

Officials finally catch the elusive 'Harbor Bill'

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SANTA CRUZ — Being written up in Surfer magazine is the kind of recognition "Harbor Bill" Mulcoy could have done without.

That's not to say his surfing doesn't merit mention. But, it brought the wrong kind of recognition — recognition from authorities who say for years they've been trying to learn the identity of the surfer who illegally rides the waves at the entrance to the Small Craft Harbor.

The Harbor Patrol couldn't catch the surfer, who, out-paddled them and out-ran them down the beach. "We had some pretty wild chases down the beach," said Harbormaster Steve Scheiblaue.

The surfer was known only as 'Harbor Bill,'" says Scheiblaue. "His last name was one of the best-kept secrets in Santa Cruz." Whenever the Harbor Patrol would seek to learn his identity from other surfers, the reply would be "his first name is Harbor. His last name is Bill."

The secret was broken last week when Scheiblaue's copy of Surfer magazine arrived in the mail. The August issue features a spread on surfing in Santa Cruz.

Scheiblaue flipped through the 10-page feature, reading about the top surfers "then" — Doug and Dan Haut, Tom Hoyer ... — and "now" — Vince Collier, Kevin "Wildman" Reed ... — and the top surfing spots, like Steamer Lane and the harbor mouth.

Scheiblaue's eyes popped as he read "'Harbor Bill' Mulcoy's local knowledge of the place allows him heroism five times a day..."

Bingo.

Scheiblaue then flipped through the city directory and found an address for a Bill Mulcoy. Scheiblaue says Mulcoy was "cooperative" when Harbor Police contacted him. They then turned over their reports to the District Attorney's Office.

A copy of a complaint, charging Mulcoy with obstructing a navigable waterway and resisting arrest, is in the mail to Mulcoy, according to Assistant District Attorney Steve Muni. Both offenses are misdemeanors, although the resisting arrest charge could carry a maximum sentence of a year in jail.

"After reviewing the police reports, it appears Mr. Mulcoy has been getting away with breaking the law for years. It's about time we finally caught up with him," Muni said.

Mulcoy doesn't see it that way. He thinks he's been more of a help than a problem. In all those years, he said, he has never been hit by a boat or even been in the way. "In fact, I've helped a lot of boaters and I've helped people who literally were drowning," Mulcoy said.

The 37-year-old Mulcoy has been surfing in Santa Cruz for 22 years. He has been riding the waves at the harbor mouth for 14 years. "I've probably surfed the harbor more than anybody. It's my break," he said.

He said everything was "cool" for most of those 14 years. "They knew I was out there," he said. Recently, though, he said he has been singled out and targeted by some new harbor patrolmen.

Mulcoy said he doesn't want any trouble. He's never been in trouble. He just wants to ride the winter waves at the harbor mouth, which, he said, are "probably the best on the whole coast when the sand is in there." The waves are alluring to many surfers.

"Every winter it's like Thanksgiving when the waves start coming," he said.

Now that the Harbor Patrol knows his name, those perfect waves will probably roll in without "Harbor Bill." Just because he made Surfer magazine.

"It's a fluke. I've been surfing practically my whole life. I don't care about being in Surfer magazine. I'm not into contests. All I want to do is surf and enjoy it," said Mulcoy.