



Mike McCollum

Watsonville police officer Pat Murry shares a peaceful moment with students at the local high school.

# City beefs up police presence

## Watsonville calm, but wary officials prepare for new protests

By LARAMIE TREVINO and EMILIO ALVARADO  
STAFF WRITERS

Watsonville police officials yesterday put officers on extra duty and called in additional forces from the California Highway Patrol and the sheriff's department after hundreds of Watsonville High students swarmed through streets in the downtown area stopping traffic and slinging rocks in protest of the Rodney King verdict.

Watsonville city spokeswoman Lorraine Washington said there were reports of rock throwing at the county courthouse annex on Freedom Boulevard and at the high school. A Watsonville police

officer was hit with a rock but was not hurt. Two students were taken into custody for rock throwing, Washington said. There were no reports of damage or injuries, however.

The city normally has about six officers on duty on a regular shift, Washington said. But yesterday that number was increased to 27. Officers were put on a 12-hour schedule, she said. The city also received help in the form of 10 officers from the CHP and the sheriff's department.

"We are preparing for anything that might happen," Washington said.

The few motorists cruising

downtown just before nightfall encountered law-enforcement vehicles all along Main Street. And at Ford's department store, two security guards stood watch over the front entrance, in a visible attempt to discourage looting.

Another business, the 7-Eleven store on East Lake Avenue and Lincoln street boarded up its windows. Washington, who said a store representative informed police late yesterday afternoon of the safety measure, also heard from other shopkeepers who sought advice on whether they should fortify their buildings.

"We discouraged it," she said. Across town in the Watsonville

Square Shopping Center, Pay Less Drug Store posted a guard near the front door.

The entertainment scene also suffered a blow since a teen dance sponsored by the Watsonville Recreation Department at the Santa Cruz County Fair grounds was cancelled as a precaution, Washington said.

By late afternoon, officers who spent the morning outfitted in riot gear, were back in regular uniform, winding up an uneventful late afternoon. "Everything is nice and quiet," Washington, who was working late at the police station, declared.

See PROTEST / back of section ▶

# PROTEST

▶ From Page 1

High school students also were out in force at the County Governmental Center in Santa Cruz, where about 300 protesters gathered about noon and hurled a fire extinguisher through a window before marching downtown. No arrests resulted from the fracas, although an investigation on the vandalism continues, said Sgt. Steve Hartness of the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office.

And at North Monterey County High School in Castroville, two small fires, one in the girls bathroom and the other in the school forum, resulted in \$500 in damages but no arrests or injuries. Less than a dozen students staged a protest at the school's Castroville Boulevard entrance shortly before 1 p.m. that broke up without incident.

Monterey County merchants exercised caution by taking the unusual step of closing Northridge Mall at 6 p.m. last night, instead of the normal shutdown time of 9 p.m. Capitola Mall stores operated on a normal schedule.

Watsonville's protest started at the high school around 10 a.m. after a handful of students distributed fliers early in the morning calling for the demonstration. Hundreds of students marched up Lincoln Street to Freedom Boulevard, to the courthouse, then back to school. School officials did not attempt to stop the students from leaving the school.

Police from Watsonville, the

CHP, and the sheriff's department closely monitored the crowd but made no attempt to clear the streets, which were jammed with marchers.

After rallying at the high school for a few minutes, the marchers then headed for City Hall, where scores of students sat down in the middle of Main Street and closed traffic for about 10 minutes. By this time, officers on foot in riot gear stood on the sidewalk in front of city hall in case students made a move toward the building. But they didn't.

The students then headed back to the school, marching in the middle of Main Street and East Beach Street. One student — a 16-year-old girl — was pulled from the crowd, handcuffed and put in the back of the police car. Officers said she was seen throwing a rock at police.

The girl kept yelling, "What are you doing? I didn't do anything, I didn't do anything." She seemed on the verge of tears as she was handcuffed.

Most motorists sat quietly in their cars and waited as students marched through the streets. But some drivers honked their horns in support and waved peace signs and clinched fists in solidarity.

The mood of the crowd seemed to grow angrier by time it reached City Hall. Several students shouted profanities and made obscene hand gestures at police. Officers, however, did not react.

The anger and frustration was unmistakable in Gina Roman's voice.

"If they can do this to a black person, they can do it to a Mexi-

failed.

can," said the Watsonville High student.

Watsonville Mayor Oscar Rios said the outrage felt by Watsonville High students is also felt by people everywhere who see the King verdict as a "double standard of justice" in America.

"What's happening now is a reflection of people's frustration," he said, referring to the students' march and rioting across the country. While people may feel angry, he called for restraint and non-violence during this "sad" period in American history.

At yesterday's march, several staff members accompanied the students in order to supervise them and try to prevent things from getting out of hand. One was teacher Karyn Bristol.

Bristol said the whole incident could have been avoided if school administrators had given students an opportunity to vent their feeling in an open forum on campus. But no such event was organized.

"It was a big error," Bristol said.

High school principal Roger Mock was not available for comment yesterday. Superintendent Merrill Grant and several assistant superintendents were also unavailable for comment.

Aptos High students had the day off and no other schools in the Pajaro Valley had demonstrations. At other school districts in Santa Cruz County, the sheriff's department reported only one other incident at Soquel High. There, students attempted to leave campus in protest, but school officials called in the deputies and students were directed back to school. There were no arrests, damage or injuries reported.