

Watsonville police step into foot patrols

By SCOTT DAVID BRENNAN
CORRESPONDENT

WATSONVILLE — Foot-patrol police officers have started walking the town's retail centers much to the delight of shop owners, and they may soon be a familiar sight.

"It's good for business," said Pete Derpich, owner of the Miramar Bar and Grill at 522 Main St.

"People feel more secure when they see the officers strolling down the street, especially in the dimly-lit rear parking lots," he added.

"Officers stop by almost every night. They're always here," said Steve Garcia, owner and manager of Fox Pizza, Grill, and Theater at 300 Main St.

Crime is the main concern. "We wanted it to be safer to shop in Watsonville," said Linda Bays, of Speed of Light Towing. She attended a meeting with police, organized by Sgt. Manny Solano, to educate merchants about criminal ac-



Scott Brennan

Steve Garcia, left, of Fox Pizza, Grill and Theater, meets with foot patrol officer Walt Cooley.

tivity and listen to their concerns.

"Now residents are more apt to shop J.C. Penney and Gottchalks at night," Bays added.

"Everybody waves and says 'hi,'" said rookie officer Walt Cooley.

"It's really important for the children to see us in a positive light and for us to be approachable on their level," he said. "We've had nothing but a positive response."

There's added security on Main Street, from the 100 block to Ford street, and at Watsonville Square shopping center.

The program, started a month ago, is an effort by Police Chief Terry Medina to put a police presence on the streets, as merchants have requested him to.

"We have known that stores wanted more protection," he said. "Now, with the foot patrols, people seem to feel safer."

Medina said the program has reduced crime. "They have been

working very successfully; we have had fewer auto burglaries," he said.

Garcia, of Fox Pizza, said, "I like them because there haven't been any cars stolen around my property lately."

"Forty volunteer community service officers, armed with pepper spray and police radios, assist the police in non-arrest situations, and See FOOT PATROLS, back of section

FOOT PATROLS

From page 1

augment their community policing efforts," Solano said.

The patrols begin each weeknight from the police station when the night-shift sergeant, Ed Rodriguez or Ed Gluhan, assigns a few officers to the street beat.

The foot patrols typically start at 4:30 p.m. and last until 8:30 p.m., prime shopping hours in the business districts.

Started to curb crime during the holiday season, the patrols will continue indefinitely to meet the requirement of President Clinton's Cops Grant, part of the 1994 Crime Bill promise to put 100,000 new police officers on the streets of America. Medina said the city, which is trying to meet eligibility requirements, is likely to receive some of these funds.

City councilmen Dennis Osmer

and Lowell Hurst joined in the praise, commending Medina for the new street beat at a council meeting last month.

Solano said the idea of foot patrols was developed and encouraged at the last Community Business Alert Training Meeting, held at the Miramar, by local business owners.

They asked to see more officers in the downtown area especially, he said of the 30 attendees.

The Police Department, in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce and the Main Street Watsonville Association, warns and educates participants on violence, drugs and alcohol in the workplace, local gang activity and how businesses can help each other prevent crime.

They share their resolve to fight crime by placing Business Alert Program in Forcwarning stickers in their front windows and large signs on nearby lamp posts.