



Gun owners flex their right to carry arms at Livermore event

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LIVERMORE — They brought their guns to downtown Livermore — to have a cup of coffee and demonstrate their right to literally bear arms.

A group of more than a dozen people met at a downtown cafe Saturday afternoon, some of them had unloaded semi-automatic pistols holstered to their belts with their ammunition clips readily available. The demonstration was put on by members of the "open carry" movement.

The event at the Panama Red Coffee Co. was similar to others held recently in the Bay Area, at which gun owners exercise their rights to carry the weapons in public, said Livermore police Lt. Lance Bye. It is legal to carry an unloaded weapon without a special permit in most of California as long as the gun is unloaded and not near a school.

Bye said the group, which held a similar event in Livermore last month with no problems, called police beforehand to make sure the event would be in compliance. Officers met with a handful of them in a nearby parking lot, including to check the weapons.

"It was very low key, low profile," Bye said. "We received no complaints from the public."

Event organizers, who call themselves Bay Area

Open Carry, could not be reached Monday but said they are planning another event on Feb. 6 in Walnut Creek. Videos of the event posted on YouTube show a group of mostly men meeting over coffee and discussing rights among themselves.

Another video shows them being checked by the police, along with commentary about California law conflicting with constitutional rights. Viewers are directed to Web site californiaopencarry.org for more information.

Mike Stollenwerk, co-founder of opencarry.org, which started in 2004, said his national group is focused on areas where people can carry loaded guns and is unaffiliated with the californiaopencarry.org Web site or organization.

He said once police and others know what the law allows, it is not a big deal to carry a legal weapon in a legal manner.

Bye said it is not the police department's job to make opinions, but to enforce the law.

"We do understand and view it as a legal act" to carry the unloaded weapons, Bye said. The fact people may disagree with it is inconsequential. Our position is the enforce the law. We are the enforcement, not the legislature."

Reach Eric Louie at 925-847-2123

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