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Judge caps career of graffiti vandal '8edge'

Library 1990

By DONNA KIMURA
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Business owners, neighbors, a police detective and one man just plain tired of seeing "8edge" spray-painted all over town gathered in court Friday for the sentencing of a 20-year-old graffiti vandal.

Some asked the judge to lock Noah Levine of Aptos in jail and others just described the thousands of dollars of damage he has done with a simple can of black spray paint.

"Mr. Levine has set an example for young people for many years," said Doug Kaplan, who operates the Brommer Place business center. "These 'taggers' are heroes. ... That

message has to be turned around."

Authorities said Levine's signature "8edge" is a play on the words "straight edge." They said he was espousing a clean, drug-free lifestyle.

"It may have been a commendable message, but the means was not good," said Kerrigan.

"This case is unusual," sheriff's detective Len Lofano said in court. "I've never seen a vandalism case receive so much attention from the community."

After listening to a half-dozen victims, Municipal Court Judge Michael Barton ordered Levine to perform 500 hours of volunteer service and clean up or pay for his damages.

Levine, who pleaded no contest to nine counts of vandalism, was ordered not to possess spray paint or marking pens. In addition, he was placed on probation for three years.

Barton said he could have sentenced Levine to four years and six months in jail, where he would have been fed and clothed at taxpayers' expense, but believed it would better serve the community if Levine was put to work paying for what he has done.

Dressed in black, Levine offered no comment after the court hearing. At one point in the proceedings, his attorney, Sean Gallagher, said Levine was willing to take care of the damages.

Prosecutor Nancy Kerrigan sought to place Levine behind bars for one year.

"Jail time would send a message to the community that it's not right and we're not going to accept it," she said.

She added that Levine told authorities he did it "for the hell of it."

Kerrigan brought together several victims of Levine's spray paint to court to describe what he has done to hundreds of buildings and walls throughout Santa Cruz and Mid-County.

Heidi Smith, manager of the Aptos branch public library, said two-foot high letters read:
Please see 8edge — A14

'I have a 10-year-old who talks about 8edge.'

— *Municipal Court Judge Michael Barton*

of the American Petroleum Institute. "The petroleum industry is committed to this

they can produce enough of the cleaner gas to meet the law's deadlines. In that

environmentalists consider the pact a positive first step to cleaner air through

There are what will cons



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Aptos librarian Heidi Smith shows where graffiti 'tagger' 8edge left his mark at the library.

8edge ordered to put down his spray can

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ing "8edge" have marred the building for months.

It will take four hours to paint the wall, \$50 in supplies and \$60 in labor, she said.

Others echoed the same message, including a spokesman from the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, who said Levine is responsible for more than \$7,800 in damages.

Authorities estimated \$20,000 in damages have come at Levine's hands.

Authorities said Levine hit private busi-

nesses, public property, Cabrillo College and other places that are easily accessible.

During the court hearing, Judge Barton even commented on how well known Levine's graffiti is in the county.

"I have a 10-year-old who talks about 8edge," he said.

According to Lofano, there are three basic types of graffiti "artists."

There are gang members who use graffiti to mark territory and communicate with one another, and there are "piecers," who paint mu-

rials.

Levine was a "tagger" — someone who does it on a "quick catch-me-if-you-can basis," explained Lofano.

His tags angered one Aptos resident enough to make him attend the hearing even though Levine hasn't touched his property.

Paul Elerick said he is just sick of having to look at graffiti.

"I viewed it as I drove this morning to your courtroom," he told the judge. "I'm tired of it."

Health center