

In Santa Cruz County, a sort of legend has developed about people surviving without working, even doing well financially while evading labor. This is generally not true. The people of Santa Cruz do work, and work hard.

With the price of almost everything aiming to be the first on Mars (with the exception of candy bars, which oddly enough, are getting bigger without a price increase) and paychecks exhibiting classic symptoms of acrophobia, making ends meet gets more difficult every day for a lot of people.

Like any community of its size, the range of jobs here is numerous. However, the number of high-paid, skilled professions is not. Signs are favorable for an upswing over the next few years, thanks to the burgeoning electronics industry. According to projections from the Employment Development Department, electronics-related jobs in Santa Cruz County will increase to 2100 by 1983, considerably

higher than the 1500 electronics jobs in the County in 1981.

Mike Woods has been working at Plantronics in Scotts Valley through the Manpower employment agency for two-and-a-half months. "The job's not too bad," he says, "compared to other factory jobs I've had. It takes a lot of concentration, though, doing touch-up work on a printed circuit board.

"It's a small plant here, compared to some of the plants I've worked at over in Santa Clara. I don't enjoy it as much as a 'people-oriented job.'

"I get paid \$5-an-hour, and that's the best wage I've ever made. But I pay \$190-a-month in rent. I make enough to live...just live."

A very common Santa Cruz job is as a nurse's aide in one of the many convalescent homes. The Yellow Pages list 13 nursing home, each housing between 25-200 patients, with a staff working around the clock seven days a week, tending to

the varied needs of the elderly, the infirm and the chronic schizophrenic.

"It's depressing being around those people. I remember changing the diaper of a woman who had been a missionary in China for 30 years," says an employee of one of the nursing homes, who asked that neither he, nor his employer, be named. "The job doesn't pay well. But then, any amount of money would not make that job any less depressing.

"When you're not paid enough in a job, you gradually lose your self-esteem. It's just like when you're trying to promote a patient's self-esteem and they get slop for dinner — they must say to themselves, 'That's what I'm worth?' And it's the same thing with our wages. Eventually you start looking for ways to goof off.

"You do a quicker and shoddier job, but no one in the administration pays attention. You find out that nobody cares. So you don't get

# Working

Richard  
Hildreth

PHOTO: JOE DANIELS



Bus Driver Carol Sharps

in trouble. As you lose your own self-esteem, you start taking less care of the patients.

"It's rare when you find a place that cares about the work it's supposed to be doing. Those places will care about the workers and what they do.

"I don't think anybody would want to do this as a career. Anyone interested in the field should be a nurse's aide, but to make a career of it...? No. It opens doors to you, like nursing school or pharmacy.

"As I see it, the administrations of nursing homes only know about paperwork and this is detrimental to care. They're the ones that call the shots, decide where to spend the money. They give us programs and policies and guidelines that have nothing to do with the care of patients. They don't know about patients. Us, the aides, for the most part, we try to."

Santa Cruz has three large hospitals, employing a sizeable staff 24-hours-a-day. A hospital cannot run without nurses — the recent strike in San Jose proved that — yet many nurses have qualms about their jobs.

"I work part-time as an LVN (Licensed Vocational Nurse) at a hospital here about 32-hours-a-month," says a nurse who asked that she and her employer not be identified.

