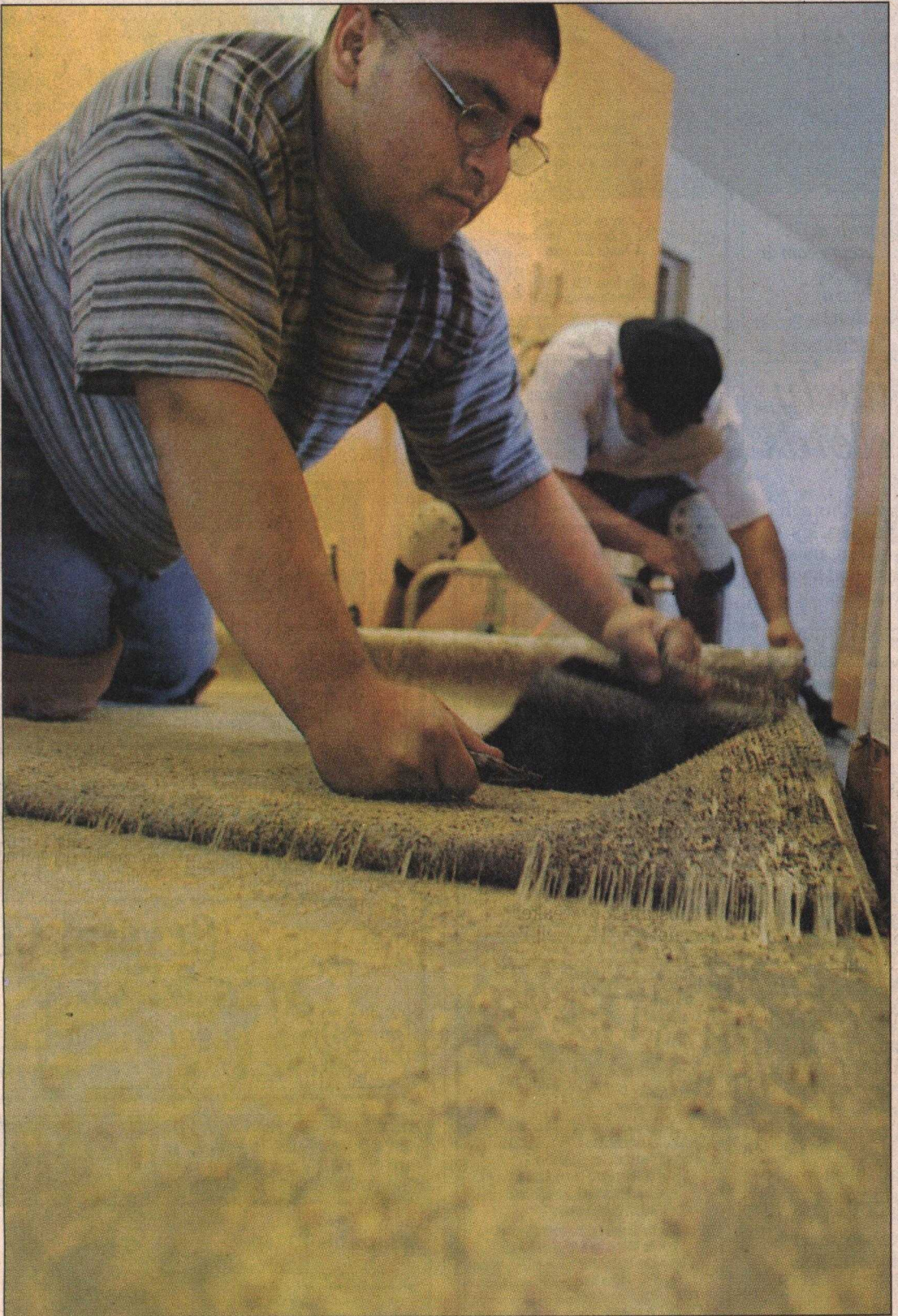


SANTA CRUZ

No motive leaked by hose vandals

IF PRANKS ARE A PROTEST, MESSAGE IS VAGUE



KAREN T. BORCHERS — MERCURY NEWS

At the law offices of Biggam, Christensen & Minsloff, Ray Torres, left, and Phillip DeLatorre remove ruined carpet. It was soaked with a hose, but then dried out, making the glue even harder to work with.

