

Police, witnesses catch lighthouse vandals

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Port cops cite three teenagers for damaging property after they were caught spray painting graffiti on city landmark

Just weeks after the Port breakwater reopened, three Port Washington teenagers were cited for damaging property after they defaced the lighthouse late Friday night.

Port police credited the actions of people who saw what was happening with the arrest.

“That was awesome,” Police Chief Kevin Hingiss said. “Usually we get these calls the next day, and our chances of catching them go down considerably.

“This works really well when people see something and call in right away.”

The call Friday came in just before 10:30 p.m. by someone reporting vandalism in progress, Hingiss said.

Officers Jerry Nye and Kirstin Moertl responded, and while walking to the breakwater ran into two groups of teens. They took down the names of the youths, then proceeded to the lighthouse, where they saw freshly painted graffiti.

“It was still dripping,” Hingiss said.

The graffiti included the phrase “Long Live the King,” “PW ’18,” “SVN” and “SVG.”

“I can’t tell you what that all means,” Hingiss said.

At the lighthouse, the officers talked to several adults who told them they had not witnessed the painting but noticed a group of four boys who were standing around the base of the structure “laughing and bragging,” Hingiss said.

The adults said the teens became nervous when they approached and left the scene. Their description of the boys matched that of a group the officers had passed, so they called the youths in for questioning, Hingiss said.

When they arrived, the chief said, “the officers could see white paint on their fingers.”

Three of the 17-year-olds were cited for damaging property. One was also cited for obstructing an officer, Hingiss said, after he “continued to lie to us and tell us a different story,” telling officers the paint on his fingers was from work with his family earlier in the day.

The fourth teen told police he was not involved in the painting, something the other youths acknowledged, he added.

Hingiss said that in addition to a fine, the city will be seeking restitution from the teens to offset the city’s cost in removing the graffiti.

Street department workers tried to remove the graffiti on Monday, but traces of it can still be seen.

Street Commissioner J.D. Hoile said crews use a special anti-graffiti paint followed by a chemical coating, but ran out of the chemical on Monday.

Because the crews have a significant amount of other work to do this week, they won’t be able to complete removal of the graffiti until next week, he said.

The citations did not include a bond amount, in part because the department does not know the cost of removing the graffiti, Hingiss said. That also compels the teens to appear before the municipal court judge, he said.