

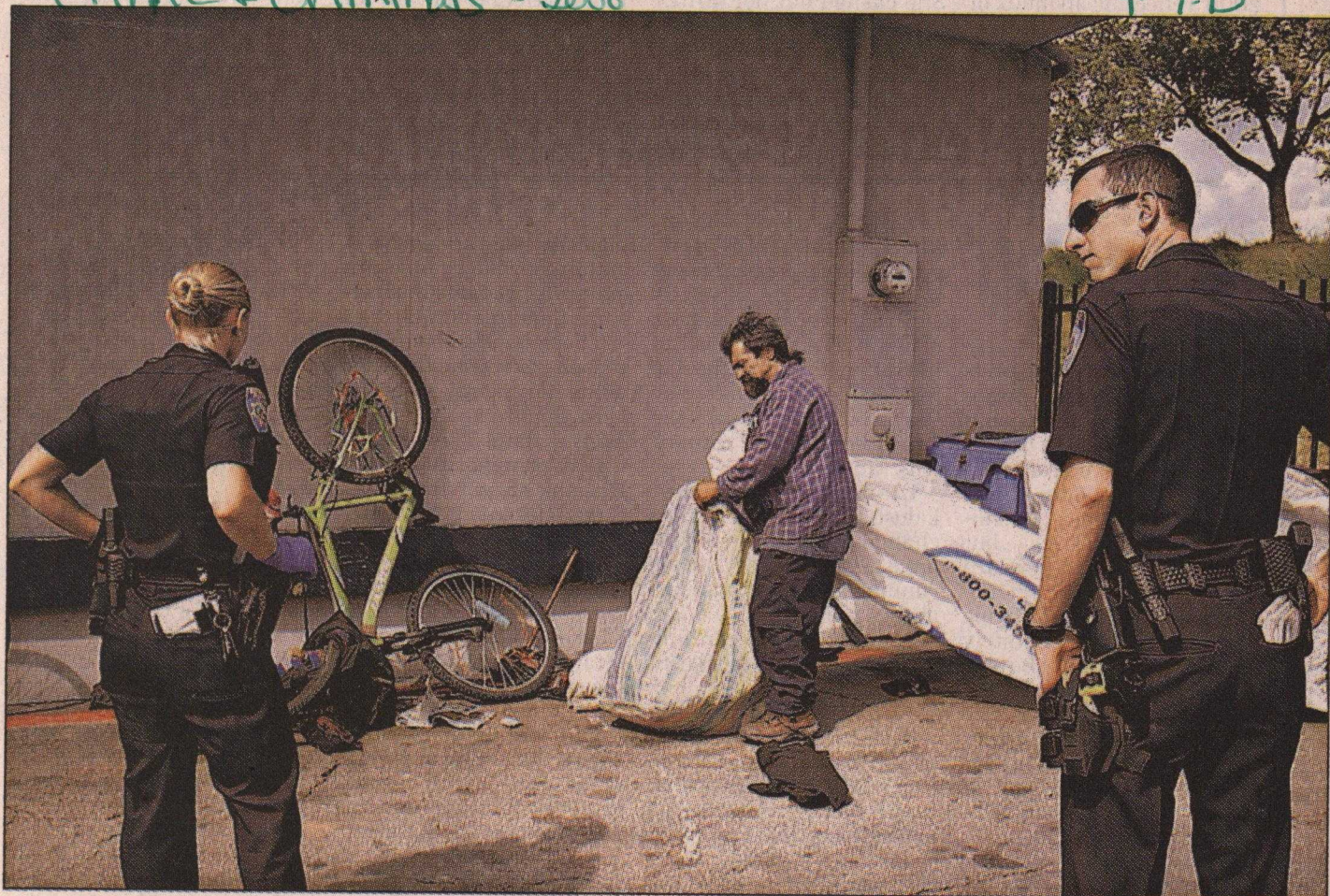
# AT RISK

Santa Cruz  
crime among  
state's highest

Numbers support concerns of many after high-profile shootings

Crime + Criminals - 2006

4-7-13



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz Police Department officers Carly Cross and Kobe McCauley ask a homeless man to remove his belongings from private property near downtown Santa Cruz on Saturday.