Crime + Criminals - 2000

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At the law offices of Biggam, Christensen & Minsloff, Ray Torres, left, and Phillip DeLatorre remove ruined carpet. It was soaked with a hose, but then dried out, making the glue even harder to work with.

Crime + Criminals - 2000

53mn 6/22/01

Vandals with hoses have ruined seven Santa Cruz offices, but nobody can say why. Puzzled victims and police are trying to determine a pattern or a message behind the troublesome crimes. If the destruction is intended to make a statement, it's not working.

By David L. Beck

Mercury News

The Vandals of old carried swords as they pillaged and looted their ways boldly across Europe and North Africa. The vandals of Santa Cruz carry garden hoses as they skulk through downtown under cover of darkness.

So far these hose vandals have attacked seven sites since June 4, all but one related to government or the courts. Their method has been unvarying: Attach a hose to an outdoor garden tap; run the other end through a broken window, a mail slot or, in one case, between a pair of glass doors; turn on the tap and flee. Damage done to the buildings is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

And the locals are getting pretty annoyed.

The police lieutenant in charge of the investigation uses words like "cowardly" and "brainless." An attorney whose offices were flooded lapses into obscenity because of the damage and inconvenience.

A woman who worked at Borders Books & Music when the chain store was under attack last year for not being local calls what the vandals are doing "a whole new level of destructive behavior."

Borders was flooded in Au-

gust when a valve on the second floor was opened. No clear connection was ever made between that vandalism and the anti-Borders movement.

Police are frustrated, if not totally baffled, by the recent crimes. "I don't know what to tell you," Lt. Joe Haebe said. "Nobody's stepped forward yet to claim responsibility for it. It's a person or persons who just have total contempt for the property of others. And it's not a cookie-cutter type of crime that points to one specific group."

Mike Rotkin thinks it looks like a protest. Rotkin, a former mayor and city councilman who teaches in the community studies field program at the University of California-Santa Cruz, said, "It's not totally random. . . . They're all related" by their appearance of attacking the system. "If Costco had an office, I'm sure they'd fill that with water, too."

Community studies at UCSC is like a major in public activism. But if the hose vandals took his class, Rotkin said, "they weren't paying attention. We try really hard to get our students to think strategically and move them away from ineffective forms of moral outrage."

Historically, he said, both the

Hose vandals

Seven locations have been soaked by Santa Cruz vandals using garden hoses beginning June 4.

NIGHT OF JUNE 4:

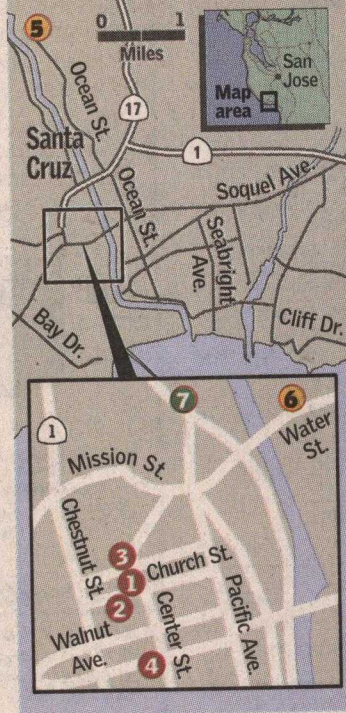
- 1 City Hall, 809 Center St.
- 2 City attorney (offices of Atchison & Barisone), 333 Church St.
- 3 Battistini & Canfield Insurance, 901 Center St.
- 4 Page, Salisbury & Dudley (attorneys), 605 Center St.

NIGHT OF JUNE 6:

- 5 California State Parks, Santa Cruz District, 600 Ocean St.
- 6 Alto Counseling Center, 271 Water St.

