

Big target on repeat offenders

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PHOTOS BY DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Surrounded by Santa Cruz city and county officials at the corner of Pacific Avenue and Cooper Street, District Attorney Bob Lee announced Monday a pilot program to deal with criminal activity by repeat offenders in downtown Santa Cruz in response to the Santa Cruz Public Safety Task Force study.

"We're all in," DA says of crime effort

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SANTA CRUZ » Over the next eight months, downtown Santa Cruz will be transformed into a criminal justice laboratory.

Numerous local officials, including police, prosecutors, mental health providers, judges and elected officials, on Monday announced an intensive effort to target crime along the city's foremost public gathering strip, Pacific Avenue. They hope to target repeat offenders in an effort to clean up what many locals complain is the top issue facing the city — crime.

"We're not guaranteeing a safer Santa Cruz. This is a very difficult issue," District Attorney Bob Lee said, at a press conference held on the corner of Pacific Avenue and Cooper Street. "What we are guaranteeing is, we're all in."

The effort will be housed in a to-be-determined downtown office, and include full-

time representation from several county and city offices, including probation, as well as local nonprofits. Lee is committing his top deputy, Jeff Rosell, to the project, and cases arising from the effort will be routed to Judge Denine Guy, who helps oversee misdemeanor cases for Santa Cruz County Superior Court.

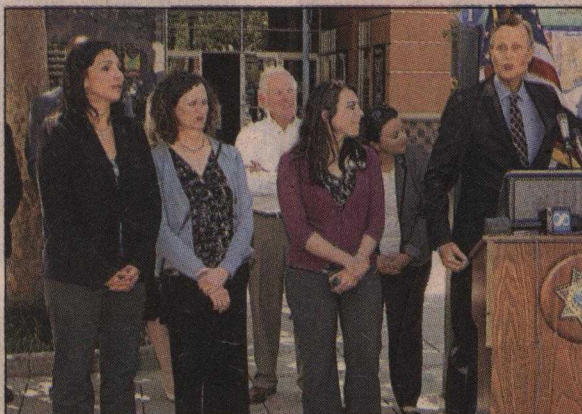
The intent is to reduce the number of police calls downtown by funneling repeat offenders toward services to help address the issues underlying criminal behavior. But without question, law enforcement is also a major component, with Lee saying a series of weekend undercover drug buys in the downtown area by the Santa Cruz County Anti-Crime Team was part of the initial rollout.

"This is really the first time that we as a community have gotten together, people from every single branch that we think is important, to try to make a difference on the front end, to try to provide some services and also to try to gather some information and provide accountability," Rosell said.

The project is also an ex-



At left, next to Santa Cruz Police Chief Kevin Vogel and District Attorney Bob Lee, Prosecutor Jeff Rosell will devote his time to prosecuting downtown repeat offenders.



Judge Denine Guy, at left, will handle all of the downtown Santa Cruz repeat offender cases.

Offenders

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tension of work by the city of Santa Cruz Public Safety Task Force, which was convened after a series of high-profile crimes, including the murder of a downtown business owner and slaying of two Santa Cruz police detectives. The Sentinel also has documented how the city has some of the highest crime rates in California, with citizens' property particularly at risk. Two homeless activists interrupted the press conference to question Lee about whether the program is a way for the city to target homeless persons. He said it was not.

"We're absolutely talking about conduct. We're not talking about status. We are going to arrest people who commit crimes whether they rent a home, they lease a home, they live on their brother's couch or they're homeless," Lee said. "This is all about people who commit crimes."

Santa Cruz Police Chief Kevin Vogel said the public's help is needed to make the program a success, and he acknowledged downtown issues have "a huge

impact" on the department.

"I devote more resources per square mile in our downtown area than I do any other place in the city," Vogel said. "Unfortunately most of the resources I direct down here are continually addressing recurring problems created by the same individuals. The hope of this program is that we can prevent that from occurring so that my staff can focus on things that are pressing for us in other areas of the city."

One statistic demonstrates how large numbers of low-level crimes can overwhelm the criminal justice system — of the county's 12,000 annual jail bookings, 5,000 are for public intoxication, county Deputy Chief Jim Hart recently said.

Tuesday, the county Board of Supervisors is being asked to approve support for the pilot program.

"With law enforcement, the county, the community working together to address this problem, I think we can make a difference downtown and make downtown even more enjoyable and safer for families and for visitors," said Supervisor Neal Coonerty, who represents much of Santa Cruz.