

Arrests up in fight against juvenile graffiti vandals

Sometimes it seems that graffiti is all over the City. It's on building walls, wood fences, even shrubbery in one case. And it's a common sight to see surfaces that were tagged and painted over.

City residents are proving to be a valuable asset in the fight against graffiti.

Last month one resident was watching a baseball game at Merced High School when he noticed three youths spray painting a wall near the creek. The boys covered nine different places along a 145-foot stretch. The witness called police and officers arrested the trio quickly.

All three had paint residue on their hands, although two denied any knowledge of the crime.

In another incident, a resident saw two youths walking onto the Hoover Middle School campus with a spray can. Police were

called and caught the pair after a restroom door had been vandalized.



Experts agree that graffiti must be covered as soon as possible to deny the vandal the satisfaction and peer-prestige of displaying their crime.

Graffiti left uncovered just attracts more graffiti. If it's on your property, report it and paint it.

Without the public involvement in those two cases, the vandals might have escaped to trash another neighborhood.

The Merced Police Department has assigned an officer to the graffiti crime detail. He identifies and catalogs graffiti before it's covered so when a vandal is arrested the sus-

♦ If you see a crime occurring, including graffiti vandalism, call the police at 911. If you are using a cell phone, dial the department direct at 385-6912 to avoid the delay while the call is being forwarded to the Merced PD.

♦ To report graffiti that is already finished, call Merced PD at 385-6912.

pect can be matched to other crime scenes.

Enforcement is moving into high gear. In 2006, there were 29 juveniles arrested for graffiti, last year the number climbed to 69 arrests. In the first three months of this year 20 juveniles were arrested for graffiti. Two adults were arrested for graffiti in that same time period.

Much of the graffiti has gang overtones, but not all of it.

The Merced County District Attorney has agreed to increase prosecution of graffiti vandals, and the Merced County Probation Department has agreed to increase the penalties imposed on juveniles in their custody.

The parents of juvenile graffiti vandals will also be accountable for their child's actions. As part of the punishment, they will be required to paint over graffiti and do other community service work.

City receives state grant to make routes to schools safer for kids

The City of Merced has received a \$866,000 grant from the Safe Routes to Schools program. The grant requires the City to provide a 10 percent match of funds

With the grant, the City will be able to install traffic signals at two schools, add sidewalks, curbs and gutters at two other schools and provide 21 flashing school warning signs at eight schools.

The grant is intended to make it safer for children to walk to their neighborhood school.

City staff worked with officials from the Merced City School District and the Weaver Union School District to find out where the safety improvements were needed.

New traffic signals, costing approximately \$210,000, will be installed at:

Fremont School at 22nd and R streets.
Farmdale School, at G Street and Gerard.

Sidewalks, curbs and gutters will be installed along Santa Fe Drive near Hoover Middle School. The cost is \$160,000.

Sidewalks, curbs and gutters also will be installed along Gerard Avenue near Pioneer School. The cost is \$70,000.

The flashing warning signs, costing \$7,500 each, will be installed at:

★ Reyes Elementary School
★ Tenaya Middle School
★ Gracey Elementary School
★ John Muir Elementary School

★ Hoover Middle School
★ Burbank Elementary School
★ Peterson Elementary School
★ Rivera Middle School.



Students walking to Pioneer School.

Merced City Council

Mayor Ellie Wooten
Mayor Pro Tem John Carlisle
Council members:
Joe Cortez
Michele Gabriault-Acosta
Noah Lor
Jim Sanders
Bill Spriggs

Council meetings

The Council usually meets on the first and third Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers in the Civic Center. The agenda is posted online at www.CityofMerced.org.

Holiday

City offices will be closed Monday, May 26, for Memorial Day. Refuse collection will be on the regular schedule.

Contacting us

The Web site, www.CityofMerced.org, contains City Council information, the Municipal Code and General Plan and other information. To contact the Newsletter, e-mail newsletter@CityofMerced.org, call the Public Information Office at 385-6232 or write:

Merced Civic Center
678 W. 18th St.
Merced CA 95340

The Civic Center is open Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m., except holidays.

Call us

City Council	385-6834
City Manager	385-6834
City Attorney	385-6868
City Clerk	388-7100
Airport	385-6873
Code Enforcement	385-6855
Finance	385-4718
Inspection Services	385-6861
Personnel	388-7100
Planning Department	385-6858
Public Works (7:30-4:30) ...	385-6800
After hours	385-6905
Recreation/Parks	385-6855

IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 911

Fire Department	385-6891
Police Department	385-6912

Air quality flags fly over the Civic Center

The City of Merced has begun flying Air Quality flags at four locations.

The color-coded flags — which also fly at schools in the community — give people an air quality report at a glance.

The flag colors are:

GREEN: Good air quality

YELLOW: Moderate air quality

ORANGE: Unhealthy for sensitive groups

RED: Unhealthy

The program began at the request of the Merced-

Mariposa County Asthma Coalition, which is supplying the flags.

The flags will be flown at the Merced Civic Center, Central Police Station, Fire Station 51 (Main station) and the Public Works Department Corporation Yard.

Merced ComVIP wants you to pick a new name

It's a good cause, but the name is a mouthful. The Merced Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Task Force is looking for a new name and seeking help from the public with a contest.

The goal is a better name to convey the mission statement. The logo contest has easy rules: It has to communicate the goals and ideals of the Task Force. It should be short, simple and concise so it can be used in the web address. It can't be offensive, trademarked or copywrited.

Entries with your name, address, phone number and an email address can be sent to contest@cityofmerced.org or mailed to Slogan Contest, 678 W. 18th St., Merced CA 95340. Anyone can enter.

Mission Statement:

Educate the community about violence and gang awareness

Help people create and continue constructive behavior

Assist families with parenting and other skills for character development

Provide information and resources for intervention and prevention

Encourage community-wide ownership of this effort.

Ask the City: A weedy situation

Ask the City is a recurring column answering questions that have been submitted to us by mail, email or phone. Readers can submit their questions to the addresses listed at the left.

Is there anything that can be done with yard and garbage that's a real eyesore? The home has tall weeds and grass and garbage in the driveway.

E. H.

Yes, there are Good Neighbor ordinances designed to prevent these kinds of problems. Call Code Enforcement at 385-6855. They will notify the property owner that the yard needs to be cleaned up and action can be taken to force compliance.

In cases where there are public health or sanitation issues involved, the property can be cleaned up immediately and the owner billed.



Public Works Week will be celebrated at the City of Merced Public Works Corporation Yard from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, May 17. There will be food, fun and lots of activities as Public Works crews show their equipment and share their knowledge. Other City departments will also have booths and displays during the event.

Pardon us while we learn the new phone system

A new phone system is being installed throughout the City, and with it comes a learning curve.

The VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) offers new features that will improve service. No phone numbers are expected to change, but please bear with us as we learn the bells and whistles.