

Parents irate over restroom sex activity

By Diane Winocur
News Staff Writer

Police patrols have been stepped up at Riddle Field and parents are planning to appear before the City Council, following a June 1 incident in which a 10-year-old boy reportedly walked into the park restroom to find three men engaged in sex.

Jay Grant, a Laguna Beach News columnist and local baseball coach, publicized the incident in his June 8 column. In the column, Grant appealed to Mayor Bob Gentry, the Laguna Beach City Council and Police Chief Neil Purcell for stepped-up patrols of Riddle Field's public bathrooms.

Within days, meetings had been held between coaches, parents, park neighbors and city leaders to remedy the situation.

Police patrols of the park were increased to once every half hour as soon as the incident was reported, said Deputy Police Chief Jim Spreine. Since the goal is to free the restrooms for the public, rather than to catch particular individuals as they break the law, department policy is to maintain high visibility, he said.

Spreine said he was shocked to learn that the problem had become intense without the police having been contacted. According to Grant, men had been seen visiting the park's restrooms for weeks before the incident.

"If we have increased activity, all they (parents) have to do is report it to us," Spreine said. "I can guarantee that whenever we realize there is a serious problem, we take action."

The boy's mother said she and other Laguna parents are not satisfied with this response, and plan to address the City Council Tuesday to ask for additional support for their cause.

"It's a breakdown of our society when our children are subjected to this," she said. "It's a shattering of innocence."

Punishment of those who commit public lewd acts should be stricter, she said. According to Spreine, the crime is considered "disorderly conduct" under state code, a misdemeanor punishable by a maximum of six months in county jail and a \$1,000 fine. The specific amount is decided by the courts.

Spreine said that, to his mind, making public sex a felony would be out of line.

"I challenge this mother. Would she send a man and woman to state prison for having sex in the back of a car?"

See PARENTS, page A32

A32 Laguna NEWS-POST June 15 1989

PARENTS

From page A1

The woman is also concerned that the stepped up patrols could end as abruptly as they started. Perhaps the gay community should police itself, she suggested.

A local gay leader responded that this would be impossible.

"I don't know what she would expect us to do," said Kirk Linville, co-chairman of Laguna Outreach, a political and social group for gays and lesbians. "We leave it to the police."

Volume 74 No. 32

Thursday, June 15, 1989



Laguna Beach

Linville called the incident publicized in Grant's column "unfortunate," and emphasized that Outreach is "never in favor of illegal or illicit activities."

Men who have sex in public make up a very

small percentage of the community," he added.

North Laguna residents have complained intermittently since 1983 about illicit activities at Riddle Field and Heisler Park. Ganell Baker, president of the North Laguna Community Association, said the group has been monitoring such activities and reporting them to the police.

"We're talking about a steady stream (of men using the restrooms for sex) each day," Baker said.

She emphasized, however, that the problem is a matter of illegality, not of homosexuality.

"This (public sex) is an illicit activity which is illegal in the state of California. It's not specific to gays—it applies to everyone," she said. "What we're interested in is law enforcement, not a witch hunt."