

A downtown SP safety BID

SAN PEDRO: Security teams hired by area property owners, deal with loitering and drinking.

By Donna Littlejohn, Staff Writer

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Security Phone Number

310-519-7329

Abraham Silva, with mom Dorothy, is greeted by Scott Smith, who with partner Jose Guerra is part of a private security patrol for San Pedro businesses. (Sean Hiller/Staff Photographer)

Wearing logo polo shirts and armed with cell phones, a new private security patrol is walking the streets of downtown San Pedro.

The foot patrols are the first visible sign of the area's new Business Improvement District, in which property owners pool their money to pay for improvements to downtown.

"BIDs are primarily about (making an area) 'clean and safe,' and we're starting off with the safe part of it, so that's our first goal," said Eric Eisenberg of the BID board. "We want to create a nice, safe environment for families."

Camilla Townsend, executive director of the San Pedro Peninsula Chamber of Commerce, said she already sees a difference.

"It's a deterrent more than anything else," Townsend said.

The patrols will be out tonight as the town celebrates First Thursday, a monthly event showcasing the restaurants, shops and art galleries.

Los Angeles-based Andrews International, founded by former Los Angeles police officers, has been hired to perform the service at a cost to the BID of \$326,000 for the first year.

"Mostly we go out and create a high visibility," said Dave McCall, a retired police officer who heads the local Advertisement effort. "We try to be proactive and take care of any problems that might come up."

Since the patrols began in early December, they have encountered a number of issues, he said, including smoking marijuana and drinking in public, loitering in front of shops, panhandling and drug deals.

"There are also some homeless and our officers have attempted to assist them by placing them in alternative living," McCall said. "Some have been open to the idea, others haven't."

The officers have told skateboarders they need to stay off sidewalks and they also have called in incidents of graffiti. One day they found a "functioning crossbow" in an alley, one of the few weapons capable of penetrating a bullet-proof vest.

The district spans all of the downtown shopping district and Ports O' Call Village where thefts from parked cars have been a problem.

At any given time, four officers are patrolling the area, stopping when businesses close and later - about 11 p.m. - on weekends.

Downtown San Pedro has recently had issues with public drunkenness after bars close at 2 a.m., but Eisenberg said the funding isn't available to keep the patrols in place throughout the night.

The BID was approved by the Los Angeles City Council in May. The area also is set to get the city's designation of an Arts, Culture and Entertainment District before the end of January, Townsend said.

Providing unique and affordable entertainment may help the town weather the current economic downturn, she said.

"That's the sad thing; we were just ready to get on a roll here and now (the economy is) getting so bad," she said. "I'm sure there are some businesses that are going to close because they just can't hang on any longer."

The first year's BID budget totals \$957,000. Next on the "to do" list: sprucing up the streets and sidewalks with landscaping such as flowers and other plants.

Look for those improvements as early as March.

"We'll be getting rid of the eyesore (abandoned) furniture in the alleys and then putting in flowers, to give us a nice, quaint look," Eisenberg said.

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