

Crime - Criminals -

Graffiti

Capitola police work late for graffiti arrest

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CAPITOLA — A 13-year-old Corralitos boy who was alone on the streets of Capitola early Thursday was arrested on suspicion of writing graffiti at 20 locations with a marker, police said.

He is the 10th youth arrested in Santa Cruz County in the past two weeks for "tagging."

The boy was taken into custody shortly past midnight after a police officer watching from a rooftop spotted him "tagging" the state Department of Motor Vehicles building.

He is suspected of using the tag "SKOT," police said.

The boy was observed by reserve officer Jake Nelson, who was using binoculars to watch for vandals.

Nelson called dispatch and officers converged on the area, said Sgt. Pat White.

Officer Al Velasco arrested the boy near the Chevron gas station about 200 feet away from the DMV office on Capitola Road.

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The police department is using off-duty officers for special assignments in the fight against graffiti, Braunton said.

Jack Cary, manager of the Capitola DMV, estimated damages at roughly \$300. He said one wall and several signs in the parking lot were damaged.

The DMV building is being hit with graffiti about once a month, Cary said.

The youth reportedly went around the neighborhood with a black marker, writing on signs, cars and dumpsters, according to police. There was no estimate on the total damage.

Police said they did not know why a 13-year-old boy from Corralitos was alone in Capitola.

"It's troubling, isn't it?" said Sgt. White.

District Attorney Art Danner said the boy is the youngest to be arrested in a graffiti case.

He said he's "gratified" that so many arrests have been made.

"It's the most we've ever had," Danner said. "Every part of the community, especially law enforcement, is focused on catching these people who are polluting the community."

Residents and merchants of Capitola are joining

forces with police to try to end a rash of graffiti in the city, which has suffered about \$50,000 in damages.

They are forming an "action committee" to do stakeouts and keep an eye out for vandals, said Toni Castro, executive director of the Capitola Chamber of Commerce.

It would be similar to neighborhood watch groups that keep a lookout around their homes, Castro said.

The new citywide group will focus not only on graffiti, but also vandalism and shoplifting.

Last month, Capitola police reported that graffiti taggers had vandalized several village business by scratching "HTK" into several windows.

Three youths were arrested in Santa Cruz on suspicion of spraying and scratching "HTK," which reportedly stands for "hard to catch" on businesses on Pacific Avenue.

Capitola police are looking at the trio as suspects in its case.

Six youths were also arrested last week on suspicion of tagging in Eastside Santa Cruz and in Live Oak.

For more information on the action committee, call the Capitola Chamber of Commerce at 475-6522.