

Can't hang out with Officer Crumpton

By CANDACE ATKINS
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TAYLOR'S HOT DOG stand is handing out one less midnight cup of coffee these days, since Watsonville Police Officer Leon Crumpton retired after some 25 years on the force.

Crumpton worked a lot of graveyard shifts, said fellow officer Steve Nakamoto, and he regularly visited the hot dog stand just before it closed at midnight on weekdays and 1 a.m. on weekends for that last cup of coffee before going back on duty.

"He was known for 'hanging out at the corner' as we called it," Nakamoto said. "It was kind of his hangout. It was his cor-

ner."

But he actually did little hanging, Nakamoto said. Mostly, it was Crumpton's predictable visit rather than any time he spent at the hot dog stand that earned him teasing from other officers.

It became such a ritual, Nakamoto said, that no one referred to the hot dog stand itself. It was simply "the corner." And when the stand was moved a few years ago from Maple and Union streets by the old police station to East Beach Street, "the corner" reference went with it. So did Crumpton and other officers who needed late-night coffee or a meal on the run.

Crumpton may never again

visit the hot dog stand in the small hours, but there's no way he can forget it. Fellow officers — most of them off duty — gathered recently in uniform to give one final toast to Officer Crumpton. Posing with WPD canine patrol dog Nemo, the group had their picture taken and the shot blown up and framed. It was presented to him last night at his retirement dinner.

"He was one of the old-timers," Nakamoto said. "We're down to two or three now. This is a fairly young department. We're watching a whole generation leave when these guys retire."

Nakamoto said Crumpton was "a very smart cop. He was a

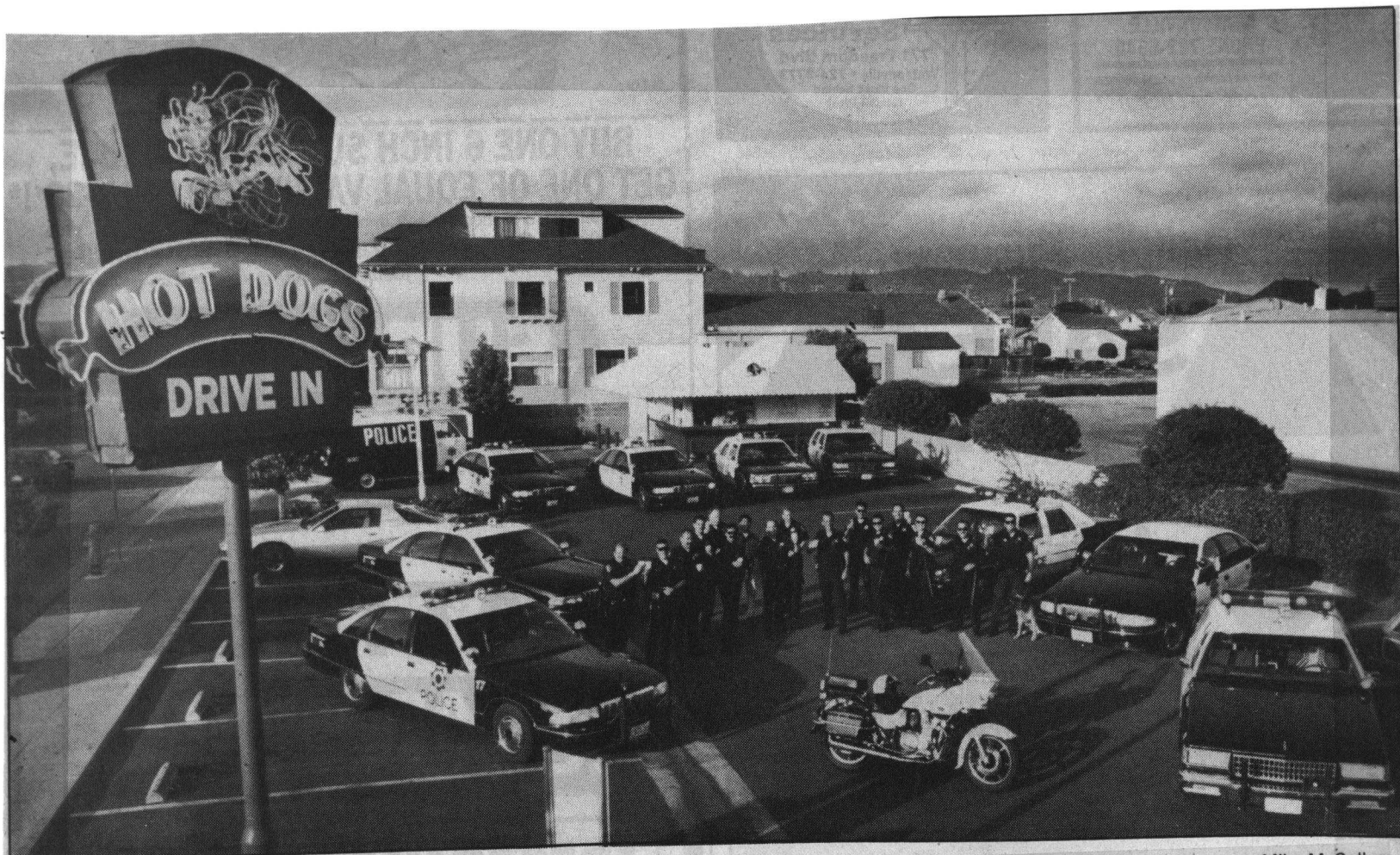
very good street cop. He knew how to work."

Crumpton spent a number of years on the beat, but was also a field-training officer throughout his career. Nakamoto praised Crumpton for his willingness to help new recruits beyond job requirements, saying he helped more than one rookie through the rough spots of adjusting to a policeman's life.

Crumpton was also a member of the hostage-negotiating team at WPD — more evidence, Nakamoto said, of his ability to work effectively with others.

Crumpton is a long-time Watsonville resident. He and his wife, Joyce, have two daughters, April and Laurie.

Taylor's Hot Dogs was never robbed during Crumpton's shift.



Mike McCollum

WPD officers wanted Leon Crumpton to remember the good times at 'the corner.'