

South County feels effects of gang violence

Gangs
Residents mobilize to curb jump in crime, drug use

By **DONNA JONES**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

No one has to tell Second Street resident Dan Hernandez that gang activity is on the rise in Watsonville.

WATSONVILLE He's been watching the trend in his neighborhood for the past two years.

One night last fall, a young man was shot in the hand in front of Hernandez's house. Last Thursday a brawl between teenagers broke out in late afternoon on a

street corner a few doors from his home. Young children were getting off school buses as the young men engaged in the melee struck each other with sticks.

Hernandez, who spearheads a neighborhood watch group, said he and his family have been threatened by teens he believes are gang members or gang wannabes. He let his front yard go because he got tired of being harassed while working.

"It's progressively gotten worse," Hernandez said. At this point most residents are in "bat-

ten down" mode, he said.

What's happening on Second Street is part of a larger story, according to Watsonville Police Capt. Eddie Rodriguez. Gang activity is up citywide, coupled with an increase in drug use and sales, he said.

An apartment complex near Airport Boulevard is battling

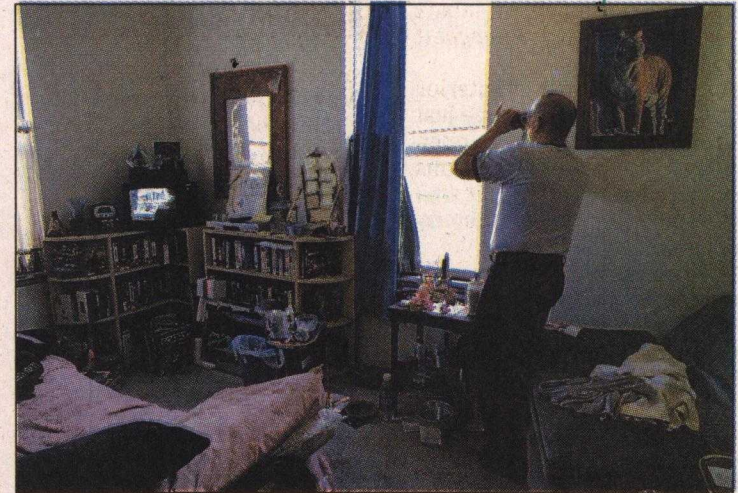
gang infiltration, and the stabbing of a teenager last Friday afternoon near E.A. Hall Middle School also appears gang-related, Rodriguez said.

It's hard to say what's driving gang activity, Rodriguez and oth-

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Second Street resident Dan Hernandez keeps tabs on gang activity in his neighborhood using binoculars at his living room window.

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Gangs

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ers say. The issue is complex, and there's likely a combination of factors. But Rodriguez said funding constraints in the police department are playing into the problem. A hiring freeze, for example, has left the department down three officers.

Linda Perez of Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance said groups that provide counseling, recreational activities and other interventions all have taken hits and reduced programs.

"A real deterrent to gang involvement, especially with young people, is to engage them in pro-social activities, to have adults available to them, to listen to them, to take them seriously and to do things with them," Perez said. "Yet the resources aren't available to provide those interventions."

But parents are concerned, she said. More than 100 attended recent workshops that the Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance group sponsored. The workshops were aimed at alerting parents to signs of gang involvement.

What is clear is that neighborhoods ultimately feel the brunt, and it doesn't take much to turn one into a battleground. On Second Street residents and police trace the problem to two houses.

"The gang members are hanging out, and just basically trying to rule that part of the street," Rodriguez said.

Ilia Bulaich grew up on Second Street in the 1960s, and has remained in the neighborhood. It's traditionally been a working-class neighborhood, he said, and that hasn't changed, though the Irish and Yugoslavian immigrants who once lived on the street have largely given way to Latinos.

The small homes were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and most have seen better days. They share the street with welding shops and similar businesses that inhabit former fruit packing sheds and canneries.

