



Police Capt. Terry Medina says graffiti such as on this building on Second Street is all too common.

## Police aren't amused by graffiti

By LANE WALLACE  
STAFF WRITER

Watsonville police captain Terry Medina sees graffiti not just an act of vandalism but as a mark against the city's image.

It's the message on the walls, more than the fact of the graffiti itself, Medina said, that besmirches Watsonville's reputation. Many of

the writings make reference to names that many people might associate with youth gangs, such as "Poor Side" and "North Side."

"We're already poorly perceived because of a few people (involved in criminal activity)," Medina said. "A lot of people think Watsonville is a place where Mexicans kill people. That's unfair."

It's especially unfair, Medina said, because police believe structured youth gangs in Watsonville are a thing of the past.

"We see P.S. and N.S. on the walls," he said. "What it means is Poor Side and North Side. The graffiti doesn't mean it's an organized criminal-oriented gang. It could be people aged 9 to 16 who want to identify with an area or a name. The worst crime they may be committing is painting the graffiti."

Poor Side, North Side and "C.H." refer to loosely knit groups of youths who live in a particular area of the city. The Poor Side is considered the area around Front and Grove streets. "C.H." refers to the area around City Hall.

Medina acknowledged that the city has a juvenile crime problem that shows no signs of abating, but he said police don't know of any structured

gangs.

Graffiti "has always been a problem here," Medina said, noting that there were several incidents over the Thanksgiving weekend.

"I don't know if it's any more or less (than in the past), but people seem to be more disgusted about it now. They're calling in, and talking to officers they see on the street."

The best way to discourage graffiti, Medina said, is to paint over it quickly. If a graffiti painter is caught, he or his parents have to pay for the painting.

Early last week, police caught two 14-year-old boys spray-painting the Pajaro Valley Cold Storage building at Second and Walker streets. Neither boy claimed affiliation with any of the loosely knit groups.

"They had to stand on top of their bikes to do the painting," Medina said.

Because graffiti painters tend to do their work when nobody is around, they're seldom caught.

There were gangs in the Watsonville area in the late 1970s and early '80s, mainly the North Side Locos and the Las Lomas Boys.

The feud between the two gangs reached its height when two gang members were slain on Mt. Madonna in 1980; four young men were sentenced to prison in connection with the murders.

But the North Side Locos and Las Lomas Boys no longer exist. Medina said the young men involved in those gangs are now well into their 20s, and a number of Northsiders ended up in jail or prison.

Kurt Ellison