By JASON HOPPIN

jhoppin@santacruzsentinel.com

**SANTA CRUZ** — Santa Cruz is one of the most uncommon pockets of the country, full of natural gifts and a unique culture that have given the funky seaside town a global reputation.

It also is teeming with thieves.

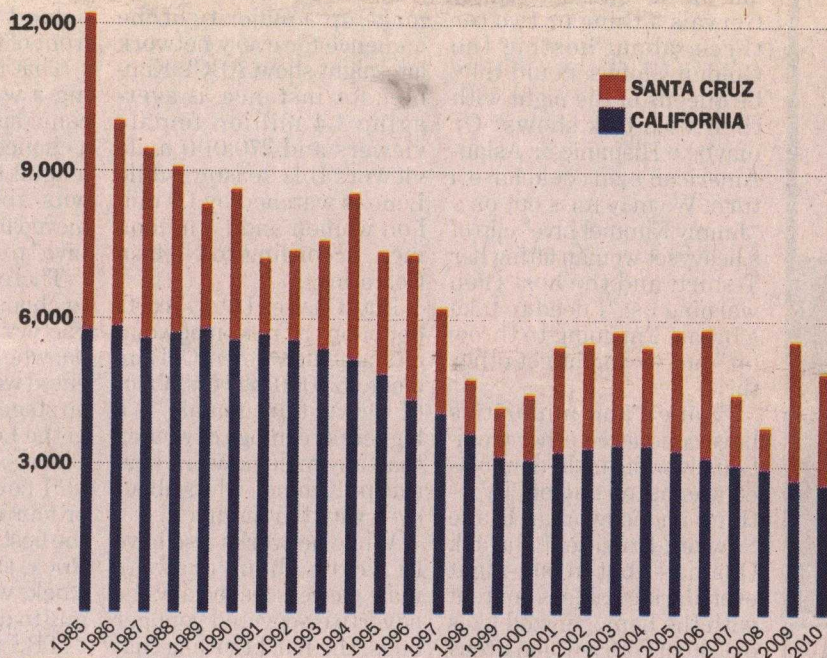
According to FBI statistics, Santa Cruz's reputation isn't the only outsized thing about the place. It also has a significant crime problem, with the highest property crime rate in California among medium and large cities.

But cars, bikes and backpacks aren't the only thing at risk here: Santa Cruz also has a higher violent crime rate than all but eight cities in the Golden State. People are more likely to become a victim here than in Los Angeles, San Francisco or Vallejo, not to mention Central Coast neighbors Salinas and Watsonville.

"I did not expect this. It's the craziest thing," said Oakland native and student Zach Rokeach, a UC Santa Cruz junior studying environmental studies and biology, as he locked up his bike downtown. "It is surpris-

## PROPERTY CRIME RATE

State property crime rate compared to Santa Cruz, per 100,000 people.



SOURCE: FBI UNIFORM CRIME REPORTING, CONTAINING DATA FROM MORE THAN 18,000 LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

SEE CRIME ON A3



# CRIME

Continued from A3

transient issue is 40 years old, but the debate over it — Do social services attract the homeless? Are the homeless responsible for much of the crime? — rages on.

A staunch supporter of homeless services, Lane says there's no question that some transients, but not all, contribute to the problem.

"There are people who are kind of making their way through existence by petty crime," Lane said. "But I think it's important to recognize that's a distinct subpopulation."

He disputes the belief, closely held by some, that homeless services bring homeless people to the area.

"I don't think people are choosing to come great distances because the [free] dinner in Santa Cruz is better than the dinner in Salinas," Lane said.

And Kubrin said you cannot draw a correlation between social services and crime. In fact, she said they are key to rehabilitation, and should help reduce crime.

"What you will not find is [that] it's causing crime," Kubrin said. "I cannot think of a study that would show that."

