

Police shut down homeless camp

By GREG BEEBE and
KATHERINE EDWARDS
Sentinel staff writers

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SANTA CRUZ — State police arrested six homeless people and their advocates on trespassing charges Friday night as a dozen or so protesters tried to carry on their fourth evening of camping on state-owned land.

The property at the corner of Josephine and River streets, dubbed "First Amendment Park" by the protesters, was cleared after police received a formal complaint from the state Department of Transportation, which owns the property.

The Santa Cruz Union of the Homeless set up camp there Tuesday night to protest the city's camping ordinance — which prohibits sleeping in public between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m. — and what it perceives to be a shortage of essential services and affordable housing for people who are homeless and poor.

"This is not over," said homeless activist Robert Norse. "We intend to continue until homelessness is completely decriminalized."

Anders Corr, a member of the union, said Friday the group's "non-violent direct action" had gone smoothly.

"People have been generally friendly and very supportive of the action," he said.

But Steve Belcher, the Santa Cruz deputy police chief, said the department has received complaints about the presence of the campers, mostly from motorists who have seen the group from busy River Street. Neigh-



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Police officers arrest homeless activist Anders Corr at the protesters' encampment Friday evening.

boring residents and business owners also have complained, Belcher said.

It is the police department's policy to act on trespassing cases only when a complaint is filed by the property owner, said Belcher. The department had not written citations for violating the city's camping ban.

The campers had been sleeping in and around four donated tents and canopies. A supporter, who Corr declined to identify, had provided access

to a nearby toilet, and the protesters had been cleaning up, cutting weeds and planting flowers and vegetables on the site.

After state and local police arrived around 7 p.m., many of the protesters began quietly cleaning up the site, watering the makeshift garden and rolling up tents. A dozen protesters then formed a circle and linked hands, many saying they would return to the site today.

After an hour, six protesters refused to leave and were arrested. Four Caltrans workers on hand cleared off the last shelter and signs, saying they were planning to leave the gear at the police station.

The union's action was modeled after activities taken by Dignity Housing West, an Oakland activist group that says non-violent housing and property takeovers resulted in the creation of more than 200 new units of housing.