

Cape town businesses say arrests avoidable

By John Hechinger
Contributing Reporter

PROVINCETOWN — Leaders of the business community issued a strongly worded statement here yesterday criticizing weekend police action, which resulted in nine arrests.

Calling the police department's decision to call in State Police "a show of force unbelievable to the point of absurdity," members of the Business Guild also expressed concern about the implications on tourism. The Guild met for several hours yesterday afternoon.

Early Saturday, Sunday and Monday morning, police arrested nine patrons of Spiritus Pizza, a local late night gathering place, in response to earlier complaints about noise and drunken behavior outside the shop.

Shortly after midnight Sunday, Provincetown Police Chief James J. Meads called in State Police and police dogs when more than 1,000 people gathered to protest arrests on Friday. Meads has called the demonstration unprecedented.

Like many owners of local businesses, Conrad Harding is worried. As he sat yesterday in his restaurant on Commercial Street, the center of this small seaside community, Harding said he was saddened by the arrests.

"People come to Provincetown because it's a haven for gay people," said Harding, vice president-elect of the Provincetown Business Guild. "It's a place where they can be free. If they've paid all this money

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to be here, why should they be subjected to a tense and threatening situation?"

Effect on tourism

Business people are concerned that the publicity could discourage gay tourists, said Paul A. Christo, president of the guild.

According to the statement, many here believe the arrests and demonstration could have been avoided had the police given advance warning that they would send six officers to Spiritus on Friday.

Police action was decided upon at a board of selectmen meeting last Monday. The Business Guild's statement yesterday expressed surprise that the local newspaper covered the meeting but neglected to mention the decision.

Recovering from what many view as an unfortunate misunderstanding that has resulted in animosity between police and the gay community, residents said that

the conflict has served to overshadow all that is positive about Provincetown.

Yesterday, as sunshine burst through the clouds after Monday's fierce storm, crowds swarmed through the streets, buying hot dogs and ice cream and basking in a cool sea breeze.

Harding and others point to such events as the eighth annual summer carnival, held earlier this month, as an example of the cultural contributions of the town's community.

Early yesterday morning, after a weekend of conflict, the streets were quiet except for a bomb scare at Spiritus, which owner John Yingling said was probably a prank by a local youth. Yingling called the incident "minor," and Provincetown police dispatcher Loring Russel 3d said there are no records of the scare.

May hurt fall season

Still, many worry about the future.

"I'm afraid it might hurt the

fall season. No one wants to go where there are State Police and dogs," said Candice Boden, executive secretary of the Provincetown Chamber of Commerce.

The Provincetown economy relies on tourism. Christo estimates that tourists bring in as much as \$20 million annually.

Although the town relies on tourist dollars, many residents have trouble accepting the noise and traffic congestion that comes with vacationers.

Yingling said his shop causes fewer problems than the bars and discos in the neighborhood. Spiritus serves no liquor, but late night revelers often cap their evening with pizza and coffee in his shop, he said.

Boden said the problem of noise and traffic exists all summer long when the population of the town, which is between 3,000 and 4,000 during the year, can expand to 60,000. "The town should have alleviated the situation in the beginning of the season, not in August when the crowds are the greatest."



Globe staff photo/Wendy Maeda

The Provincetown pizza restaurant where nine were arrested.