

Upgrading The Mall 8/12/79

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The Pacific Avenue Mall is one Santa Cruz County's biggest assets.

However, a growing number of "drop-outs" has found it to their liking too, and the result is that several longtime citizens are deciding they would rather stay away than be hassled by panhandlers, purse snatchers and the like.

The solution to making the mall a place for more to enjoy without won't be easy. It will take a coordinated effort for it to work in this, in effect, societal problem.

The mall is a public place and should be open, and remain open, to the public. But, the number of unfavorable incidents occurring on the mall and its surroundings is growing, just as is the number of dropouts who can't support themselves.

Merchants along the mall aren't suffering. Total sales within the Downtown Parking District, which encompasses the mall primarily, have increased from \$39.7 million in 1973 to \$61.4 million in 1977, the latest year the state issued official figures.

But the salesmen are worried about the future. The mall often is used in promo-

tional efforts, but the number of reports coming back from people asking, "Why did you encourage me to go there?" is growing.

There are a lot of reasons the dropouts find their new "home" here. After Santa Cruz County, the climate itself makes it uncomfortable for anyone going farther north to put up stakes with but a knapsack on his back.

The word is out that welfare payments aren't difficult to come by. It was just a few months ago that the county Board of Supervisors tried to do something about that, but the move was shot down by the state. So, areas like Sycamore Grove, Paradise Park, San Lorenzo Park and the river levees continue to be home sweet home for a growing number of "residents."

We have rehabilitation centers for just about every type of offender, and the drug scene has gotten to be what some people might say is alarming.

Increased policing won't solve it alone, and one officer termed the outlook a "lousy situation." That's because, for one, most anyone booked for alleged illegal activities around the mall is out on the

street again before the ink is dry on the booking sheet, partly due to the jail being so small. Additionally, an officer can act as an undercover agent in the drug scene for one or two times and then his shield is lifted quickly by those in the know.

The mall itself doesn't breed these people. It's a combination of those items listed above, and more, that affects the total picture.

Within the next few weeks a report is anticipated from the SC Police Department analyzing what is going on at the mall, why, and what can be done to correct it so much of the citizenry may visit it and feel comfortable at the same time.

It took a petition signed by 4,000 persons protesting some of the happenings on the mall to get the city to increase its patrolling on the mall.

The upcoming police report probably won't get into that aspect again. Rather, it's likely that it will mention a number of proposals that would involve the state, county and city becoming involved in a solution. It's unreasonable to think less will be needed to solve such a complex problem.