

City bites the hand of a clown who feeds it No laughing matter for 'Mr. Twister'



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Cory McDonald, 'licensed latex manipulator,' at the scene of irritation on Pacific Avenue.

Funny man runs afoul of SC meter laws

By ERIN K. QUIRK
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SANTA CRUZ — The good Samaritan for the '90s wears a big red nose, blows up balloons for your kids and puts money in your expired meter when you park downtown.

But he may just earn you a parking ticket.

"They are taking away my right to be a Christian and a clown," said Cory McDonald, better known as Mr. Twister, who describes himself as a "licensed latex manipulator."

McDonald, a professional clown dressed in his usual striped trousers, spangled hat and suspenders, was making balloon animals in front of the Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Company, Friday afternoon, when he saw a meter man

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Parking control supervisor

approach a car at an expired meter. McDonald said the owner of the car was an acquaintance, so he quickly dropped a quarter in the slot for him.

McDonald said the officer told him not to bother and issued the ticket anyway.

McDonald then shuffled down the sidewalk dropping coins in at least eight other meters. He said the officer fol-

lowed him, stopped at every car and placed a ticket on at least one of them.

"There was 10 minutes left on one meter I put change in, and he gave it a ticket anyway. He made a show of it to spite me," McDonald said. He said the meter man refused to give his name or badge number.

After querying city officials, McDonald learned to his surprise that a city ordinance actually makes it illegal for him to be a good Samaritan.

According to Marlin Granlund, parking control supervisor for the City of Santa Cruz, the law states no person other than the owner or operator of the vehicle may deposit coins in the meter without the owner/operator's consent.

Reached Saturday, Granlund said the

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city will issue a citation to a car in an expired space regardless if money is dropped in after the "parking control deputy" — the official title — has arrived.

"That is the letter of the law," Granlund said, however that there are many laws on the books that aren't as rigorously enforced.

Vice mayor Mike Rotkin said the law was adopted eight years ago because people were known to follow parking deputies around town and drop quarters in expired meters as officers were about to give tickets.

"People could park for three hours without putting change in the meter," Rotkin said. The lost revenues hurt the city, he said.

"It is OK if a guy wants to fill his meter all day long but these people were trying to thwart the meter folks," Rotkin said.

Granlund was skeptical of McDonald's charge that the

deputy placed tickets on cars with unexpired meters.

"The vehicles could not be cited for anything," Granlund said.

McDonald did not incur any punishment for his actions.

"I suppose the Police Department could arrest him (McDonald) for unauthorized deposit of coins," Granlund said.

He said the parking deputies are salaried employees who do not make commissions on their tickets or work on a quota system. The money goes to parking improvements and to pay off a bond for the downtown parking garage.

But Mr. Twister, while emitting his trademark honk and wrangling a latex bug-jar for an awestruck 3-year old on Pacific Avenue Saturday, insisted the law is a bad one,

"If they make being nice to people against the law, it makes it hard for me to do my job," he said.