

Pacific Ave.

South end of Pacific Avenue

On the downtown beat

Mall sergeant is 'one of nicer guys'

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SANTA CRUZ — It's not the hippies, the homeless or the teens who really get to Sgt. Eric Seiley. It's the Deadheads.

"They irritate everyone. They stink, they have bugs and I think the main thing is they look bad. They just usurp and space and stake it out as their territory," he said.

Every year, for about four months, several Volkswagen busloads of Grateful Dead fans make downtown Santa Cruz their hangout while the band plays its San Francisco Bay Area shows. At night, they drive up the coast to Greyhound Rock where they camp.

"I call them the tide," he said. "They come and go."

Deadheads aside, Seiley said that dur-

ing his 18 months working Pacific Avenue, it has become safer, cleaner and more enjoyable. He talks more like a downtown promoter than a police officer, and he has worked with City Hall, street people, and the county Human Resources Agency to improve the area.

Seiley said another key that he can't do much about is getting people from throughout the community to come downtown to shop and enjoy the cafes.

"If there's more of us than of them (panhandlers), then they'll be afraid and go somewhere else," he said. "People don't need to be afraid to come downtown. It's safe here."

Seiley, 46, has been a Santa Cruz cop for 13 years. He came to the area from St. Charles, La., where he was an officer for six years. He and his wife have three adult children, and he also has a grandson.

He has never drawn his sidearm since taking over the downtown beat. He said this is partly because he tries to talk to people and get their voluntary compli-

ance, and partly because people know he means business.

"They know that if I get into a fight I'm going to be the winner," he said.

He says he loves the beat "because you get to act like a human being.

"A lot of the merchants are my friends, and a lot of the people who hang out are my friends," he said.

When it's warm out he wears shorts. He hunkers down to chat with the folks who are drunk on the sidewalks. He is on a first-name basis with some street musicians and with most merchants.

"We all just love him. He's so easy to talk to, and he listens and actually tries to do something," said Kathleen McBurney, co-owner of Cat-N-Canary, a clothing store on Pacific Avenue.

A young man named Mouse, who likes to sit on the sidewalks when the sun is shining, also said Seiley is a good cop.

"The sergeant? Actually, I think he's one of the nicer guys out here. He doesn't try to just harass people," he said.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Santa Cruz police Sgt. Eric Seiley patrols the 900 block of his beat.