

# Local

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## Rainbow colors replace graffiti

### Community effort in Watsonville

By JOHN ROBINSON  
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WATSONVILLE — Margarite, an older woman wrapped in a shawl, watched a group of kids paint her neighborhood fence a mish mash of green, blue and purple.

No one had asked permission to paint the fence.

"It's beautiful, I like it very much," Margarite said in Spanish, clasping her hands and smiling. "Bonita. Muy bonita," she said again.

With each stroke of the paint roller, more gang scrawlings, crude names, pictures and all manner of black spray painted markings disappeared. Soon the entire fence was striped with odd colors like a patchwork circus tent and Margarite was happy.

In this alley near E.A. Hall Middle School, and a dozen other locations around Watsonville, the battle against graffiti was being won Saturday morning — if only for a few hours — as dozens of volunteers gathered to paint over graffiti scarred walls and fences.

"I know they'll come back, but so will we," said Ethel Harris, a volunteer. "They'll paint it over and then we'll come back and paint them over. At least it looks better than it did."

Less than a mile away "Bust," a 16-year-old "graffiti artist," was busy painting out some of his own markings. As he slopped on another coat of purple paint, he couldn't help but size up the wall's new potential as a challenging canvas given the patchwork colors.

As a police officer looked on, Bust swore he was done doing graffiti.

"No man, this is it, I'm done," Bust said.

Bust was a "volunteer" by court order, working off 30 hours of community service. Bust was arrested a few months ago while spray painting the side of Payless Drugs in Watsonville at 10 a.m. while people looked on.

"Some guy in a truck, a volunteer cop I guess, pointed me out," Bust said. "I started because I just

'I know they'll come back, but so will we. ... At least it looks better ...'

— Ethel Harris,  
volunteer

didn't care."

Bust used to practice his tags and pictures at home before choosing a wall and venturing out, usually at night, to spray. His marks can still be seen throughout Watsonville.

"You're never going to stop it," Bust said. "There's too many people doing it. It's art."

But no more, Bust swears. His graffiti days are over. For now he gets his painting fix by working on legal murals in downtown Watsonville as part of his court-ordered service.

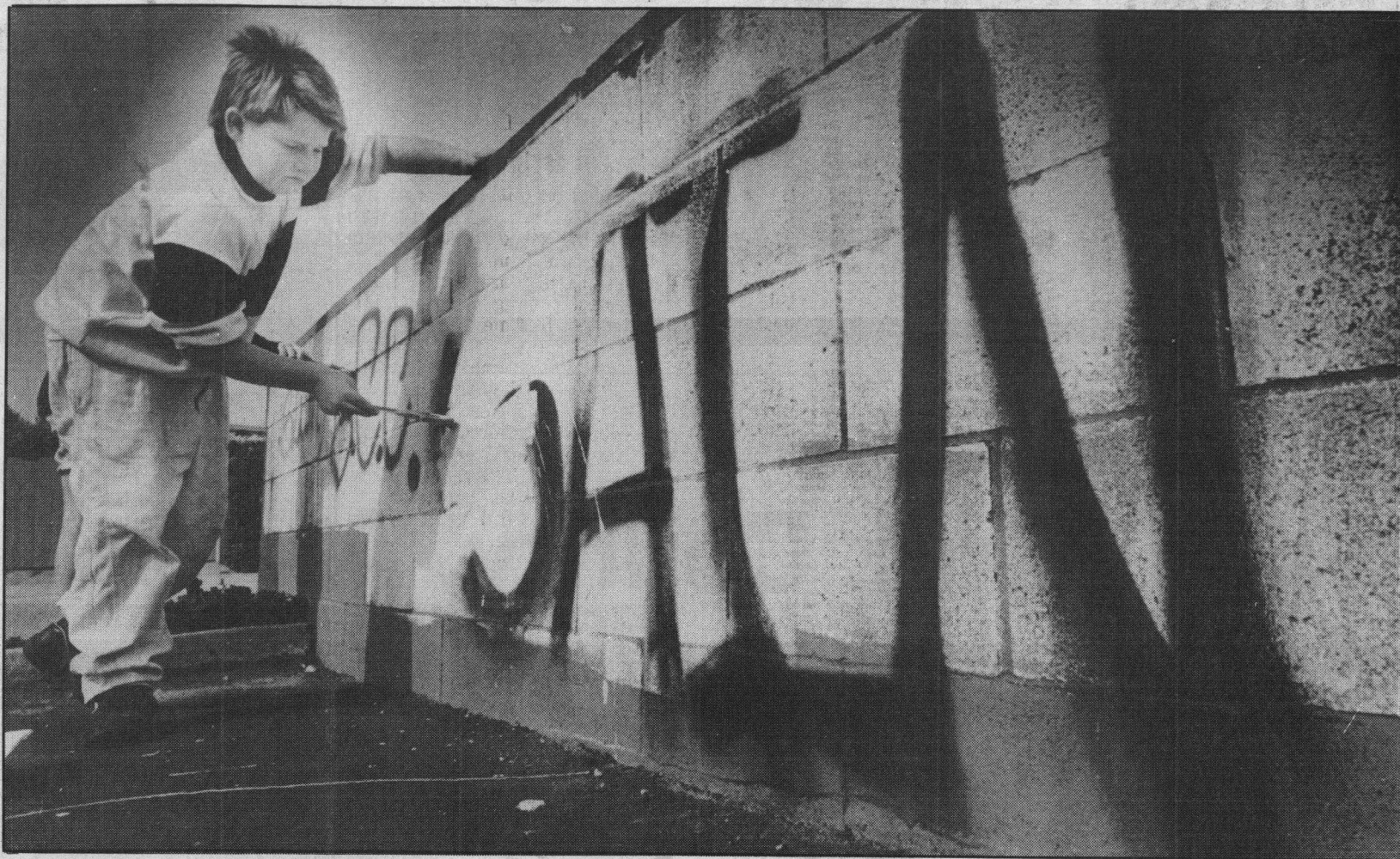
Watsonville Police Detective Bob Montes said getting to know the graffitists on a personal basis, such as during Saturday's cleanup, helps solve the problem.

"I think it's great to get to know them one on one," Montes said. "And to get them out here so they can see how people feel about it — the businesses and people in the community."

More than 100 people turned out for the paint over, the third sponsored by Neighbors Against Graffiti, or NAG. The community response was overwhelmingly favorable, according to participants.

At one point the group ran out of brushes and went to the Freedom Paint Center to buy about \$100 worth of supplies. When the store proprietors found out who the group was, they donated the materials.

A number of other businesses also pitched in, and at least for a day, the blight of spray-can vandalism was covered by the rainbow colors of community spirit.



Top, Mike Barnes tackles a wall behind the Watsonville DMV office Saturday morning during a community effort in that city to paint out graffiti. Left, Jackie Bogges, with daughter Elizabeth and friend Melissa Guerrera, put a new coat on a blighted Alta Vista neighborhood fence. Yellow Cab of Watsonville and the Police Department provided transportation to outlying sites that ranged from Green Valley Road to lower Main Street.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos