

Fewer graffiti tags in S.J. for fifth year in a row

Not only have their been fewer graffiti tags across San Jose, but they're also shrinking in size.

For the fifth consecutive year, the annual graffiti survey showed a decline in tags from 3,827 to 2,913, or about 24 percent, anti-graffiti czar Rick Stanton reported Friday after he did the final number-crunching. And more than one-third of the tags are "small stuff," he said.

Instead of the huge colorful graffiti banners spray-painted on walls and overpasses, volunteers and staff members are seeing smaller hits on signs, utility boxes and light poles — the kind of tags that can be cleaned with solvent rather than covered up with paint.

This pleases the 2,600 volunteers who work thousands of hours to clean up graffiti, and it saves the city money on paint, Stanton notes.

Last week, 15 to 20 anti-graffiti staff members fanned out to look for graffiti tags. They covered every street in the 177-square-mile city.

The first survey was done in 1999, with surveyors finding a whopping 71,541 tags. The slide has been steady since then: 35,744 in 2000; 10,498 in 2001; 5,612 in 2002; 3,827 in 2003; and 2,913 this year. The numbers add up to a 96 percent drop.

The success of the campaign, launched in 1999 by Mayor Ron Gonzales, is largely credited to the army of volunteers who adopt areas to keep clean. But it also is the result of more staff members dedicated to wiping out graffiti, stricter law enforcement and tougher penalties.

The gold star for improvement this year goes to Council District 3, which showed a drop after three years of increases. Two years ago the district, which includes downtown and other core neighborhoods, had 715 tags on 447 objects. This year, the survey showed 177 tags on 156 objects.

Stanton said more staff members were assigned to downtown, and the efforts paid off.

Gang tags, however, were up slightly this year, 224 compared with 188. The majority — 104 — were found in District 5, covering most of East San Jose.



janicerombeck
neighborhood notebook

"Gang tags always concern us, especially in light of recent gang problems in certain areas," Stanton said.

But as always, Stanton says his staff — and the community — cannot become complacent.

"There is an undercurrent of kids out there ready, willing and able to do graffiti," he said. "If we don't keep up the work, it'll be back right away."

To volunteer for anti-graffiti or anti-litter cleanup duty, call (408) 277-3208.

DISTRICT 4 SUMMIT: If you live in Alviso, Berryessa, Orchard or North San Jose, Councilman Chuck Reed would like to hear from you at District 4's upcoming conferences on priorities. And you can get a free continental breakfast.

The meetings will be held 8:30 a.m. to noon Saturday at the Berryessa Community Center, 3050 Berryessa Road, and 8:30 a.m. to noon Jan. 31 at George Mayne School, 5080 N. First St.

RSVP to Dawn Wright or Armando Gomez at (408) 277-5320. Or e-mail district4@sanjoseca.gov.

CANDIDATES' FORUM: A District 10 city council candidates forum will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the water district office, 5750 Almaden Expressway.

The event is sponsored by the Almaden Valley Community Association.

Candidates Rich De La Rosa, Nancy Pyle, Ronald Siporen and William Garbett are vying to replace Councilwoman Pat Dando, who has served two terms.

All candidates have promised to show up.

LIBRARY DESIGN: A meeting on the design of the expanded Cambrian Branch Library will be 6:30 to 9 p.m. Thursday at the library, 1780 Hillsdale Ave.

Community members will be asked to offer comments and suggestions for the 26,000-square-foot building, which is expected to cost \$12.4 million.

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