

# DRUGS Big drug bust in the park



Pete Amos/Sentinel

Sheriff's deputies arrested 10 suspects in the narcotics raid in San Lorenzo Park Tuesday.

## Officers 'amazed how easy it was to buy drugs'

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SANTA CRUZ — San Lorenzo Park, the meeting place of the homeless, loungers and drug dealers, was swept by 40 narcotics squad officers Wednesday afternoon in a crackdown on what has become an open drug market in the middle of town.

Officers blocked off Dakota Street, then surrounded the grassy park and walked in, closing a circle around an estimated crowd of 150 to 200 basking in the warmth of another sunny day.

They arrested 10 men. Eight of those men, officers say, were among 16 for whom officers had warrants for selling drugs to undercover agents this past month. One of the remaining eight is presently in jail and was booked there. The other seven are being sought. Officers say they have the names of five of those persons.

One man was arrested for parole violation and another for possession of a drug found in the park.

"We were amazed how easy it was to buy drugs in the park; it is so blatant; in my 14 years in police work, I've never seen anything like it," narcotics squad supervisor Peter Mouriski said.

Undercover agents made 12 drug buys in two hours on their best day during their month-long surveillance of the park. Twenty purchases were made and photographs of the transactions were taken.



Pete Amos/Sentinel

Nearby resident watched law enforcement officers make arrests.

More than 50 other transactions were observed and photographed.

He said the narcotics squad is going "to keep heat on the park" to rid it of the open dealing that's going on.

After the arrests, the crowd was asked to leave the park so a search could be conducted.

Many of those leaving headed over the footbridge to Front Street on their way to the Pacific Garden Mall, and officers followed to keep check on any demonstrations, or violence that might carry over.

Police confiscated some backpacks and other property not claimed. Mouriski said he did not take a search warrant in "because the park is a public place."

Officers photographed a number of the people leaving, but did not take IDs,

Mouriski confirmed when questioned by the press.

Mouriski said the narcotics team used a large force "because when one or two city police go in for an arrest, they are surrounded by people and hassled. By having a large force, we avoided any violence or hassling."

The people in the park "just froze," when the circle of officers formed and began to close in, he said.

About \$1,200 was spent on drug purchases by undercover agents for evidential buys of marijuana, LSD and cocaine.

The biggest purchase was for one-quarter ounce of cocaine at a cost of \$600. It was purchased outside the park, but ar-

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# Drug arrests

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rangements for the buy were made within the park, Mouriski said.

He said some dealers offered larger buys if arrangements could be made.

Most of those arrested are small fry in the sub-culture of drug dealing, officers say, but also say their dragnet may have caught the "main supplier to the park." One officer lightly called him "The king-pin," but did not single out his name.

Various charges included conspiracy, forging prescriptions, possession and possession for sale of narcotics, controlled substances, PCP, and marijuana.

Booked into County Jail were Joseph Eugene Omeluk, 23, a transient; Earl Thomas Tate, 23, 120 Ocean St.; Thomas Martin Preston, 30, Oakland; Charles Douglas Roberts, 22, St. George Hotel; Michael Licoln, 28, a transient; William Ray Scott, 27, Emporia, Kan.; David Marshall Martin, 33, 299 Tinkling Creek, Lompico; David Richard Wrightington, 32, Berkeley, and Richard Dean Brave, 19, 252 Tabor Road, Scotts Valley. Timothy James Simmons, 38, Boulder Creek, was booked for probation violation.

Bail is set from \$5,000 to \$20,000 on the various charges.

Mouriski noted that at least five of the men had local addresses, saying that it throws into question the common idea that dealers and others in the park are all transients.

The local narcotics squad, called Santa Cruz County Narcotics Enforcement Team, was formed in July and this was its biggest operation. It includes officers from all local police forces and the District Attorney's Office. It also works with the Attorney General's Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement and agents from that office were in on this operation.

One well-trimmed man who said he's spent four days in the park while he looks for work in Santa Cruz, said of the sweep, "The arrests were done well. It was a precise raid and done well."

One of those arrested was with his family and friends in the park, celebrating his son's third birthday.

"We couldn't find him at first,"



Mouriski said, "then I saw him, way over on the other side of the playground. Ironically, they were celebrating his kid's birthday and having a party."

Another officer said, "His wife told us it was a cold thing to do, to arrest his daddy on his son's birthday."

Roberts' wife Kelly was distraught and telephoned the press immediately after the arrests.

"They came in the park with guns and drew down on my husband. They arrested him just as we were cutting his son's birthday cake. They arrested him right in front of his son. He's (the son) sitting here crying because they took his daddy away on his birthday."

Kelly said she spent \$100 on her boy's party and his birthday bicycle "and then I had to throw all the ice cream and the cake in the garbage can."

"It was cold, it's just not fair," the mother said as she sobbed.

Mouriski said, "It was just ironic that it had to be his boy's birthday party."

In one case, officers went out of their way to avoid arresting a mother-to-be.

"During the undercover operation, we kept refusing to buy from a pregnant lady. She was seven to eight months pregnant and every time we went into the park she

would run up and say, 'do you want to buy some weed, do you want to buy some weed?' And, we would say, 'No!'"

"We didn't want that baby born in our jail," an officer said.

Mouriski was questioned why the arrests were done so dramatically by sweeping the park, rather than to have quietly arrested known dealers when they left the park.

He was asked if it was done dramatically to make a statement to the park's habitues and the community at large that the narcotics team is on the job.

He said, "No. We decided to arrest them in the park because that's where the drug buys were made and that's where they congregate, and we knew they were in there."

At one point, a police surveillance team on the second terrace of the parking lot across the river thought they had lost some of the suspects.

The two officers were observing the park through binoculars and one of them told the other, "Damn, a group of them are walking out of the park."

The suspects came across the footbridge and took a walk on the mall. They returned to the park in time for the sweep, however.