SATURDAY NIGHT

- 7 Public Defender's Office (offices of Biggam, Christensen & Minsloff), 2301 N. Pacific Ave.



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KAREN T. BORCHERS — MERCURY NEWS

Fans dry out the floors throughout the vandalized law offices of Biggam, Christensen & Minsloff in Santa Cruz.

VANDALS | Crimes seem pointless

Continued from Page 1B

left and right political wings have been "plagued with individuals who decide to take action by the deed." Often, he said, they are younger people excited by an issue, they don't think about the consequences, and their actions backfire.

In the 1960s, for example, "people threw rocks through the windows of libraries to protest the war in Vietnam, which seems, in retrospect, insane," Rotkin said, because it upset liberals who "were on your side."

Possibly random

Not everyone agrees that the vandals are trying to make a statement. "At first I thought it was a group, a disgruntled group," said Tom O'Rourke, a partner in the insurance firm of Battistini & Canfield, which was one of the first hit and which remains the only "civilian" victim.

"But we're not a government agency. We're a locally owned, independent business. Nobody has an ax to grind with an insurance agency. We're a disinterested observer. So then I thought, maybe wanton vandalism by kids. I really don't know."

"I really don't know," ech-

oed attorney Jerry Christensen. As a partner in Biggam, Christensen & Minsloff, the law firm that holds the public defender contract with Santa Cruz County, he figures he's one of the good guys. His firm was hit Saturday night and is still being cleaned.

"I'm really shocked by this," he said. "We're really good about dialoguing with people, with clients, with people with concerns. We've represented numerous people with causes, represented them diligently. We try to stand up for what we believe in."

"I mean, hell, we took Ron Ruiz, himself, to court" when Ruiz was district attorney. "We're not wimping around over here."

Nevertheless for the past few days they've been sloshing around. The water may have run for 12 hours before attorney Kristine Burke went to work Sunday morning and found a hose stuck through a broken window.

"I would hope that it's some 12-year-old, really immature person who's doing it for fun," Christensen said. "But I don't think that's the case."

Burke was unable to turn the water off because the vandals had broken off the tap handle. Christensen had

to bring a pair of pliers. "This was a little extra 'Ha ha' or 'Gotcha!' or whatever," he said. "More malice."

Double damage

At district headquarters for California State Parks, which was hit the night of June 6, vandals used a hose on the top floor so the water soaked through to the first floor. At the height of the summer tourist season, parks employees had to disperse, and the public was left with only a single-line phone over which to call for information.

Dave Vincent, the district superintendent, said he, too, has no idea who might have done it. "Could be anything: kids, somebody with a grudge, a whole range of things."

Rotkin pointed out that, with nobody coming forward, the message, if there is one, is obscured and the impact on the public is minimal.

"It's certainly not going to have its intended impact — 'Oh, because of this the State Parks is going to change its policy about people staying there for 30 days.' It's not a very strategic activity."

The first hose attacks occurred June 4, a few days after three homeless activists received a split decision in a

long-running court battle over their right to stage a "teach-in" at City Hall. But none of them has spoken out on the attacks. And Frances Markovic, a homeless sympathizer, doesn't believe activists had anything to do with them.

"The people that I know, they're speak-out people," she said, "not clandestine, do-sneaky-stuff people."

"If they ever find" the vandals, "they're going to be total strangers to me, I'm sure."

Police have hopes. They've sent evidence, including the hoses, fingerprints and other evidence they won't describe, to the state crime laboratory in Sacramento, but the lab, like justice, moves slowly in cases where no one has been injured.

That wasn't true, of course, in the case of the original Vandals, who had a short, high-profile run. They sacked Rome in 455 A.D. and conquered North Africa, even wiping out St. Augustine's home town of Hippo. Bad move. In 533, the Romans struck back. There are no Vandals today.

Only vandals.

Contact David L. Beck at dbeck@sjmercury.com or at (831) 423-0960.