



Some Aptos and Soquel area business owners say graffiti has been on the rise in some areas.

The Self-Appointed Graffiti Fighters of Aptos and Rio Del Mar

Crime & Criminals - Graffiti

by Michael Thomas

For the past four years, Robert and Marilyn Hoyt have been battling a constant tide of graffiti in the Rio del Mar area. Their efforts to keep the neighborhood looking fresh and free from vandals' markings might even be spreading. Elizabeth and Marc Lipton started a similar effort in their Aptos neighborhood this year.

"We kind of just took it on as a hobby. Then it became a game," Elizabeth said.

For their commitment to this "game," *The Post* would like to recognize the Hoyts and Liptons with special honors for community activism.

Though some Aptos and Soquel area business owners say graffiti has been on the rise in some areas, Marilyn Hoyt says it's been fairly steady in the Rio del Mar beach area

and the neighborhood around Deer Park Shopping Center. However, she added that there are two "taggers" whose signatures have been appearing in the area for at least four years.

"That is surprising," Marilyn said. "Most of them grow out of it."

She and her husband Robert scan key spots almost daily, keeping an eye on posts, benches, signs, retaining walls and alleyways. They photograph the graffiti and then paint over it.

"At least the tagger is not going to have the thrill of seeing their work the next day," she said. "It's hard to have bragging rights if it's not there anymore."

In early summer, a State Parks ranger caught four taggers in the Rio del Mar beach area with paint still fresh on their hands. According to Hoyt, their arrest made a big difference.

The Liptons and the PG&E Box

The Liptons were spurred

into action by a frequent graffiti target in their neighborhood. It was a large PG&E box subjected to the hiss and splatter of spray paint almost every day. After painting over it once, they found they enjoyed the challenge of keeping the box clean.

They keep cans of paint in their car and carry them on evening walks.

"If they get it at night, [Marq] will get it on his way to work before they have a chance to point it out to their friends on the bus," Elizabeth said.

When he paints, Marq often gets puzzled glances from passing drivers, followed by a thumb up.

"Rather than get ticked off by graffiti, you just do something about it and it's good for your mental health," he said.

Hoyt sees it as a simple way to give back.

"There are so many ways to help in a community and this just feels right." ■