

CE Gangs  
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# Officials seek ways to avoid another fiasco

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Santa Cruz County Fairground representatives and public officials will explore ways of avoiding repetitions of Sunday's low-rider car show fiasco at the fairgrounds. The event was shut down early by a gang-related melee and sent swarms of cruisers into Watsonville, causing major traffic jams for several hours and outbreaks of fights on city streets.

John Kegebein, the fairground's chief executive officer, said he has tentatively scheduled a meeting with County Supervisor Ray Belgard for tomorrow to discuss what precautions can be taken to head off trouble at similar events in the future.

He also plans to meet with Watsonville City Manager Steve Salomon and Police Chief Terry Medina to discuss these matters.

Sunday's show was halted around 3:30 p.m. after several brawls broke out involving between 30 and 40 rival gang members from Watsonville and Salinas. A contingent of sheriff's deputies, Watsonville police, and fairground's security guards moved in, forming a human chain and exploding tear gas canisters to

squelch the fights.

The event, which police estimate was attended by about 8,000 people, ended, but instead of going home, the people decided to cruise in Watsonville.

Beginning around 4:30 p.m., the main thoroughfares in Watsonville became choked with traffic, which continued until around midnight, Watsonville police said. Numerous fights, including stabbings and a shooting, were reported along Freedom Boulevard and Main Street, two of the most-heavily cruised streets.

The traffic jams proved to be a major inconvenience to residents. Police closed Freedom Boulevard at two spots around 8:30 p.m. and closed Main Street around 10 p.m. to stem the flow of traffic.

Residents flooded police telephone lines with complaints. One resident in the Martinelli Street area reported that a carload of men stopped their car in front of her house, got out, and urinated on her lawn. Others reported loud, boisterous behavior, young girls dancing suggestively in the middle of streets, and littering of streets with beer containers.

Salomon said this morning that

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the city has worked closely and cooperatively with fair officials in the past in planning for events after the events have been scheduled. Salomon said the city will suggest to fair officials that it be allowed to take part in the scheduling phase. The fairground's executive board, however, would most likely have to approve such an arrangement.

"(Fairground officials) need to take into accounts the (events') impact on the city," Salomon said.

He emphasized that the city has always had a good relationship with fairground officials.

He also plans to discuss the cost of providing such services as police. Police Chief Medina said this morning a report on Sunday's event will be ready sometime today. That report will include the cost of policing, he said.

Kegebein, who turned 59 on Sunday, said the fair does not plan to hold another low-rider car show next year. This was the second annual car show, which was sponsored by LG Productions of Hollister.

Kegebein, who has been with the fair for more than 30 years, said Sunday's fiasco was caused by a few people who ruined it for the rest. He said the troublemakers showed total disrespect for the police.

"Sunday was the worst I've seen," Kegebein said.

Lorenzo Gonzalez, who promoted the show, said he did not "pack up the trophies" and leave the event through a back gate, as reported by police. Police said that Gonzalez loaded the trophies in his car, broke a lock on the back gate and left.

Not true, Gonzalez said. In fact, he said, police threatened to impound the cars and confiscate the trophies if the event organizers and car show participants didn't leave quickly. Gonzalez said about half the trophies were awarded, because only half the participants were left by the time the trophies were handed out. He did leave through a back gate, he said, but a security guard opened the gate. He will mail the rest of trophies, he said.

"Police are trying to make me look like a fly-by-night businessman," said Gonzalez, who has been promoting car shows across the country for about 15 years.