



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

TOP: Santa Cruz police ask a loiterer to leave his spot on Pacific Avenue. **ABOVE:** Pedestrians walk past the scene of the controversy.

Homeless 2000

Then and now: S.C. examines 'transient element'

By **DAN WHITE**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — The latest clash on Pacific Avenue downtown, between those just hanging out and merchants and shoppers, is not the first time the conflict has heated up.

In the early 1970s, the county commissioned a controversial study about "UTES," bureaucratic shorthand for the "undesirable transient elements" flooding into the area because of its climate, beauty and "hip" reputation. UTEs were mostly out-of-towners between 15-30 years old, much like

Is the city overreacting?/A7

the biggest groups of street crowds now on Pacific Avenue.

The study indicated the group smoked a lot of marijuana and was largely on welfare, and also stated that popular opinions of UTEs were not necessarily fair or accurate.

UTEs at the time were often labeled in the report as "immoral, dirty, uncouth, liv(ing) like animals, rude and unhygienic."

At the time, according to newspaper

reports, local people were most worried about UTEs not downtown but in San Lorenzo Valley.

The study did not recommend any ways of "solving" the UTE dilemma.

But the city has tried repeatedly to deal with more recent worries, especially panhandling, downtown.

In 1993, the Downtown Association tried to discourage begging by encouraging customers to hand out vouchers for homeless services. The panhandlers are still here, and few remember that program.

In 1994, the City Council drew applause

Please see **UTES** on **Page A7**

Sunday, January 27, 2002 SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL **A-7**

UTES

Continued from Page A1

and outrage when its new ordinances targeted beggars who came too close to targets, panhandled too aggressively, blocked streets or sidewalks, followed people for donations, and solicited near banks or ATMs.

Panhandling was not made illegal, but the city established firm parameters. New rules banned sitting on sidewalks — but that rule was later modified. Sidewalk-sitting is still banned within 10 feet of any building entrance or exit and within 50 feet of an ATM.

Violations of most of 1994's rules, however, are frequent.

The trouble, said Lt. Patty Sapone, is "officers can take action if they see it, but if they don't see it, someone has to make a citizen's arrest."

Activists denounced the measures then as mean-spirited, while many merchants said "it's about time." Tempers boiled over. Someone threw rocks into the windows of Bookshop Santa Cruz.

The bookstore owner, then-City Councilman Neal Coonerty, said activists were targeting him for proposing the ordinances.

He said the situation was different then because the city was just starting to recover from the 1989 earthquake.

"When a group of people take up residence on the street, that in itself makes it an uneasy situation, especially if the group is largely young males who have very little social skills and are aggressive," he said.

Coonerty now believes some of that has returned, saying, "It seems to be centered in one area. It's too bad."

He said problems remain even after the tough 1994 rules because "it's hard to regulate bad behavior."

The tough part, he said, is trying to address problems without compromising constitutional free-speech rights.

"We're constantly doing a balancing act."

'Officers can take action if they see it, but if they don't see it, someone has to make a citizen's arrest.'

LT. PATTY
SAPONE,
SANTA CRUZ
POLICE

Contact Dan White at
dwhite@santa-cruz.com.