

The source for much of students' drug use,
East Palo Alto continues to struggle with . . .

ISSUES OF SUBSTANCE

Editor's Note: This article is the last in a series examining the issues facing East Palo Alto. Today, we look at the connection between drug use at Stanford and drug dealing in the small city that lies two miles from campus.

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EDITORIAL STAFF

In 1992, the violent crime rate in East Palo Alto — largely fueled by drug- and gang-related violence — peaked with 42 murders in the city of 24,000. That year, the community was dubbed the country's "murder capital."

Since the early 1990s, the East Palo Alto Police Department has clamped down on drug-related crime. The violent crime rate was halved by the end of the decade, accord-

ing to the Rand Institute, and only one murder was reported in 1999, the last year for which statistics are available.

But members of surrounding communities — including Stanford students — say they know that East Palo Alto remains the place to buy illegal drugs.

"Everyone knows that East Palo Alto is a drug haven," East Palo Alto resident Henry Salas said.

However, labeling East Palo Alto a "drug haven" doesn't tell the whole story.

Although East Palo Alto is frequently blamed for its drug problem, Rose Jacobs, San Mateo County supervisor and former East Palo Alto city councilwoman, told the San Jose Mercury News that "all of the consuming wasn't being done there . . . Lots of purchasers were coming in from Palo Alto and Menlo Park. In fact, there was more selling going on in East Palo Alto than actual using of the drugs."

EPA provides a local market

For the impoverished community of East Palo Alto, which has an average income of \$15,028, according to the Associated Press, the \$60-per-gram market price of cocaine can entice many to go into the drug trade.

East Palo Alto drug dealers provide an easy outlet for Stanford students who wish to purchase illegal substances; some dealers even deliver to campus, reports a Stanford undergraduate who uses cocaine, and who asked not to be identified.

"Most people buy their drugs from East Palo Alto," he said.

"I have four dealers in East Palo Alto. Friends gave me their names, and some dealers gave me other contacts,"

he continued.

According to East Palo Alto Police Lieutenant Ron Sibley, dealers within the city generally offer a full line of drugs.

"But methamphetamines, heroine and crack are the most common drugs in the city," Sibley said.

Sibley said the police department knows that college students come into the town to buy drugs, but that citizens of other surrounding communities also use East Palo Alto dealers as their suppliers.

"We've run some reverse sting programs where officers sell drugs," he said. "We've arrested people, including some rocket scientists from NASA."

Stanford Public Safety officials note that there is also a second pattern for obtaining drugs on campus.

"Students frequently buy drugs from other students who have connections higher up the

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FOCUS ON EAST PALO ALTO

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drug chain," Public Safety Lieutenant Laura Wilson said.

Wilson said that generally drug suppliers, such as one they arrested out of Sonoma last year, are based in rural areas. But she added that "East Palo Alto certainly has a reputation [for drug dealing]."

One student agreed that the local origin of much of the drugs dealt on campus is East Palo Alto.

"I think a lot of the drugs come from East Palo Alto," said a junior majoring in Symbolic Systems. "I also heard there's a bunker there."

Salas said that he worried about the wealthy young people who come into East Palo Alto to buy drugs.

"You see people in suits — these people are subjecting themselves to dealers who will hurt them."

Overdoses increase at Stanford

Public Safety officials report that students seem to be overdosing on illegal drugs more frequently now than they have in recent years.

"It's not only drugs but also alcohol," Wilson said. "But it might not be a negative thing that we are receiving more reports of overdoses — students could be calling us more."

He added that students usually don't report overdoses to the police department.

"Students, as you probably know, pretty much try to keep the police out of matters," she said. "People call for paramedic response and we come along."

Marijuana and Ecstasy are the most commonly used drugs on campus, according to Wilson.

Students say they normally use drugs with a small group of friends.

A sophomore who casually uses marijuana said, "when I use it on campus it is definitely with a small, intimate group of people, like one or two friends."

Wilson said the Police Department knows about drug use on campus but generally does not make a lot of arrests.

"We know it's happening, and we know it's happening in the dorms and at parties," she said. "But to be honest, we don't make a lot of drug arrests. We typically only get called when someone has overdosed."

Overdoses are infrequent, occurring only every couple of months, and are handled on a case-

by-case basis, Wilson said.

Recently, however, there were two overdoses in one month.

"We just had a case recently when a student overdosed where there were no criminal charges brought," she said. "In this case, the student's parents came and took him home and he got the help that he needed."

Yet in the same month there was a tragic ending to a similar story.

"We did just have a student die from an overdose in the city. That made it two in one month," she added.

East Palo Alto Police fight back

The East Palo Alto Police Department reported that it normally uses traditional tactics in order to curb drug dealing in the city.

"Our tactics are basically traditional as far as frisking people hanging on the corners and using informants to make buys," Sibley said.

But what is innovative about the Police Department's anti-drug efforts is its community involvement component.

"Most importantly, we have engaged the community. They call us all the time and give us information," Sibley said.

Sibley noted that violence stems from competition among dealers.

"It's about the location of the day," he said. "Everyone shows up where the customers are and they sell their wares."

Although some users prefer the convenience of having drugs delivered to their house or dorm, Sibley said this practice can be dangerous.

The department's crime suppression squad, which is operated through the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office, regularly patrols the two or three drug "hotspots" in the city, Sibley said.

But this enforcement can be sporadic.

The Palo Alto Weekly reported that during December, the crime suppression squad was not active because of staffing issues.

'A safe place to experiment'

Some students say that the relative lack of enforcement of drug laws on campus is positive, because it allows students to make choices for themselves.

"I think security is understandably loose around here," said a sophomore who describes herself as a "casual marijuana user," and who obtains her drugs from her Bay Area hometown. "The beauty about Stanford is that it is a safe place to experiment."