

Bonny Doon

A-6—Santa Cruz Sentinel — Wednesday, Nov. 14, 1984

Threatening incidents prompt Bonny Doon School meeting

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER

Sentinel Staff Writer

BONNY DOON — A series of threatening incidents at Bonny Doon Elementary School has parents and school officials worried enough to set a special meeting at 7:30 tonight to discuss child safety.

Twice last month a man tried to approach children leaving Bonny Doon School, according to Principal Bill Howe, who sent a letter to parents Nov. 7 warning them of the situation.

After the letters were sent, Howe heard of other incidents involving a man who matched the description of the man in the October occurrences.

The child safety discussion is to be part of the Bonny Doon School Board meeting and features a presentation by Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Sgt. Mark Tracy.

It will be held at Bonny Doon Elementary School, 1492 Pine Flat Road.

Two occurrences spurred the meeting.

On Oct. 7 a child was playing in a clearing by a bus stop on Empire Grade Road when a man driving a white car pulled up next to him. The man reached over to open the car door when the child's mother walked up.

The car "took off like a shot," according to Howe.

Then on Oct. 12, a teacher, a mother and a 4-year-old child were leaving the school parking lot when a bizarre-acting man walked up to them, jerked open his jacket

'I told the kids, I don't know if this person was out to hurt anybody but it's best to be a little scared.'

— Principal Bill Howe

and asked the child if he knew who he was.

When it became clear neither adult knew the man, they hurried off the parking lot to the mother's car.

The day after that, Howe talked to students in the kindergarten through sixth-grade school and was told of yet another instance about three weeks ago when a man in a Jeep tried to get a sixth-grade boy into his vehicle, asking if he needed a ride. The man then ordered him to get in and the boy ran away.

Yet another parent told Howe a man had tried to approach her fifth-grade daughter last May while she was waiting for a school bus on Empire Grade Road.

"I told the kids, I don't know if this person was out to hurt anybody but it's best to be a little scared," Howe said.

The man in three of the four cases is described as between 25 and 28 years, 5-foot-11 to 6-feet tall, muscular build, with short brown hair. During the parking lot incident he was wearing a red "Saturday Night Live" T-shirt.

Part of the problem, Howe said, is that none of the occurrences were reported to the Sheriff's Department.

"I phoned the information into the Sheriff's Department but the parents ought to be doing it as these things happen," said Howe.

School Board Trustee Phyllis Strickland said parents have started taking turns watching the bus stops so that someone is there when the bus leaves and arrives.

"We don't think there's cause for alarm, but we want the parents to be aware that there may be a problem," Strickland said.

School officials also talk to children at the beginning of the year, telling them not to accept rides from or to talk to strangers.

Tracy will show a short film geared for elementary school children featuring McGruff, the cartoon dog who urges viewers to "take a bite out of crime." The film tells kids what to do if they're victims of a crime, or what to do if someone is trying to break into their house.

Tracy said he wants to encourage parents to work with the Sheriff's Department.

Parents can help by writing down license plate numbers of suspicious cars and descriptions of suspicious persons, and calling the Sheriff's Department.

Tracy pointed out that the man responsible for molesting an 11-year-old girl in the Branciforte Drive neighborhood earlier this year was arrested because a neighbor wrote down the license number of the car.

With any luck, said Tracy, others who may have seen the man described in the reports will come forward and give sheriff's detectives leads to follow up.