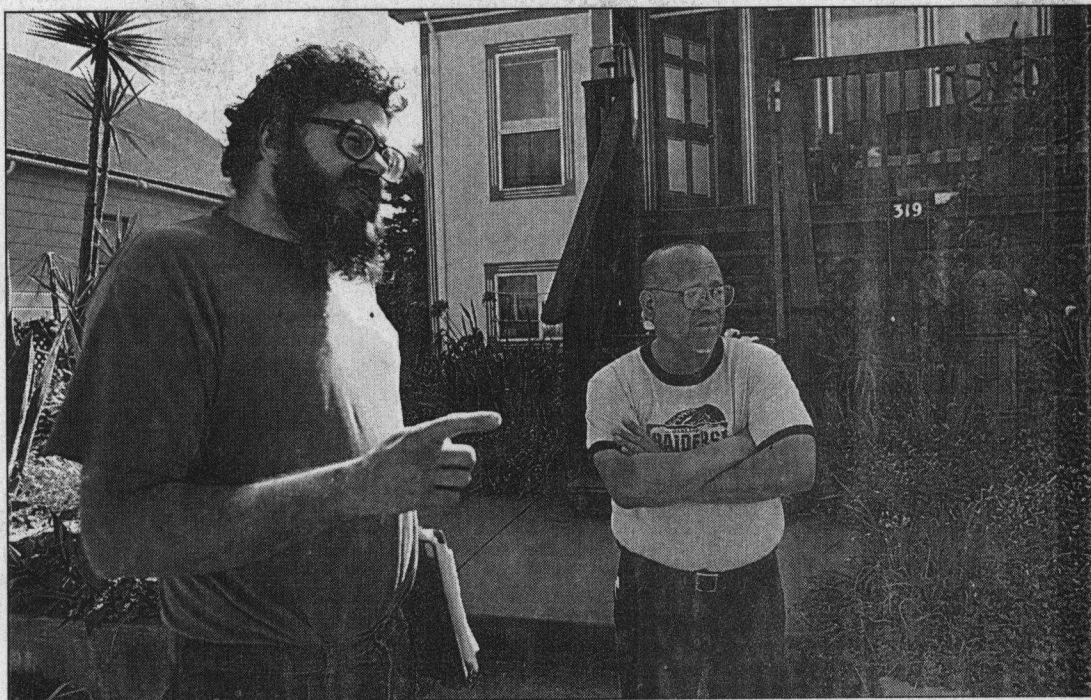
Bulaich joined Hernandez in establishing a neighborhood watch group last year. A couple of months later the windshield of his truck was shot out, an act he doesn't find coincidental. Though a few residents are standing up to those they believe are gang members, most are not, he said.

"They create this whole atmosphere of terror and intimidation and fear, where individuals give up," Bulaich said.

Hernandez and Bulaich continue to speak up, most recently taking their case to the City Council.

Across town, at Sunny Meadows Apartments off Airport Boulevard, the management is standing up to similar problems, Rodriguez said.

Debra Ortiz, administrator of the 200-unit complex, said management has a zero-tolerance policy toward



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Ilia Bulaich is part of the Second Street neighborhood watch group, as is Dan Hernandez.

Convicted teen faces CYA sentence

By CATHY REDFERN
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An 18-year-old Watsonville man faces sentencing March 25, and possible time at the much-maligned California Youth Authority, after his conviction Thursday for a gang-related attempted murder.

SANTA CRUZ That conviction could send Loreto Arizpe to CYA until age 25. But recent reports highlighted problems at CYA have led some counties to stop sending youth there, and District Attorney Bob Lee has said he does not support such incarceration.

But Lee said changes have been made at CYA facilities, including the appointment of new administrators and that he and county probation officials plan to tour the facilities and check on those changes March 20, a few days before Arizpe is to be sentenced.

The group will check the status of county inmates, also, he said. "Mr. Arizpe has an adult case

pending so he will be here a little longer, and I'm confident when he does get to the point of sentencing there will be a facility that will house him and protect the public," Lee said.

Local officials can't choose where in the system individual youth are sent, he said.

And the ultimate decision on Arizpe's sentence will be up to Judge Michael Barton.

Arizpe has garnered community support with friends and teachers attending his six-week trial. His teacher at Renaissance High School, Jennifer Laskin, said he was traumatized by the state juvenile detention system and released with no post-release care.

"He's a product of the system," she said, calling him one of the most "amazing students I have ever taught."

Laskin said the teen is innocent. She plans to create a support network for him when he is released.

Prosecutor Christine McGuire has a different view of Arizpe, who was also convicted of enhancements of committing the attempt-

ed murder as a gang member and for causing great bodily injury.

She says Arizpe attacked a man who was visiting his sister in Watsonville, after pretending to befriend him at Beach Street Market, mistakenly thinking he belonged to a rival gang.

As the men walked, Arizpe knelt to supposedly tie his shoe and came up and stuck a knife or ice pick in the man's throat, just missing a carotid artery, McGuire said.

"It's a just verdict," she said.

The charges would carry a life sentence if Arizpe were tried as an adult.

Arizpe also was involved in a gang-related fight at County Jail and faces a preliminary hearing in that assault case Monday.

Arizpe's attorney, Sean Gallagher, said he had not decided where to propose his client be sent. He said Arizpe was very intelligent, but declined to discuss his case further.

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gang activity. She's working with police, security services and the courts to keep the complex safe. She speaks with pride about its 12 acres of garden-style apartments, its computer learning center and homework help project for kids.

"We have a lot of good families living here," she said. "We're striving to keep a good safe com-

munity."

Police plan to team up with the city's Neighborhood Services division in the next few weeks to hold seminars aimed at helping residents take control of their neighborhoods. Rodriguez said while police recognize the problem, they can't solve it alone.

"What the group on Second

Street is doing is coming together and basically sending a message that they are not going to tolerate any kind of violence in their neighborhood," he said. "That's the only way this problem is not going to become worse."

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