

Farmers market expansion forces drum circle out



ROBINSON KUNTZ/SENTINEL

The drum circle moved to the parking lot at Cedar and Elm streets after a brief altercation at the old location near the farmers market.

✓ Santa Cruz police report several complaints about noise, drug use and more

Farmers market

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By CATHY KELLY

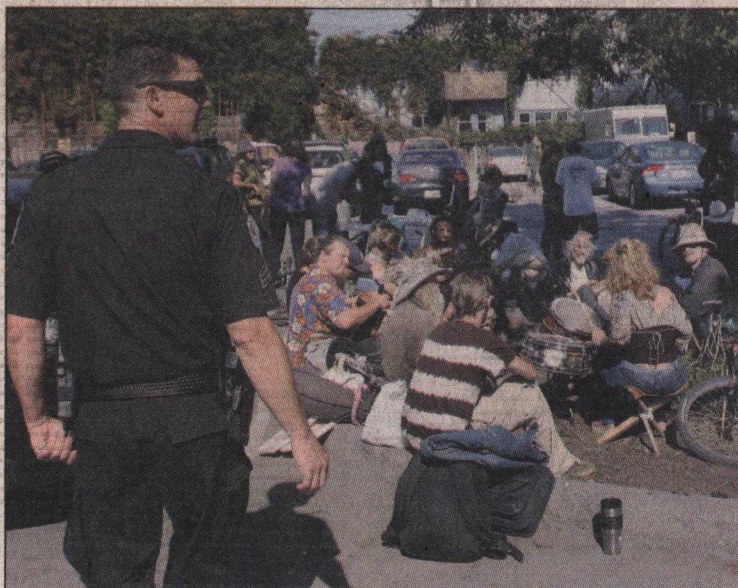
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SANTA CRUZ — The drum circle that convenes downtown Wednesday afternoons has encountered a steady beat of complaints since the farmers market expansion three weeks ago pushed the circle out of an adjacent parking lot and into a bit of hot water.

The longtime group has yet to find a new place to gather since the April 21 expansion, and complaints from merchants and others continued Wednesday as police advised drummers who had settled at two nearby parking lots on Cedar Street that their new spots were problematic.

Frustrated drummers said they don't know where else to go downtown and have the right to play music in public.

Homeless activist Robert Norse on Wednesday called for a "Drum Circle Defense" event, with the aim of strategizing what to do if "police attempt to shut down the circle." Police, however, did not try to quash the circle. Instead, officers issued more warnings after drummers began pounding away at a new spot near a parking lot at Cedar and Lincoln streets on Wednesday. The group had been at one behind The Spokesman, on Cedar and Elm streets.



Sgt. Michael Harms walks to the relocated drum circle, in the parking lot at Cedar and Elm streets, to warn participants about noise complaints from nearby businesses on Wednesday.

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The most discord Wednesday came when a drum circle participant, Patrick Lancelin, took offense when Norse taped a conversation Lancelin was having about drumming and his civil rights with Sgt. Michael Harms. Lancelin began shouting at Norse to get out of the area and not to put him on his "stupid (radio) show."

The two scuffled, grabbing one another

and fighting over the tape recorder. They fell near a medium-size black and white dog named Barack Obama, which bit Lancelin, causing a deep and bloody puncture wound on his forearm. There were no arrests.

As he was being loaded into an ambulance,

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lance, Lancelin said Norse was making the problem worse and should "butt out."

Norse said others feel differently and "appreciate more eyes on the situation."

He said earlier that police last week had warned drummers they might be ticketed this week. But no tickets were written or arrests made, though more officers were on duty because of Cinco de Mayo, Harms said.

Harms said he got several complaints last week, after drummers and others who had begun congregating at Cedar and Lincoln streets spread jewelry and other merchandise on cars, he said.

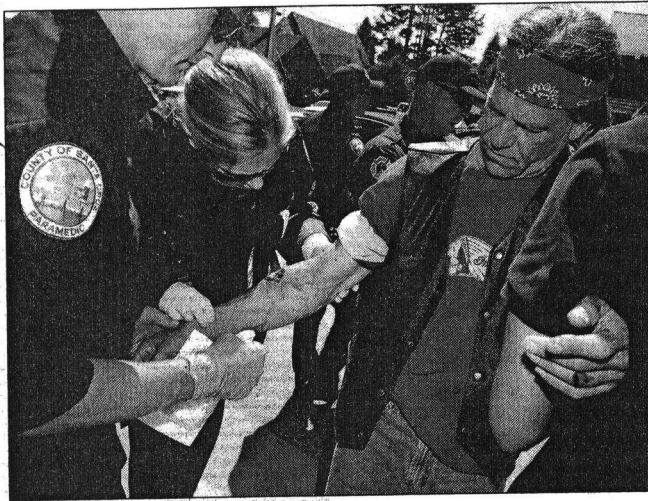
"There are a several businesses and a (language) school nearby; it's a very problematic location," Harms said.

Two nearby businesses contacted said they had gotten complaints from customers, as had their neighbors.

Connie Hutchinson, owner of Jack's Hamburgers, said patrons have been complaining that the drumming "drives them nuts."

"I have nothing against the drummers," she said. "And it's not about freedom of expression, it's just about disrupting my customers. We are not attacking the poor."

Next door, at newly opened Faust Salon, manager Anna Wu said customers come expecting a relaxing



ROBINSON KUNTZ/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz paramedics bandage a man who was bitten by a dog during a tussle at the drum circle downtown on Wednesday.

massage or facial, not a raucous, impromptu concert.

"I don't want to diminish the whole Santa Cruz thing, but at the same time it's hurting our business," she said.

Later, Harms said he got three complaints when the group of about 20 moved two blocks down to a spot around a redwood in a parking lot behind The Spokesman, playing drums and other instruments and singing. He said he usually just contacts the drummers and asks them to tone it down or move along. Two business owners approached police as they stood on the street near the group, expressing concern about the noise.

The drum circle has been an ongoing problem for about 15 years, Harms said. But complaints have come

from more quarters since the expansion forced drummers to move from a spot where nearby businesses might not have appreciated their music and activities, but had become somewhat resigned to it, Harms said.

"For the most part, the drummers are reasonable but there is a small segment who want to politicize it," he said.

Drummer Mark Osborne said it's become a problem for them to find a place to play close enough to downtown for a good number of people to join in.

"The cops have been pretty good to us, but it's just sad, there is no place to go," he said. "I understand there is a drug element, but there is nothing we can do about that. It's hard for those of us who just want to hang

out. I'm afraid Santa Cruz is going to turn into Capitola."

At least one passer-by said he appreciated the circle. Manny Santoyo, a North Coast resident who works at a sawmill, said he hears the drums when he and his wife go to the farmers market.

"I love the music," he said. "Sometimes they really get it going and it's nice they have a place to meet."

Drummer David Berrick said he believes some of the complaints are exaggerated.

"We want to be here," he said. "And I think most people walking by understand this."

Police spokesman Zach Friend said he has noticed increased tension in the last couple of years between some in the circle and farmers market vendors and downtown merchants, and increased willingness by business owners to sign citations. There have been meetings between the sides, but a solution has not been found, he said.

Drug sales and other illegal activity by some reflect on the whole group, he said. And he believes the community is frustrated by a sense of entitlement some seem to have and their tendency to openly flaunt downtown laws.

"These quality-of-life issues really impact people's willingness to travel downtown and feel safe," he said. "And from our perspective, we have to address these issues before they spiral into others."