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## Safe on 17 project gets top recognition

Dec 6 2003 12:00AM By

By TARMO HANNULA

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

APTOS - Santa Cruz Area California Highway Patrol officers got special recognition Thursday from the highest ranking figure in their statewide outfit, Commissioner Spike Helmick.

After flying into Watsonville Municipal Airport, Helmick visited the Santa Cruz Area CHP station in Aptos to present a distinguished Commissioner's Unit Citation to Santa Cruz Area Captain Pat Camara on behalf of the department. The citation recognized and honored the department for a 46 percent reduction in injury traffic accidents on Highway 17 over the past three years.

"Highway 17 has been a constant battle - to make that roadway safe," Helmick told a group of officers and their superiors. "We have gotten a lot of positive feedback about the 'Safe on 17' project. We have to continue to work it."

A taskforce was formed in 1998 to investigate the number of collisions in the Highway 17 corridor between Santa Cruz and Los Gatos. The force was comprised of the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission, the San Francisco Bay Area's Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the CHP, the California Department of Transportation, local law and fire departments, legislator's offices and media agencies.

Bolstered by a three-year grant from the Office of Traffic Safety, the taskforce implemented a strategy of enhanced enforcement, road improvements and public education. Officers focused on potential collision-causing violations. Taskforce members also distributed brochures, bumper stickers and press releases, held press conferences and used highway signs to urge motorists to slow down and drive safely.

In the Santa Cruz area of Highway 17, injury collisions were down 46 percent - 67 percent in the overall Highway 17 corridor. Due to the project's success - besides Helmick's presentation Thursday - the Safe on 17 Task Force was honored with a 2000 Excellence in Transportation Award from the SCCRTC and a 2001 Transportation Excellence Award from Caltrans.

"Highway 17 is a roadway that is not very forgiving," Helmick told area officers. "You work it every day and we do owe you plenty of thanks."