## A CITY, ITS POLICE

In a city with an anti-establishment streak, the Santa Cruz Police Department and residents have sometimes had an uneasy relationship. The department has cultivated officers who match the community and continues to do so, and is in the midst of an exhaustive search for new recruits.

"This is a very political community. Maybe a 'politized' community is a better word," Lane said. "The Police Department has always been cognizant of dealing with what the community attitudes are, and it's always kind of wrestling with that."

After the deaths of Baker and Butler, Supervisor Zach Friend, a former crime analyst with the Santa Cruz Police Department, called for a "rebirth" in the relationship between the city and its police.

Friend said he sees the ongoing public safety conversation as growing pains, with the city having shifted on its axis in the 1970s, from a conservative, growth-happy area known for fishing to a politically charged, liberal bastion.

"This to me is part of the discussion and growth of a community that really isn't that old," Friend said.

The responsibility for preventing crimes falls on many shoulders, he said.

"By the time a law enforcement officer knows your child's name, a lot of elements of society have failed that child. The police are really the parent of last resort."

Speaking of his former police colleagues, Friend added: "They feel like they're asked to accomplish an impossible task, often with very limited resources and in some sections of the community with little support. But it isn't their job to vocalize that."

## MARIJUANA ISSUE

In 2006, Santa Cruz voters passed Measure K, which not only made marijuana a lesser law enforcement priority but limited the Police Department's ability to work

with the Drug Enforcement Agency on pot cases.

At the time, voter outrage at the DEA over its participation in the infamous raid on the Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana was still high. But Measure K's practical impact was to limit police cooperation with the DEA on all drug investigations, including going after top-level suppliers, Clark said.

"The fact that Santa Cruz has such a large drug problem and gives away twice as many needles than all of Santa Clara County transcends anything the Police Department or City Council can control," Clark said.

Cutting off the supply might help change the city's drug-friendly reputation. But cutting off demand and getting more people into treatment would make that easier, and could lead to declines in drug-related property crimes.

"Addiction is a disease that needs treatment and that can really be seen when we see a transformation in people and get them back to a place where they are stable and back with families and working," said Carolyn Coleman, executive director of Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center and an appointee to Mayor Hilary Bryant's new task force on public safety. "We think all these services are geared toward public safety."

## WHAT'S NEXT

The City Council is taking up the crime issue this week, and adding to the fabric of community concerns is a state prisoner shift that some feared would mean more crooks roaming the streets. Oakland, which has by far the highest vio-

lent crime rate in the state, recently hired former New York City top cop Bill Bratton, the godfather of zero tolerance-style policing, as a consultant.

But the hammer of the criminal justice system is not the only way to fix a crime problem. Kubrin said there's no evidence yet that the prison realignment has led to an uptick in crime. And locking people up isn't the answer, she added.

"Overreliance on incarceration is very problematic in California," Kubrin said. "You cannot incarcerate your way out of a crime problem. There are diminishing returns after awhile."

Ultimately, Clark said, crime isn't about numbers at all, but a sense of place. With so many factors at play, it comes down to whether people feel secure in the place where they live.

"How good do you feel about where you live and what you do? Not just Santa Cruz, but there are a lot of communities at a crossroads about this," Clark said. "My whole time that I've been here, Santa Cruz has always found a way to figure it out and move forward."

Reporter J.M. Brown contributed to this report. Follow Sentinel reporter Jason Hoppin on Twitter at [Twitter.com/scnewsdude](https://twitter.com/scnewsdude)



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz Police Department Officers Carly Cross, John Shepard, and Kobe McCauley wait as a homeless man packs his belongings near downtown Santa Cruz Saturday.



# CRIME

Continued from A1

ing to me for Santa Cruz. I thought it was just a laid-back beach town."

Kristin Onorato, 30, said she was not surprised because she has friends in the law enforcement community who tell her about the city's crime issues. Onorato, who suspects drugs and poverty are behind the numbers, does not want Santa Cruz to become known for crime.

