



Kurt Ellison

Jose Mendoza of Pete's Painting covered over fresh graffiti this morning at a Freedom Boulevard business. *Crime & Criminals - Graffiti* R-P 8-16-94

Paintout demonstration officially launches city's war against graffiti

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Watsonville this morning officially launched its graffiti abatement program with a demonstration of graffiti removal techniques.

Watsonville city officials, including the chief of police and

the mayor, attended the demonstration, which was held at Lety's Meat Market on Freedom Boulevard. The small store has been hit by vandals numerous times since it opened a year ago, said owner Leticia Hernandez.

The demonstration involved a

couple of painters painting over graffiti on the store and some walls surrounding the store's parking lot.

"I'm happy about this," Hernandez said. For a year, she and her workers have had to paint over the scribbling, costing them time and money.

Today's demonstration initiates the city's two-part graffiti abatement program, considered one of the toughest and most comprehensive in the state. One part restricts the sale of graffiti "tools" such as spray paint and large-tip markers. The second

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part removes graffiti from private and public areas, with the city picking up the tab.

The program is expected to cost the city about \$32,000. As far as Hurst is concerned, it is money well spent.

"It's an investment in the future," Hurst said.

He said Watsonville is on the "cutting edge" in the battle against graffiti. It may not be a complete solution, but the alternative, he said, is to "wash our hands and give up."

The city has contracted local painter Pete Violich to clean up the graffiti. He actually started about a month ago and has painted over about 150 areas. Violich, who came to Watsonville in 1959 and owns and operates Pete's Painting, said he has been in business for almost 30 years.

"I've painted half of Watsonville," he said with a laugh. At one time or another he has painted the Fox Theater, Watsonville High, the old Ford's building and the Jefsen Building, to name a few.

Graffiti, he said, is like a "cancer." In 1959, "the town was completely clean," he said. Now

he wonders what type of people live here, asking, "Are we not civilized people?"

It is the first time that such a massive, coordinated program has taken place in Watsonville. Similar graffiti abatement programs have been adopted in numerous cities across the state.

Under the city's graffiti program, Watsonville residents who find their property defaced by graffiti taggers can now call the city's graffiti removal hotline. After the city receives a graffiti incident report from the property owner, a painter is sent out to remove the graffiti.

The ordinance requires that property owners either remove graffiti within seven days or request that the city remove it within that time frame. If, however, the property owner does not remove the graffiti and does not file a report with the city, city officials could consider the graffiti a public nuisance and charge the property owner for removing it.

The present graffiti program is a revised version of an earlier proposed ordinance in which the property owner also was given seven days to remove the graffiti, but had to foot the bill for the service. Those who did not comply would have been cited. Property owners bitterly rejected that plan, saying it

made them victims twice.

The first part of the program involves restricting the sale of spray paint and large-tip markers. It consists of an ordinance that requires merchants to store the materials in a secured area. Many businesses have opted to keep the materials in a locked display case.

Nancy Reutlinger, who is overseeing the graffiti abatement program, said both components of the program are working well.

Prevention and restitution are two additional components of the program. The city plans to sponsor art classes for at-risk youth and to hold mural contests. An education program at schools is also part of the plan.

Anyone convicted of defacing property will have to make restitution. Parents of minors will be held responsible for restitution.

The city is also working with the county court system to speed up trial for those charged with vandalism. The idea is bring them to justice quickly, making the impact of their crime more forceful. This is seen as a way to prevent repeat offenses.

Anyone wishing to report an incident of graffiti may call the city's graffiti hotline. That number is 763-4040.