

Authorities alerted to troubling graffiti

Crime and Criminals - Graffiti

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Racist message, swastikas found in rural area

By **CATHY REDFERN**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Some San Lorenzo Valley residents who travel Kings Creek Road came across some troubling graffiti recently — five large swastikas spray painted on the road.

BOULDER CREEK

A neighbor who wished only to use his first name, Jonathan, said he came across the symbols on a walk about two weeks ago, near the intersection of Sunbeam Avenue. He contacted the NAACP, spoke to neighbors, photographed the graffiti and is planning to file a report with the Sheriff's Office.

"I'm of Jewish background, and I was very upset and scared," he said. "I wasn't sure what to do, so I kind of sat on it for awhile and then decided I had to do something about it."

Jonathan thinks the vandals might have been targeting a nearby Tibetan Buddhist Retreat Center, as "(expletive) Tibet" was written in the same black paint on a nearby bridge. Someone has since spray-painted "free" over the offensive verb.

Sheriff's Sgt. Jeff Lansdowne said he was not aware of the incident, which he considers a hate crime, but that deputies want to be aware of such problems so they can patrol those areas. Such reports rear their heads periodically, but not frequently.

Lansdowne has been following a budding group of a dozen teens from the Boulder Creek and Ben Lomond areas who act like white supremacists and call themselves "The Boulder Boys."

He has gotten reports since March on the group, whose members reportedly "yell and scream" things like "what are you doing in our town?" to people of color. They shave their heads and wear steel-toed boots and other dress to identify themselves as white supremacists.

The group has no criminal complaints filed against them, he said, but are drawing the attention of deputies and others.

Wanda Conaway-Knight of Boulder Creek is on the NAACP board and is active in diversity training at local schools.

Conaway-Knight was attacked verbally and punched by a white woman in Boulder Creek in December of 2001, but says the community rallied around her and her family.

"My belief is that the good outweighs the bad," she said. "We're not on the defensive, we're just watching any kind of racism. It should be known that it's not acceptable. But people need to change

their hearts, and I believe they do."

Similarly low-key about the vandalism, Mara Rogers of the Vajrapani Institute said staff members saw and spoke of the writings, but were not unduly concerned. A "friend of the center" went down and covered them with dirt.

"Our assumption is that it's probably kids with too much time and not enough to do," she said.

The center has not had such problems in its 26 years there, she said, adding that paying too much attention can feed it.

Hate crimes need to be tied to a certain person or group of people, said Assistant District Attorney Celia Rowland, who has a background in prosecuting hate crimes.

Vandalism is a felony if on a church building, or if it causes more than \$400 damage.

Contact Cathy Redfern at credfern@santa-cruz.com.