"I don't want to walk around here feeling unsafe. My boyfriend lives in Stockton and we never just go out for a stroll because Stockton has that reputation for being unsafe," she said. "I would hate for this little city to be that same way."

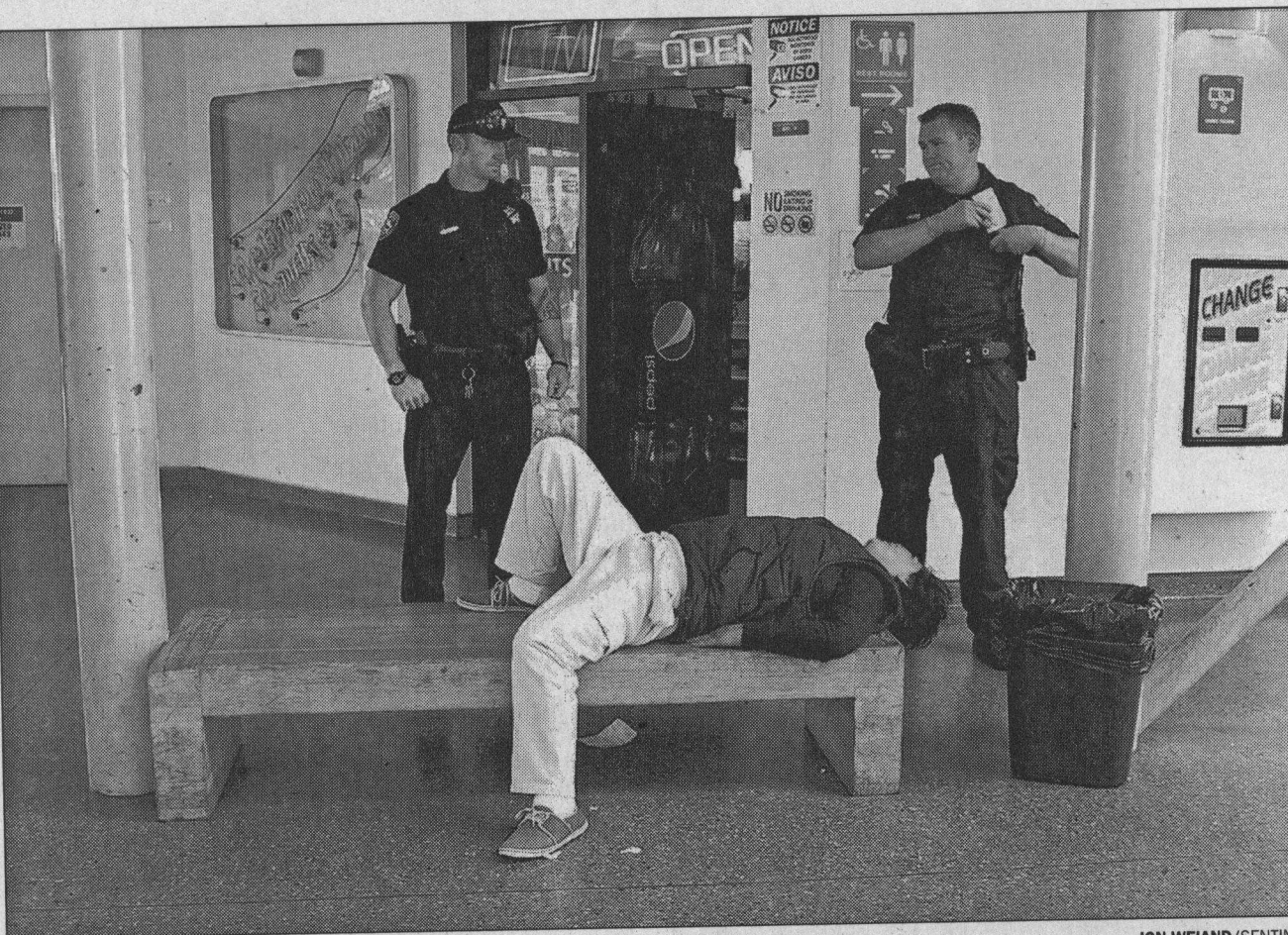
## A RUN OF MAYHEM

A spate of high-profile violent crimes have renewed a debate that's ebbed and flowed in Santa Cruz since at least the 1970s: what to do about almost shockingly high levels of crime.

