

# Rousted and Robbed by Robocop

by Becky Johnson

**S**anta Cruz Police Officer Perry, who has become known as Robocop among the homeless, has been a regular dynamo when it comes to aggressive economic cleansing of the streets of Santa Cruz. Robocop is the evil twin of Officer Eric Seiley, the Homeless Harassment Officer — er, I mean, Homeless Resource Officer.

Seiley is bad enough. In mid-April he seized the van belonging to Donald Algren, a.k.a. Dirtclod of Camp Paradise fame, and dumped the occupants out. Don's wife Kay, in her wheelchair no less, and the couple's dog were dumped onto the sidewalk.

In the same time period, according to J.J. Ballard, Robocop showed up at the long yellow wall across from McDonald's on Ocean Street to hassle three men. J. J. Ballard was there with Roger and Shortdog about 9:30 a.m. Officer Perry confronted the three men, yet issued no citations, and made no arrests. But he took away all their belongings, including survival bedding and 30 copies of *Street Spirit* which Roger had been selling.

Did he have a reason for taking all their stuff? Did he give them a receipt? Is he trying to stop them from selling *Street Spirit* even though vending papers is a legal activity and requires no permit? Perry was not saying.

A week earlier, Seiley had threatened to ticket J.J. for selling *Street Spirit* on a public sidewalk. This is surprising, since the City of Santa Cruz already had to pay a large settlement to Steve Argue for arresting him for selling a newspaper in the City since selling papers is legal.



Officer Perry (at left) arrests a homeless man named Rusty for the "crime" of washing people's windows in a parking lot.

Photo courtesy Housing Now! Santa Cruz

Seiley also has issued tickets to the three men when they camped on private property with the owner's permission, and issued open-container tickets despite the fact that it is not illegal to have an open container on private property. According to reports, Seiley also claimed he was going to make trouble for the owner.

"And the owner went down to the police station and told them to back off or he would file a complaint!" remarked J.J., a smile broadly painted across his face.

Last year, J.J. Ballard was arrested by Seiley and convicted of felony "prowling" when he drank a beer on private property near a closed office building across the street from Denny's Restaurant on Ocean

Street. Ballard spent nine months in jail and now has one strike against him. A self-acknowledged alcoholic, and a long-time local homeless man, J.J. has become a top *Street Spirit* vendor, outselling any other vendor in the Santa Cruz area.

In the meantime, HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom) has gone on record as supporting compassionate businesses and organizations which adopt supportive rather than punitive policies for dealing with homeless people found literally on their doorsteps.

For more information, call HUFF at (831) 423-HUFF for a recorded message, and to leave a message. Visit [www.santacruz.indymedia.org](http://www.santacruz.indymedia.org) and [www.huffsantacruz.org](http://www.huffsantacruz.org)