

Street people wait it out

By MARIA GAURA
Sentinel staff writer

Maria

SANTA CRUZ — Just as the seasons come and go, so do policemen on the Pacific Garden Mall. At least, that's what the street people think. For those who regularly hang out on the downtown Mall, the recent police crackdown is just a replay of a scene they have lived through before.

"It's an election year, that's why they're cracking down and writing tickets," said Hawk, a homeless man who sometimes follows the Grateful Dead rock band.

But that doesn't relieve the sting that many street people feel from being the target of continual police attention in the past few days. Since the crackdown began, police have been arresting people for selling marijuana and LSD and writing tickets for sitting on the Mall's brick planters, lying down on benches, and bringing dogs on the Mall.

A chorus of voices saying, "Don't sit there!" warned anyone preparing to rest their rear on a planter. A man preparing to bring his dog across the street to join the group was similarly warned away.

"We look out for each other," Hawk said.

Some people think the crackdown is a misplaced reaction to a recent drug shooting behind the Loudon Nelson Center and a machete attack on the Mall by a man with a history of mental problems.

"They're coming down on us for things others are doing," said Ray, a local homeless man. "The crack dealers are the ones doing the shooting. ... I've never seen a crack dealer on the Mall. And it's the

state's fault for letting these (mentally disturbed) people out on the street. They need someone to care for them."

Ray blamed recent media attention on downtown violence for lumping peaceful street people together with violent criminals.

"There are no violent people here," said Hawk. "I've never seen any violence here, except when there's a problem with a drug deal I've seen an argument, like 'you owe me \$20, and you better have it tomorrow'. But never anything physical."

The arbor area in front of Leask's department store is a favorite gathering place, and in the past week or two the groups have been larger than usual. Many of the newcomers are "Deadheads," devotees of the Grateful Dead rock band who follow the group across the country from concert to concert.

"The reason people are hanging around so much right now is that a couple of concerts have been canceled," said Bob of the Universe, a self-described Deadhead. "One was canceled in Ventura and one in Laguna Seca. Everyone's waiting to see what is happening next."

The life of a Deadhead requires a lot of travel, and many devotees feel discriminated against because of their gypsy lifestyle.

"What's so bad about somebody without a home who likes to live outside?" said Hawk.

"You're hard to control if you're homeless," said Rose, a Deadhead with a gentle Scottish accent. "And they hate it. They don't know where you're going to be tomorrow."

All of the street people inter-

viewed acknowledged that drugs play a big role in street life, but they emphasized that the drugs of choice are marijuana and LSD, which they see as less harmful than cocaine, heroin and alcohol.

Though the police presence has put a damper on much of the open drug peddling, several men still strolled from person to person on the Mall offering "hits" of LSD or "buds" of marijuana.

"Drugs are illegal whether we agree with the government or not," said Bob of the Universe. "When you walk around saying it right out loud, that's an ignorance problem, not a drug problem."

Police harassment and arrests for petty crime are expected on the street, and most street people plan to just wait out the current police crackdown.

"If the police make society feel better, then go for it," said Jim, a young Deadhead who recently moved to Santa Cruz. "California is liberal, that's why I moved here. And Santa Cruz is the most laid back town in California, I think. I like the scene here."