

Police crack down on Mall

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SANTA CRUZ — Police turned on the heat on the Pacific Garden Mall Tuesday.

Four days after three people were injured when one man attacked another with a machete in the midst of a sidewalk sale — on the morning The Sentinel ran a story on crime and other troubles along this city's supposed shopping paradise — the Santa Cruz Police Department doubled the number of

officers walking a beat along the Mall and instructed officers working other beats to cruise by the downtown area as well.

By noon, people along Pacific Avenue were acutely aware of the increased number of blue uniforms.

"Boy, there sure are a lot of cops here today," one woman commented to her companion as they walked along Pacific Avenue.

At the corner of Cooper Street and Pacific Avenue, a large police

truck was parked up on the sidewalk in front of Pacific Western Bank.

A half-block away, a motorcycle cop was writing up two bicyclists.

At the north end of the Mall two officers stood by while a third handed a ticket to a man on roller skates.

"We're trying to add a little bit more presence down there," said Deputy Police Chief Steve Belcher.

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"We want to reduce the complaints about drug dealing, drinking and panhandling, with drug dealing being the main target."

He said the increased enforcement was coincidental to the news story, and had been planned for some time.

Along with sporadic violent confrontations, the downtown area — particularly the south end of the Mall — has become a hotbed of narcotics dealing over the past month. Things have become so intense that some public phone booths have been removed to discourage dealers using the Mall as

an office.

Still, while the roller-skater was being cited, a man with long black hair carrying a backpack walked up first one side of Pacific Avenue then down the other, offering to sell "pot" to whoever fit his customer criteria.

A few minutes later, a man in a tie-dyed outfit who was carrying a backpack was told by the police officer to move along from the spot he'd chosen in front of a clothing shop.

The man walked backward down the sidewalk, gesturing at the crowd seated on the benches eating lunch, yelling back at officers, "These people are loitering! These people are loitering!"

Ken Krzywicki, owner of Ken's Shoes on the northern end of the Mall, said he had been getting phone calls all day from people who had read his comments on the Mall situation in Tuesday's story. He said he appreciated the show of force from the city, but questioned how long it would last.

"I hate to see things happen and then the police reaction comes the very next day," Krzywicki said. "How long will it last? It should have been happening all along."

Krzywicki also said he didn't think ticketing bicyclers was going to effect any great change on the Mall, and that he worried that some innocent homeless people would be affected by the

crackdown.

While talking, two men wearing bandanas and blue jeans came into the store. They said they were looking for new boots to wear while hopping railroad trains.

"It's time to hit the rails," one said. "Come back in the winter."

Neither man bought boots. Krzywicki said they were regular window shoppers.

"I'm sure we'll arrest some (of the troublemakers) and then some others will be deterred and go elsewhere," Belcher predicted.

"I'm not sure where they'll go. Some will go to jail, some will go to other areas of town and some will give up and leave town altogether," Belcher said.