Less than a year ago, downtown business owner Shannon Collins was slain by a mentally ill homeless man as she walked from her hairdresser. In February, a series of incidents jolted the city: a UCSC student was shot in the head during a Westside robbery, a man was gunned down outside a downtown bar and, finally, two officers were ambushed and killed during a routine follow-up to a groping complaint.

The deaths of detective Sgt. Loran "Butch" Baker and detective Elizabeth Butler — the first police officers killed in the line of duty in the city's nearly 150-year history — are what have given the ongoing debate about public safety unusual weight. Between the two officers, they left behind five children, and their March 7 funeral brought thousands of officers and political luminaries to San Jose's HP Pavilion.

The city's crime problem is nothing new. The 2011 property crime rate — one reported incident for every 18 residents — that tops all California cities is less than half of what it was 25 years ago, but the number has consistently been higher than the state's. And since the early 1990s, the city's violent crime



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz Police Department officers John Shepard and Travis Ahlers assess an intoxicated woman's condition as they wait for emergency medical services in downtown Santa Cruz on Saturday.

Santa Cruz police say they saw a drop in assaults, burglaries and thefts in 2012. Property crimes are also on a downward trend, sitting at less than 40 percent of what they were in 1985, with the 2008 rate being the lowest in the past 25 years.

Police and others say there are several factors that make the city an outlier. Tourism swells the city's population, particularly on sunny summer weekends. UCSC brings thousands of youths and young adults to town, away from home for the first time. And it has a relatively high number of liquor licenses, an ongoing topic of debate.

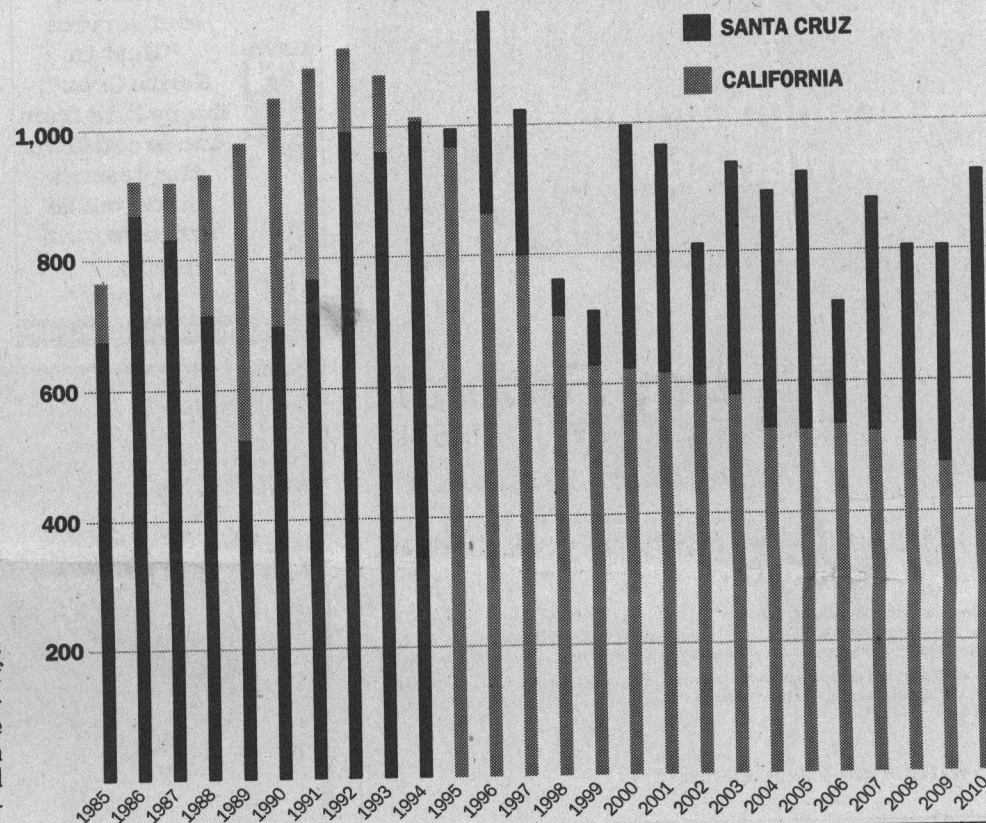
"I am convinced that you cannot benchmark Santa Cruz to any other city," Santa Cruz Deputy Police Chief Steve Clark said. "You can't. We're an anomaly."

