

# High Number of Disturbances Recorded at Homeless Campsite

**H**omeless campers staying at New Brighton State Beach in Capitola proved to be a recurring problem for law enforcement officials who responded to six separate disturbances over a three-week period beginning in late December.

Within the first couple of days of their arrival just before Christmas, two male campers were arrested for being drunk in public. They were picked up near the entrance to the state beach and not within the confines of the campground. A day or so later a female camper left a candle burning in her tent that set the fabric on fire. The tent burned down and there was little law enforcement officials could do for her. And in two separate instances charges of spousal abuse were levied against male campers who were part of the homeless group.

The death of camper Mark Valverde, 39, who was discovered post mortem inside his tent is still under investigation. Judging from the presence of pain killers and alcohol inside the tent, authorities speculate it could be a drug overdose but are waiting the outcome of toxicology reports.

An ax-wielding out-of-control man was the latest incident of a public safety disturbance as of press time. He was arrested and booked into County Jail January 4 on suspicion of being intoxicated and for giving false information to a police officer.

"These people who are arrested are evicted. They don't come back," said State Park Ranger Bob Culbertson. "Campers are expected to follow the rules and regulations. Anybody who doesn't is dealt with. That's the way it goes."

The remaining campers realize this is too many incidents

for too few people. Dan Routheau, one of the campers, said they are sticking to a new policy of their own.

"Any bad behavior that reflects on all of us and you're gone," Routheau said.

The other side of the argument is one in which the homeless complain of being routinely hassled by police simply because of who they are and not because of what they have done.

One camper who went by the name of Red said the Capitola police came by in patrol cars six times in one hour on Christmas day. He said there had also been rumors about warrant checks.

"We police ourselves," Red said.

Red, whose real name is David Marenco, 25, was later arrested for being drunk in public. He was a wielding a hatchet.

Captain Tom Hanna of the Capitola Police Department said the homeless who are generally associated with the most criminal activity are the ones who take drugs.

"It would have to be the drug users simply because every time they use a drug that's a crime," Hanna said.

The other part to it is that drugs aren't cheap and the resources to purchase them often come through either stealing or through prostitution.

"It would be hard for me to believe you could panhandle enough money to buy drugs and still afford to eat," Hanna said.

Hanna said it was hard to speak generally but it appeared to him that a number of the group of homeless campers are substance abusers. Hanna said the situation with the homeless is such that they invariably end up in positions where they are

breaking laws. For example, after their money runs out and the homeless can no longer afford to legally camp at New Brighton, some of them will probably consider camping illegally. If they are caught they risk being fined \$168, and if they can't pay the fine they end up having a warrant issued for their arrest. That confronts them with a whole new set of problems.

"Society forces police to deal with things that nobody else wants to deal with and so we get stuck with it," Hanna said. □



**David Marenco, aka Hillbilly Red, has been drifting off and on for the past 11 years. His stay at the New Brighton homeless camp came to an end when police arrested him for being drunk in public and wielding a hatchet.**