

UCSC Faculty and staff

Police chief knows taste of tear gas

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UC-Santa Cruz officer was in student protests

By Paul Rogers
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Sure there are dozens of mountain bikes stolen, dorm rooms burgled and scofflaws who insist on parking in the chancellor's space.

But if there's one thing the police chief at the perennially activist University of California, Santa Cruz campus has to know how to handle, it's protests.

For career Santa Cruz cop Jan Tepper, who was named new chief of the UC-Santa Cruz police department Aug. 1, maintaining order while respecting marchers' political rights should be no trouble: she's been on both sides.

As a freshman criminal justice major at UC-Berkeley in 1970, Tepper marched in several protests herself, including in the one-year anniversary of the original People's Park demonstrations.

"I toyed with it a little," she said in an interview Thursday. "I was kind of on the fringes — not real serious — but I remember getting tear-gassed with everyone else."

Now a congenial 39-year-old and one of only five female police chiefs in the state, Tepper supervises 14 officers and 13 staff members, who in turn keep tabs on 10,000 students at the rural UC-Santa Cruz campus.



Jan Tepper

She is bringing to the job a laundry list of creative ideas, including putting officers on mountain bikes to thwart auto burglaries and having police review blueprints of proposed buildings, suggesting architectural and landscaping changes to avoid future assaults and break-ins.

"We're a relatively closed community up here, like a small town," she said. "We don't have much trouble with violent crime, so we can get more involved with problem solving."

In fact, when compared to cities of similar size, the UC-Santa Cruz campus is one of the safer communities in the state. According to FBI statistics, between 1986 and 1990, there were 38 violent crimes committed on the campus, 26 of which were assaults. There were five reported rapes, five robberies and no homicides during that five-year period.

During her 13 years on the UC-Santa Cruz force, Tepper has guarded visiting VIPs, such as Sen. George McGovern, the family of Martin Luther King Jr. and the wife of French President Francois Mitterrand.

She assumed command during the Loma Prieta earthquake because the acting chief was out of town. She rounded up janitors to help officers close off campus buildings until damage could be assessed.

See CAMPUS, Page 2B

Campus police chief was once activist

CAMPUS, from Page 1B

Tepper's force is composed of officers who have at least one year of experience in city departments. The department has the same authority and responsibilities as any city department, and is similar in size to Scotts Valley's force.

Her salary — \$72,000 a year — is comparable to Santa Cruz city Police Chief Jack Bassett's salary of \$74,000, ranking her in the middle of other police chiefs in the county.

Asked what images of protests 20 years ago have done to shape her decisions now as a police officer, Tepper said her officers will always try to meet with protest organizers ahead of time, laying out safety concerns and telling them which actions will result in arrests. That planning, she said, goes a long way

toward preventing repeats of ugly '60s-era confrontations where riot police sometimes beat demonstrators and marchers wrecked property.

"I hope we never go back to that," Tepper said. "We want to make expression safe for everybody — to let people know we're not the enemy."

Former Santa Cruz Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt described Tepper as "a real community advocate."

"There will be no question the police will be there to serve the public," Wormhoudt predicted.

Tepper grew up in Southern California, graduated from UC-Berkeley in 1974 and was hired soon after as a Santa Cruz County sheriff's deputy. She joined the UC-Santa Cruz force in 1978, working her way up the hierarchy.

She succeeds Gene Stone, who retired in April after serving 16 years as UC-Santa Cruz chief.