

About 130 residents of the Lower Ocean Street neighborhood walk along Bixby Street on Saturday.

# Neighbors march to reclaim streets from gangs, violence, drugs

*Crime & Criminals - 200*

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## SANTA CRUZ

When Gregorio Cardenas brought his wife and three children to the lower Ocean Street neighborhood 10 years ago, he intended for them all to stay.

But soon, the violence and drugs got to be too much. So he made one of the toughest decisions of his life — he would stay and save up money to move to a better neighborhood; the rest of the family would go back to Mexico.

"We suffered five years separated," Cardenas said.

Cardenas and his family live in Aptos now, but that didn't stop them from joining more than 100 residents and church leaders in a march through the lower Ocean Street neighborhood Saturday to show people who've tarnished its name that things are going to change.

"Today we gather to demonstrate the power of prayer and the power a large group of people can bring to a public discussion



about neighborhood safety," said lower Ocean Street resident Erik Larsen. "No one person or group can stand alone to change this neighborhood."

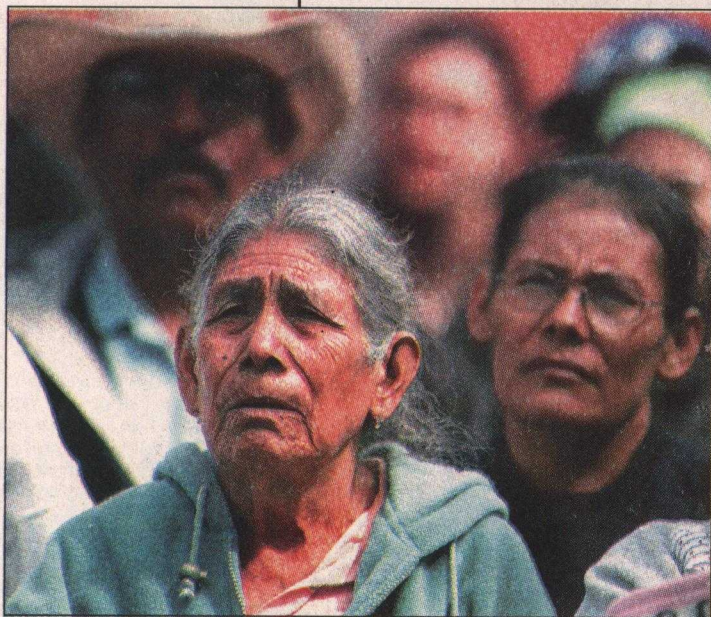
The march capped months of meetings between residents and the Santa Cruz Police Department. At issue was how to rid crime from a neighborhood that brought in 515 calls for police service in just a year's time.

The center of the neighborhood's violence is Bixby Street, which accounted for 400 of those 515 calls between August 2000 and July 2001. The area has become a focal point for gangs and drug users, who descend on the neighborhood when night falls.

In 2000, three Salvadoran immigrants were shot to death on Bixby Street. On New Year's Eve, a 31-year-old Santa

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Lower Ocean Street neighborhood resident Josefina Zamarripa wipes a tear as she listens to a memorial about those who have been slain in the neighborhood during a stop on Saturday's march.



Lower Ocean Street residents of all ages took part in the solemn march Saturday.

**'Today we gather to demonstrate the power of prayer and the power a large group of people can bring to a public discussion about neighborhood safety.'**

ERIK LARSEN, LOWER OCEAN STREET RESIDENT



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

A mother and child embrace during the final stop of Saturday's march in the lower Ocean Street neighborhood

## March

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Cruz resident was found shot to death in a ditch between Bixby and Canfield streets.

But on Tuesday, a major step in making the streets safe for kids was taken. Police and residents agreed on a four-point plan to weed out criminal elements: regular neighborhood meet-

ings with police, activities that build relationships between neighbors, increased participation by city government in solving area problems, and the police department's commitment to undertake special investigations of the area.

Residents paid tribute to victims of violence Saturday by modeling their march after the Catholic church's 14 stations of the cross.

Each station marks a point in Jesus'

walk toward crucifixion. Residents' suffering was compared to Jesus' suffering during this journey.

The march ended at 123 Bixby St., where The Rev. Hector Cruz of Our Lady Star of the Sea Church blessed the street with holy water. Church pastors and members of Holy Cross Church and St. Stephens Lutheran Church were also in attendance as a message of solidarity.

"We're starting to see how our neigh-

borhoods are connected, and how we need to work together," said Pastor Jim Lapp of St. Stephens. "One member of our church put it this way: 'If we don't walk and pray in this neighborhood with these people, it won't be long before we need to walk and pray in the neighborhoods we live in. The problems experienced here don't know boundaries.'"

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