

Police patrol fuels P'town protest

By ALLISON BLAKE
STAFF WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — Police efforts to quell noise by the usual late-night crowd — much of it homosexual — outside Spiritus Pizza on Friday spurred a demonstration the next night involving more than 1,000 people.

Chanting "tonight we have the sidewalks, tomorrow we have the streets," and playing a mock game of Red Rover, a crowd estimated at between 1,000 to 2,000 people Saturday protested what one witness called "rude and belligerent" behavior by most police officers outside the popular hangout Friday.

"I don't recall that volume of people (during a Cape protest) — even the ones at Otis" Air National Guard Base, said state Trooper Gerard Britt, who estimated there were 2,000 at the protest.

Six people were arrested late Friday, two on Saturday, and one on Sunday on charges of rude and disorderly conduct, public intoxication, resisting arrest, and obstructing free passage, according to Provincetown police Sgt. Alan Souza.

Ten people were arraigned yesterday in Orleans District Court, primarily on charges of rude and disorderly conduct.

Town Manager James Jeffers said



JAMES J. MEADS

...reacted to violence tip

yesterday that he "wouldn't want to divulge what we're planning" to further patrol the area. One state police spokesman said troopers were standing by in case they were called to Provincetown again last night.

Ten state troopers with two dogs were called in to help patrol the area Saturday night after local Police Chief James J. Meads said he was told by a newspaper reporter there

would be "violence in the streets" that night. Twelve state troopers also were stationed there Sunday night, and a state police spokesman said yesterday that troopers were ready to be in Provincetown again last night if need be.

"I think (the protest) was blown out of proportion," said Meads. "People were criticizing (police) being down there in force; we went down to meet alleged violence.

"These were out-of-towners, young kids, taunting the hell out of everybody," said Meads. As for charges that the police were harassing gay people, Meads said: "Let's suppose this was 1,000 kids. What's that? Anti-kid?"

Meads has been concerned that the crowd in front of the pizza parlor could obstruct rescue vehicles trying to pass by. But neighbors also have complained of late-night noise, according to officials.

"What was basically a neighborhood problem has somehow become a civil-rights problem," Selectman Mary-Jo Avellar said yesterday.

Events leading to the weekend incidents began last week, when the selectmen ordered Spiritus Pizza owner John Yingling to find a way to control large crowds gathering at his restaurant after the bars close. Yingling agreed to spend \$500 for police

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protection, and the police agreed to work the area on weekends, said Meads.

Friday night, the new plan went into effect for the first time. Never before had the usual gathering of people seen police officers in their midst, asking them to move off the sidewalk or face arrest, said Paul Wychules, president of the local Human Rights Coalition, who was there that night.

"That was everyone's introduction to this (new plan)," he said, saying most officers were "rookies," and were "rude and belligerent." Two officers politely explained why the usual crowd was being asked to move, he said.

Saturday, Meads met in emergency session with the selectmen to inform them of Friday night's problem. No decisions were made, said Ms. Avellar, but Meads warned the selectmen that he might have to rely on the state police to handle further incidents.

In a prepared statement issued yesterday, Selectman Paul Christo, president of the Provincetown Business Guild, called "Saturday's show of force unbelievable to the point of absurdity. It was like a scene from 'The Russians are Coming, The Russians are Coming.'"

"A re-enactment Sunday night by the state police in this theater of the absurd only served to strain Provincetown's already tight municipal budget. This solitary decision on the part of Chief Meads to call in the state police for a command performance will have to be borne by the taxpayer," Christo wrote.

The weekend protest marks the second of this summer's clashes between the gay community and the police, as a string of anti-gay attacks last month had many homosexuals concerned about police protection. Although the police were prosecuting several offenders at the time the issue came to the fore, Meads nonetheless worked overtime to explain his

department's limited powers of arrest for assault cases.

Gay leaders have since turned their efforts to supporting assault victims during their court hearings.

Saturday night's protesters were drawn to Commercial Street by general word of mouth, said Wychules. Tom Wilson Weinberg, a playwright whose celebration of gay life, "Ten Percent Solution," has been playing at the Gifford House all summer, circulated a letter Saturday to entertainers and disc jockeys, asking them to announce a demonstration later that night.

The weekend uproar came midway through the Provincetown Business Guild's carnival week, an annual fund-raiser for the guild's advertising fund. The guild in past years has been considered a gay chamber of commerce, although that tag has faded in recent years with the guild's burgeoning membership.

Still, Christo called the timing of the incidents "awfully coincidental."