

# Transforming hate

*Library turned it into art, and there are other helpful forms*

PHOTO BY TOM CARTER



## The Main

*Library's Jim Van Buskirk discovered 600 vandalized books and got artists nationwide to use them in art pieces, seen behind him in the Jewett Gallery.*

BY TOM CARTER

**E**VEN to a creative mind, transforming vandalism or a searing hate crime into a positive experience for a community is daunting.

Yet ideas do spring out of despair, and several such successes in the Bay Area were detailed at the Main Library on Feb. 17 in a panel discussion: "Reversing Vandalism: How Communities Can Transform Hate Into Healing."

The panel was prompted by the library's

own response to a reign of anti-gay book-slashing vandalism that began in 2001, lasted several months and destroyed 600 volumes worth \$24,000, some books irreplaceable.

Then scores of artists across the country stepped in to turn the trashed books into art, from collages to sculptures and even a working clock. The result is a 200-piece exhibit at the Main Library called "Reversing Vandalism." It opened Jan. 31 and runs through May 2.

By now, thousands have seen the exhibit displayed at the Grove Street entrance, in the Jewett Gallery on the main floor, and in the Hormel Center on the third floor. It was organized by the library's Catherine King, and it demonstrates, she told a group of 35 in the Koret Auditorium, that "communities are not powerless" to act positively when vandalism strikes.

"There has been an overwhelming outpouring of concern and sympathy," said panelist Jim Van Buskirk, program manager of the library's Gay/Lesbian Center, who had discovered the damaged books on the third floor, almost daily, over many months.

"We're in a different era now," said panelist Jude Thilman of the Marin Human Rights Roundtable on Hate Violence. "Now, we want to respond as a community and promote healing together."

To combat ignorance and hate, teach tolerance in schools, Thilman said. Gay bashing among the young will end when gays and straights get together to discuss their feelings, which

recently occurred at Novato High School, she said.

Student Jed Levine had been repeatedly humiliated and targeted by a student tormentor's graffiti. Instead of escalating antagonisms, Levine convinced the student to talk about his feelings and motivations publicly with him. The two began speaking about their orientations in classrooms and to community groups. Levine later won the Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights Award from the Marin Human Rights Commission.

**O**ne night in March 2002, after vandals spray-painted anti-Arab and anti-women epithets on the Women's Building on 18th Street and a nearby building housing various gay, lesbian and peace nonprofits, the residents took action not with vengeance but with a vigil, said panelist Tina D'Elia, director of the Hate Violence Survivor Program. of CUAV (Community United Against Violence).

"They went around the neighborhood and asked people to light a candle and put it in their window," she said. "And people slept outside on the sidewalk that night to form a protection for the (Women's) building. We were reclaiming it all as our home."

CUAV itself was founded in response to the riotous White Nights following the George Moscone-Harvey Milk assassinations.

Sometimes you can prevent vandalism, suggested panelist Holly Alonzo, director

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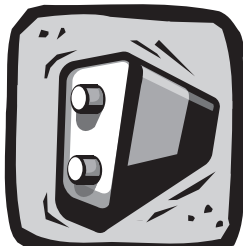
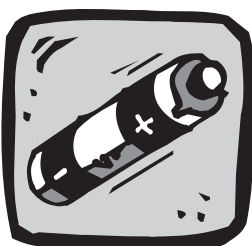
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