

Planter wars heat up on Pacific Avenue

Pacific Avenue

Protesters rally against newly installed railing

By **DAN WHITE**

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Protesters, including a man called “Free Love,” railed about a railing that city workers put up on a Pacific Avenue sidewalk Thursday to push out a loose group of loiterers.

About 40 people showed up at 1 p.m. to support the folk singers, beggars and all-day socializers who gather at Pacific and Soquel avenues.

One held a sign accusing Santa Cruz of trying to become a snooty new Carmel. “They always cite the ‘hippies’ for blocking the sidewalk, yet they put a gate

in the same exact place where these people stand,” Zoe Einbinder said as she stood at the corner.

The city put the barriers around an outdoor dining area after nearby merchants complained about blocked sidewalks and obnoxious behavior by the loiterers, including lewd comments to women. City workers will add planters to the area this weekend.

Lily Ruderman, who works downtown, called the protest “ridiculous.” She said she’d understand the outcry if a park was taken away, but not a section of sidewalk. She said hanger-outers make it worse for themselves when they are hostile.

But the hang-out crowd is crying foul, claiming they are getting picked on because of their looks, and the fact that

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they don’t blend with a “yuppie” demographic.

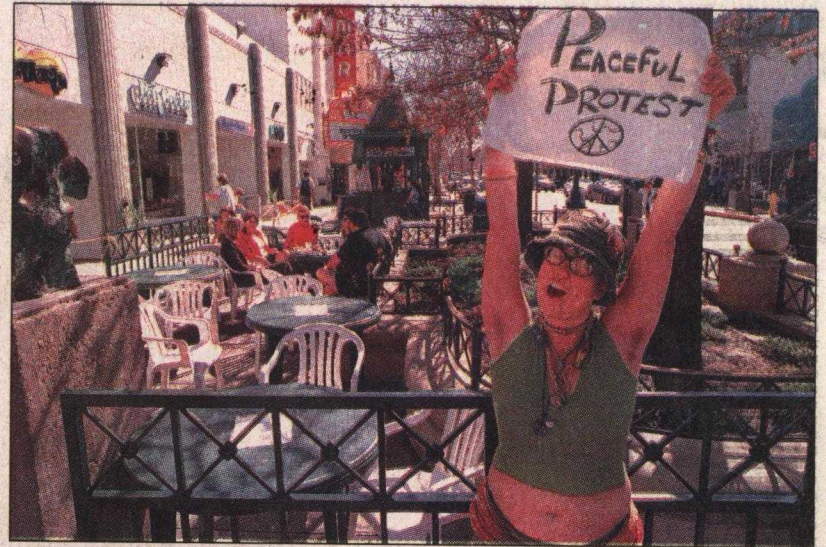
Holly Beth Garver, who works across Pacific Avenue at Cotton Tales, said the group is being unfairly singled out. “If I came here with 20 of my friends and dressed conservatively, I don’t think anything would happen.”

But kiosk operators Matisse Selman, who runs Sushi Now!, and Ali Khah, who runs Ali Baba falafel, say many of the complainers are mean-spirited.

Selman said when he asked a man to not smoke near a customer, “He started scratching his butt in front of the customer, saying, ‘So I don’t have a right to scratch my butt because I’m homeless?’”

Selman said another man recently pulled out a trash bag and shoved it onto

Please see **PROTEST** on **BACK PAGE**



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

A young woman who used to hang out between the two kiosks on Pacific and Soquel avenues stages a protest against the newly constructed seating area for outdoor diners.

Protest

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a table, splashing hot tea all over a diner.

On the corner, David Miles, said corner people “believe in peace, love and freedom to cultivate cannabis” and are getting picked on for smoking marijuana.

Free Love shouted at passers-by, though he’d taped his mouth shut.

“I hate classical music,” he yelled, referring to the recorded music the city has been playing near the corner to dissuade loitering. “It sucks. ... I hate sushi, too.”

In response, Ali Khah shouted to protesters: “I love you all.”

Khah said he isn’t against youths spending time in the area, only those who harass and intimidate his customers.

Sgt. Loran Baker reported one arrest during the protest Thursday for “loudly yelling four-letter words.”

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