

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
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Violent crime

It's on increase in Santa Cruz County

Even though Santa Cruz County's crime rate has dropped to its lowest in seven years, according to Sheriff Al Noren's annual report, it appears Santa Cruz County has become an increasingly dangerous place to live.

Violent crime has risen dramatically, while crimes against property have declined.

There were a total of 305 homicides, rapes, robberies and aggravated assaults in 1976, but the figure rose to 446 last year, the report showed.

In three other major crime categories — burglary, larceny and auto theft — the total dropped from 4,284 in 1976 to 3,916 last year.

The total crime rate dropped by 10.2 per cent from 1976.

Still, a three-page "Highlights" section

detailing crime last year reads like a Police Gazette thriller.

It lists a chronology of rape, murder, hijacking and dope arrests.

Sheriff's detectives investigated 2,786 felony cases and cleared approximately half of them.

In addition, 3,694 other cases were investigated by the detective division, and there were 604 cases processed by the coroner's unit.

Narcotic enforcement deputies seized more than \$4 million worth of contraband during arrests and raids last year.

The illicit drugs included more than \$2.6 million worth of heroin and 2,146 pounds of marijuana.

Sheriff's patrolmen were a busy lot last year, too, the report indicates. There were 73,372 calls for service from patrolmen, as

compared to 63,944 in 1976.

Of the service calls last year, 2,574 were felony reports, 2,368 misdemeanor, 3,102 incident reports and 65,328 were miscellaneous calls for service.

Noren called his patrol division, "the frontline operation" of the sheriff's office in maintaining the "commitment to provide law enforcement to the community 24-hours a day."

The sheriff also praised the 151 citizen volunteers who along with deputies comprise the sheriff's reserve forces division.

Included in this division are the air posse, mounted posse, underwater team, jeep posse and the Explorer Post 613, composed of nine adults and 15 Explorer Scouts.

Sheriff Noren also noted that the jail suit in federal district court, filed in 1972, has been litigated without going to trial.

But he said, "This will in no way relieve the county of Santa Cruz from providing better detention facilities."

Last year 7,278 persons were booked at the Front Street jail, as compared with 5,849 in 1976. This is despite the fact that qualified persons are being released without bail.

And the average daily population last year was 87.3. This is despite the fact that qualified persons are released without bail and others are being cited in the field and not booked at the jail.

There were 2,012 felony arrests last year, compared to 1,762 the year before.

Overall, Noren said of the past year, "I am happy to report to you that the sheriff's office has made great strides in providing better and more professional service . . .

"While there can never be an acceptable level of crime," Noren said, "I am pleased to advise you that we are making every effort possible to control it."