

Anti-graffiti coordinator hired

By STEVE PEREZ
Sentinel staff writer

7-16-93

SANTA CRUZ — Graffiti vandals have a new opponent in the fight against "tagging" in Santa Cruz County.

Using money from a federal job-training grant, the county has hired a someone to coordinate the Graffiti Task Force, District Attorney Art Danner said at a news conference Thursday.

He is Jesse Gonzalez, an 18-year-old Watsonville resident.

The position was created at the recommendation of the countywide Graffiti Task Force, a group of residents, merchants and law enforcement representatives.

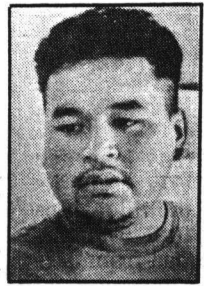
Danner says the coordinator will work out of the DA's office during a three-month trial. Gonzalez will work with cities and business owners who have areas they want painted over, as well as manage a clearing house of information on how to fight graffiti.

Until Gonzalez was hired two weeks ago, cities, counties and community groups had been taking individual approaches to the problem of graffiti.

When he was younger, Gonzalez admitted, he "tagged" at least once, but stopped after finding his own house vandalized one day.

At the news conference, he encouraged members of the community to take a stand on the issue.

"Without the communities' help, there will be no change in our situation," Gonzalez said. "If tag-



Gonzalez

gers' think that the community doesn't care, then we won't be able to stop what's going on."

Gonzalez will work with the California Youth Authority's Bob Trujillo, who commands a work crew of wards willing to paint over graffiti-marred walls.

Another suggestion being mulled by Trujillo and Gonzalez is doing things like planting shrubbery to make bare walls less inviting to 'taggers.'

Gonzalez also will have help from community groups like Barios Unidos in Santa Cruz, and the Capitola Chamber of Commerce.

Another duty is responding to inquiries from residents with the following tips on what to do if they're vandalized:

- Document the vandalism by writing down the dates and times the graffiti appears.
- Watch for strangers and strange cars in your neighborhood.
- Photograph the graffiti before painting over it. Most taggers have characteristic signatures and the pictures can be sent to high schools to be checked out.
- Obtain a cost estimate of the damages. The estimates could aid in the prosecution.

"I want there to be a clear and strong message from this office that we consider graffiti a serious crime," Danner said. "We consider these irresponsible acts a form of pollution, and they will not be tolerated."

Jesse Gonzalez can be reached at 454-2538, or write Graffiti Task Force, in care of the District Attorney's Office, 701 Ocean St., Room 200, Santa Cruz, CA 95060.