

Santa Cruz/Monterey

CRIME AND CRIMINALS

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Ubiquitous graffiti 'tagger' to be sentenced

By Lee Quarnstrom
Mercury News Staff Writer

One of Santa Cruz County's most prolific graffiti painters — an Aptos man whose cryptic "tags" espouse a puritanical way of life — will be sentenced this morning in Municipal Court.

Noah Levine, 20 — whose distinctive black "8edge" tag has been spray-painted on hundreds of walls and other flat surfaces throughout the county — pleaded guilty to nine misdemeanor counts of vandalism. He had been charged with 27 counts of vandalism after an investigation by detectives from the sheriff's office and the Capitola and Santa Cruz police departments.

Prosecutors, who said Thursday that

Municipal Court Judge Mike Barton has already indicated he will not send Levine to jail, have asked victims of Levine's vandalism — individuals and businesses who have had to erase the "8edge" graffiti — to show up for the 8:30 a.m. sentencing.

"We want the judge to hear from people who've had to spend time and money getting rid of the graffiti," said Nancy Kerrigan, assistant district attorney.

She noted that one Live Oak food wholesaler, Ledyard Co., spent \$3,000 to erase "8edge" graffiti from its facilities and that other companies and individuals have spent hundreds of dollars to remove Levine's handiwork.

She said she believes Levine should

spend time behind bars to send a message to other taggers that "it's not cool. It's a crime."

"Our position," her boss, District Attorney Art Danner said, "it that he has to do some time in jail. There's this sense by a certain number of kids that this is OK. We want to send a strong message that vandalism is not going to be tolerated."

Levine turned himself in to Len Lofano, a sheriff's investigator who had learned his identity. Lofano was originally involved in the case because he specializes in gang-related matters.

However, Lofano noted on Thursday, Levine is not a gang member and his hundreds of "8edge" mottoes spray-

painted around the area have nothing to do with gangs.

In fact, said Lofano, much graffiti is totally unrelated to gangs and much is spray-painted by "Anglos, blacks, Hispanics" and members of other racial and ethnic groups "without any relation to race or creed."

"Many," he said, "are from families with money. They're just bored; they're doing it for the hell of it."

Lofano said there are three basic types of graffiti "artists," most of whom are between the age of 12 and their early 20s.

Some are gang members, he said, who use graffiti to mark their turf.

Others are "piecers" who paint "pieces,"

such as colorful murals. These, said Lofano, believe in "art for art's sake" combined with a "catch-me-if-you-can" attitude.

Many, he said — including Noah Levine — are "taggers" who spray-paint their logos on a "hit-and-run basis" trying to avoid the police.

"8edge," said Lofano, comes from the word "straightedge." Straightedge, he said, describes a "puritanical" way of life espoused by some young people, a vegetarian lifestyle with no premarital sex, no drugs or alcohol, no smoking and no caffeine.

"But they apparently can do vandalism," he said, "What a paradox!"