But many communities must deal with impacts of the state's \$100 billion tourism industry. And many are no strangers to colleges, with 35 state-run, four-year and graduate schools across California, 112 community colleges and scores of private institutions.

The offenses driving both

## VIOLENT CRIME RATE

State violent crime rate compared to Santa Cruz, per 100,000 people.



SOURCE: FBI UNIFORM CRIME REPORTING, CONTAINING DATA FROM MORE THAN 18,000 LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

passion without accountability is nothing more than enabling. And we are seeing that play out before our very eyes."

That echoes comments by former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta at the funeral for Baker and Butler. Speaking of their accused killer and the numerous red flags that arose before he made his way to Santa Cruz, Panetta said too many people "looked the other way."

"We live in a society now ... where everybody hangs by their iPhone or their computer, and there's a lot of turning inward and not enough attention to the people around you," Panetta said in a later interview with the Sentinel.

Experts say shaking that passiveness is key to preventing crime. From telling errant teens to knock it off to calling out criminal behavior, UC Irvine criminologist Charis Kubrin said "informal social controls" are effective deterrents.

"A community that's vibrant, with residents out and about, that has a lot of things going on, is much less likely to have crime because these people serve as the eyes and ears of the community," Kubrin said. "Minding your own business is not good for the community."

## BUSY DEPARTMENT

The Santa Cruz Police Department is not resting on its laurels. In 2011, the department averaged 11.1 arrests per sworn officer a year, according to FBI statistics, among the highest in the state and a figure that easily beats larger cities such as Berkeley, Oakland and San Francisco, each of which averaged fewer than four per officer. And Santa Cruz averages more arrests than cities such as Sacramento and San Bernardino, which have similar ratios of police to residents.

Nor is the department understaffed when measured against the population (though police argue that measure is skewed due to the high number of tourists). There is one sworn officer for every 697 residents, 22nd in the state. Furthermore, what resources the department has are on the street — the ratio of civilian staff to sworn officers is third-lowest in California.



ers and political luminaries to San Jose's HP Pavilion.

The city's crime problem is nothing new. The 2011 property crime rate — one reported incident for every 18 residents — that tops all California cities is less than half of what it was 25 years ago, but the number has consistently been higher than the state's. And since the early 1990s, the city's violent crime rate has trended higher than the rest of California.

What makes Santa Cruz stand out is how unique it seems among a list of high-crime cities. It lacks the complexity of Oakland, Stockton or other high-crime communities with serious poverty issues, places that don't share the same affluence, property values or age demographics as Santa Cruz.

"These places have been blighted communities for a long, long time, and they share a lot of common characteristics," said Erik Bovee, a local technology investor who approached the Sentinel with the FBI stats. "Santa Cruz doesn't share those."

Bovee said he has brought the numbers to the attention of numerous local officials, and was frustrated to see them dismissed. A former resident of big cities on the East Coast and in Europe, Bovee said he does not feel safe in Santa Cruz.

"It's the most dangerous place that I've lived or worked in," he said.

### CRIME FACTORS

Many things affect crimes rates, and criminologists and the FBI caution the statistics are not an accurate picture of public safety. The figures measure offenses reported to police, and do not take into account the validity of the report or crimes that were never brought to police attention.

While the statistics are a snapshot of crime in 2011,

Steve Clark said, "You can't. We're an anomaly."

