacific Avenue around 2 p.m. It was captured by a surveillance camera mounted on the corner of an old hotel to deter graffiti taggers and drug traffickers. But Vogel said the tape needs to be electronically enhanced before an identification is possible.

The incident may have begun inside Graffix Pleasures, whose wares include cards, posters and smoking paraphernalia and whose services include piercing and tattooing. Tattoo artist Johnny Anderson, working in the back of the store, said three young men ran into his area looking for a rear exit. Anderson said no, and

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they returned to the main part of the store.

"There was a whole bunch of them," he said. "You could tell there was an altercation about to start."

Vogel said six of them left the store and got into a van parked in the side lot. It backed out into Birch Lane, a one-way alley, then pulled forward, screeching around another, slow-moving van and out onto Pacific Avenue.

Meanwhile, Vogel said, the alleged shooter left Graffix, crossed the alley, dropped to one knee and emptied the clip of his .45-caliber semiautomatic at the back of the van from no more than six feet away, firing with the gun held sideways, "gangster-style."

Two bullets went through the rear seat and struck the two men, Vogel said. Five more lodged in the rear door or in the seat.

But police found eight shell casings, and are unable to account for the extra bullet. There are no signs of it in the storefronts across the street.

Meanwhile, Andrea Tischler, owner of the Compassion Flower Inn, a bed-and-breakfast that backs onto Birch Lane, was having tea with guests on the rear patio when she heard the shots and moved toward the sound.

"I don't know why I was running toward gunshots, but by the time I got to the end of the deck" a man Tischler described as short-haired, stocky and at least 5 feet 10 was jogging by holding something that might have been a gun in his left hand.

Police stopped the van a few blocks away, and were examining it Wednesday. It belongs to the father of the man who was driving. Vogel declined to identify the people in the van, who were from Watsonville.

"I don't know what this is about, and I don't want to put these people in more jeopardy," he said.

He said there might have been as many as four people in the gunman's group. But the shooter jogged off alone. "We'll get a big break when we're able to identify the suspects," Vogel said.

Vogel pointed out one curious aspect of the shooting: All the bullets struck the lower part of the van. "If this guy was trying to take these people out," he said, "you'd think he'd be aiming high. He'd be aiming at their heads. But we had no rounds through the glass. . . . If this guy had been shooting a little higher, we'd be investigating a homicide."

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