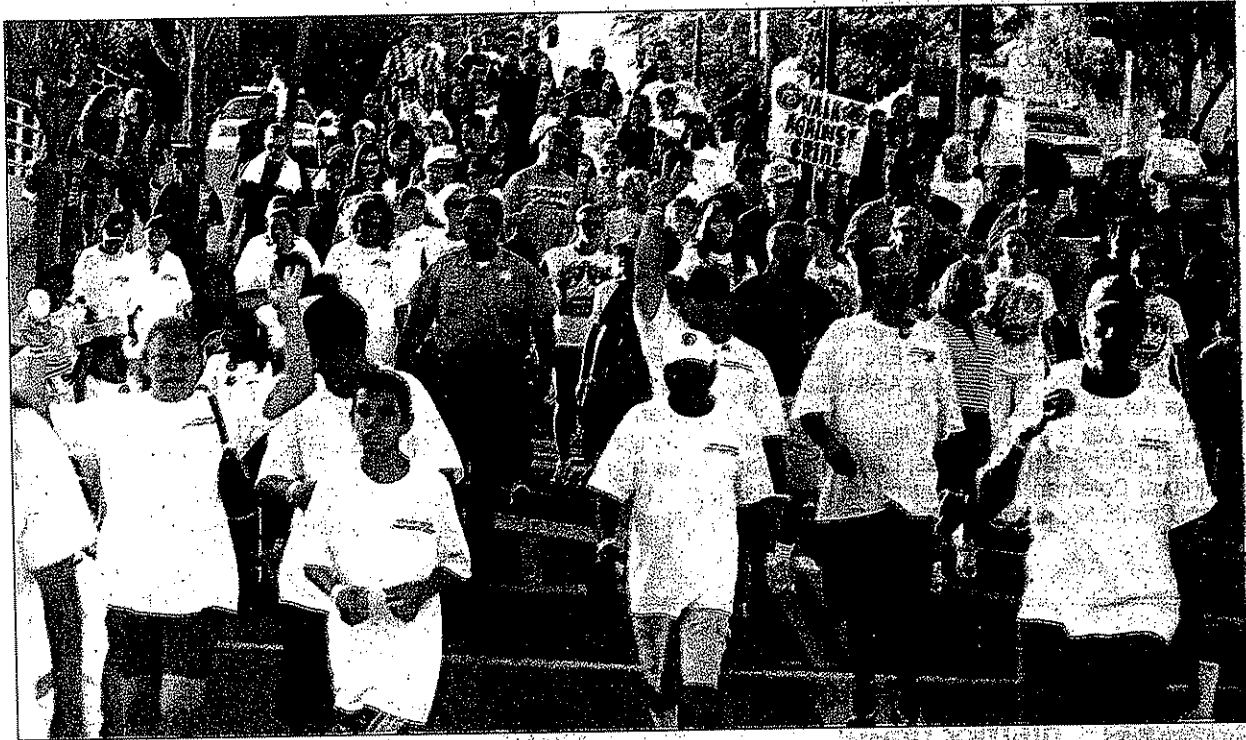


WALKING FOR A GOOD CAUSE



JAMIE SCOTT LYTTLE / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Walk Against Crime participants head back on North Citrus Avenue in Vista on Tuesday, nearing the end of their two-mile march. Similar "National Night Out" events took place in Oceanside, Escondido, Encinitas, Poway and San Marcos.

A NIGHT ON THE TOWN

■ 250 turn out for Vista's sixth-annual 'Walk Against Crime'

SARAH GORDON
STAFF WRITER

VISTA — Undaunted by Tuesday's early evening heat, about 250 residents, business people and members of law enforcement marched against crime in a two-mile loop around Vista.

Many walked in a team and wore T-shirts representing their organizations. The colorful and talkative procession started at 6 p.m. at the corner of Main Street and Indiana Avenue in the Vista

Village. Sweatier but mostly smiling, the group rolled in about 45 minutes later after walking along Citrus Avenue, Townsite Drive, Indian Rock Road and Broadway.

A community fair with booths and live music accompanied the city's sixth annual "Walk Against Crime." Cynthia Flores, a community outreach program specialist with the city who helped organize the event, said it drew about twice as many people as last year.

Similar events were held Tuesday in Oceanside, Escondido, Encinitas, Poway and San Marcos as part of the 25th annual Na-



ONLINE VIDEO

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tional Night Out.

National Night Out is sponsored by the National Association of Town Watch and is celebrated in more than 10,000 communities throughout every state, according to the organization's Web site.

The idea of the event is to strengthen community-police partnerships and neighborhood spirit, and to show criminals that neighbors are organized against them.

Those goals — and other worthwhile ones — were accomplished in Vista, participants said.

► NIGHT

Continued from B-1

"That was a good work-out," said 15-year-old Abraham Linares, a Rancho Buena Vista High School student who walked with about 12 others from the Vista Community Clinic's after-school program called "Project Reach."

The youths wore royal-blue shirts with the group's insignia.

The program's site coordinator, John Hannaberry, explained why they came.

"We teach them about violence prevention, so we want to come out and basically help support the community and fight against crime and drugs," he said.

Vista's Casa Raphael, a mostly court-ordered treatment program for substance abusers, sent dozens of its residents to the walk.

Kenneth Hammers, a 42-year-old Casa Raphael resident, found it worthwhile.

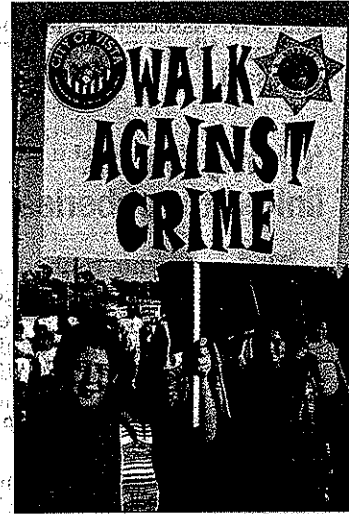
"What I liked the most was walking through the gang-banger neighborhoods," Hammers said after the walk.

"People are afraid of neighborhoods like that, but if you show a little bit of positivity, it shows the community that you can have the strength to do it."

Other groups represented in force included the Vista Townsite Community Partnership, the Northgate Market and the Vista Church of Christ. As many young people as adults took part.

Representatives of law enforcement said the annual events were an important part of building relationships with residents.

"It's good community relations," said Vista Sheriff's Station Lt. Scott Rossall, who



JAMIE SCOTT LYTLE /

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fernando Vazquez, age 11, of San Marcos, left, marches in the Walk Against Crime in Vista on Tuesday evening.

spoke energetically after finishing the walk. "It keeps that bridge that we've formed over the past couple of years in place," he said.

Before that period, which he said coincided with former station Capt. Ed Prendergast's tenure, a spate of officer-involved shootings and other factors had driven a wedge between law enforcement and the community, Rossall said.

Sheriff's Senior Patrol volunteer Jay Parker, 90, who worked at a recruiting booth at the fair, said the chance to meet residents in a positive setting was important. Simply handing out Sheriff's Department stickers to children goes a long way, he said.

"If we make friends with them when they're young, we don't have to worry about them when they're older," he said.

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