But many communities must deal with impacts of the state's \$100 billion tourism industry. And many are no strangers to colleges, with 35 state-run, four-year and graduate schools across California, 112 community colleges and scores of private institutions.

The offenses driving both rates upward are thefts and assaults, and countywide they seem unique to Santa Cruz. Watsonville rates rank 33rd for violent crimes and 53rd for property crimes among cities with a population of 35,000 and greater. And if the unincorporated area of the county were a city, it would rank in the bottom half statewide for both categories.

Rates for the smaller cities of Capitola and Scotts Valley are both far less than Santa Cruz's.

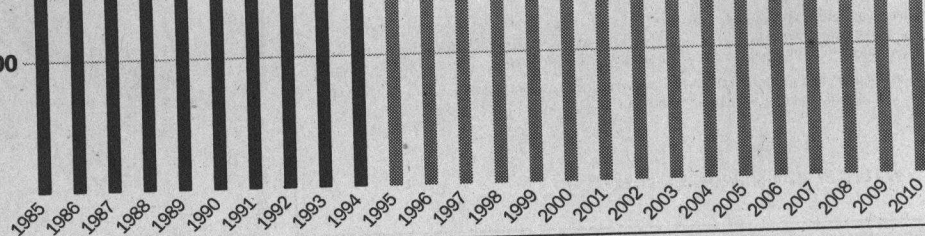
### COMMUNITY OUTCRY

Lately, an increasing number of Santa Cruzans are raising their voices about crime, with the group Take Back Santa Cruz — the name implies a city adrift — emerging as a social and political force during a dark period. Co-founder Pamela Comstock is among the City Council's newest members.

"The level of criminal activity going on in our town is unacceptable," said Santa Cruz City Councilman David Terrazas, who chairs the council's public safety committee. "I'm confident this City Council is taking on this issue and the community is no longer tolerant of crime that it may have tolerated in the past."

The debate is not completely new. It dates to at least the 1970s, when a city consultant famously penned a report on "undesirable transient elements," or UTEs — a term later co-

200



SOURCE: FBI UNIFORM CRIME REPORTING, CONTAINING DATA FROM MORE THAN 18,000 LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

opted by protesters to city policies.

"I think it's been, for lack of a better word, sort of a roller-coaster issue," said longtime City Councilman Don Lane. "In my time in this community there have been periods of great concern about crime, and at other times it's less of a concern."

"This is not a new phenomenon."

But tackling crime in Santa Cruz is a complex task. The very things that give the city its cultural identity — not just its famed tolerance, but its vibrant nightlife and global draw as a tourist destination — also contribute to the problem.

"We actually do a lot of work to encourage people to come here to have fun. That's one of our main industries," Lane said. "But when people are on vacation they do drink, and they sometimes use drugs. Let's not mince words about this: This is a town to come and play. But there's a cost to that."

Drugs also often are named as a culprit, particularly methamphetamine and heroin. A court system seen as lenient is also a frequent target, as is the county's suite of social service offerings.

### 'MANIFESTATION OF NEGLECT'

There are ongoing debates about what role the police play in preventing crime. Some 1990s-era studies concluded that standard approaches — more officers,

preventive patrols and faster response times — were basically ineffective, spurring experimentation in how best to reduce crime. Santa Cruz's predictive policing model is one example.

But the crime reduction factor that comes up is the role Santa Cruzans them-

selves must play.

"Part of that is what have we taught our community and what have we tolerated," Clark said, saying the city is reaping what he called "the manifestation of neglect."

"Santa Cruz is a compassionate place, and it's great. I love that," he said. "But com-

sured against the population (though police argue that measure is skewed due to the high number of tourists). There is one sworn officer for every 697 residents, 22nd in the state. Furthermore, what resources the department has are on the street — the ratio of civilian staff to sworn officers is third-lowest in California.

### MANY HOMELESS

Santa Cruz also has a high number of transients, and the killers of both Collins and officers Baker and Butler were recent transplants to Santa Cruz. The

SEE CRIME ON A5