

# Off with their heads

Joyous wharf occasion

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SANTA CRUZ — Time has expired for the 400 parking meters on the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf — easily the most hated, voracious quarter-eating machines in town.

Their heads were lopped off Monday by city meter eaters who took less than a minute each to unhitch them and tote them off to storage.

And it was a joyous occasion, hailed by wharf visitors, meter attendants, and even the city workers who dismantled them.

"I'm enjoying it, yeah," gloated Angie Bentley, who was visiting from San Jose with her daughter. Bentley put other more touristy-type attractions on hold so she could watch the meters go down.

"I got a \$16 ticket here and by the time I paid it was \$24," Bentley recalled.

The parking meters have been replaced by a gate attendant, who began Monday collecting money from wharf visitors as they drove out.

The work is part of a \$2 million wharf renovation that includes new restrooms, the parking gates, realignment of the wharf opening and new banners. The wharf reopening will be dedicated Friday, and celebrations will continue this weekend.

Getting rid of the parking meters was viewed by city officials as a major public relations move. The tickets issued there — more expensive than the \$12 ones issued downtown — generated volumes of hate mail to the city.

Meter reader Anita Morales speculates that's because the newly ticketed had usually already pumped several quarters in the meters, then dropped another chunk of money for a nice dinner, and then, if they were a minute or two late, were greeted with a farewell ticket. Their reaction was often something like, well ... they wouldn't be returning soon.

Morales understands the frustration, but she still wrote the tickets. On a busy weekend day, maybe up to 30. On a dead winter day, she was lucky to issue one, she says.

Morales said the wharf ticket tour is one that she won't miss on her beat. It's a tough crowd out there, she says, madder and more prone to argue the merits of their tickets than elsewhere in the city.

There are losers in the new scheme, however, said Morales. The fisherpersons who spend long hours on the wharf had refined the practice of meter-feeding to an art, paying only when they could see the whites of the eyes of the meter attendants closing in on them. Now they'll pay for their time.

But so will visitors who linger over one last cup of coffee: about 25 cents more for their java time instead of \$16.

With the gate attendants, the first half hour is free. The next three hours cost \$1 an hour.

REFERENCE

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At right, Vincent Charles (holding meter) and Eric Conrad are part of a trio of workers removing the tops of parking meters on the wharf Monday. In the top photo, a boneyard of meter heads is the result of their efforts.