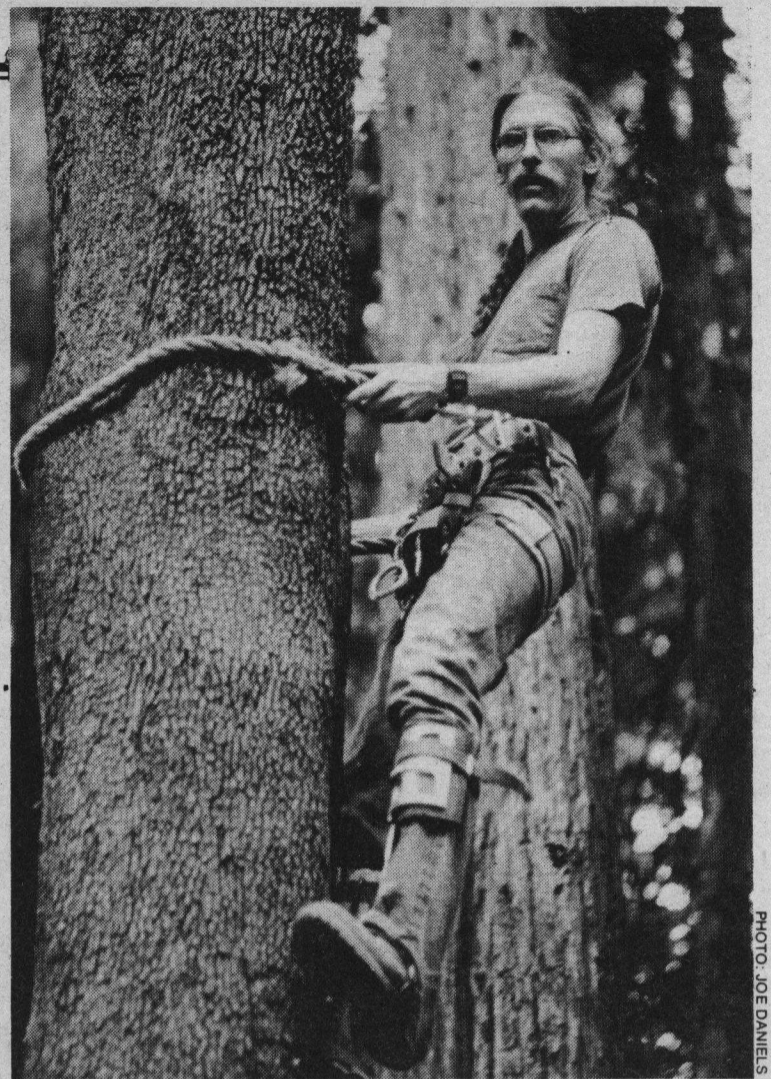


PHOTO: JOE DANIELS

Tree Surgeon Bruce Schroeder

"The pay is good for Santa Cruz, but I can't live on it. I work on-call for the registry [a service that provides medical personnel to hospitals and nursing homes to fill out a short staff] as well as at the hospital. Sometimes I have a lot of work and I can pay for bills. My regular job pays for rent and that's all. Rents are high here in Santa Cruz — everybody knows that.

I feel very fortunate to be able to get a job here that pays halfway decently. Most of my friends have skills, but they're not getting paid for them. I know people that have worked in the mental health field in San Francisco, been psychiatric technicians, and the only type of job they can get here is a minimum wage job in the nursing homes.

"I like my job. I work in a very modern hospital that has everything. I've worked there for two-and-a-half-years. But unless I want to work the night shift, there're not any full-time openings. I don't want to spend my life working nights. But, if there was a day shift available, I probably wouldn't take it.

"I've been in nursing for over six years, and I guess I'm a little burned out on it. There's a lot of physical and emotional strain. It's a stressful job. Part-time work is better for nursing.

"After a bad month, when I don't get many hours, I wonder how I'm going to make it. The hospital only staffs for the number of patients that are there. Sometimes I get called and asked to stay home. I don't have the option to say, 'I really need the money and I have to come in today.' No one does when

they do that. They feel that it's better to do this than to lay people off. There's a list of people and they give everybody a turn at staying home. You might be called once every two weeks. Some nights I find that I get really busy. We seem to have barely enough people to get by.

"I would make more money over the hill in San Jose. But, I don't have a car. It would cost me a lot of money to go over the hill everyday. So I work here instead."

The health care jobs fall under the technical heading of "service" work. This is a wide and varied category, and accounts for a large section of Santa Cruz' labor force.

Bruce Schroeder is self-employed in another kind of "service" work. He runs Tarzan Enterprises in Boulder Creek, which does tree surgery and chops and sells firewood.

"The work is hard, dirty and dangerous. I climb trees — 60, a 100 feet, whatever — cut off some branches, sometimes over power lines or houses. It's tricky. Especially when you're hanging on to a tree, cutting a piece off and the tree jumps on you. Each tree behaves differently. They're like snowflakes — no two are alike.

"I did it working for other people in San Francisco for three years. Now I've started my own business doing it. The demand for firewood is good, but for the trimming and the surgery...well, I'm not established here yet.

"I know I can make it here. I've got to get some more advertising out, give it some time, but I know I can make a living at this, here.

Summer's the time for removing trees and cutting firewood. Winter's for pruning. Everybody's going for the cheapest price. It's very cutthroat."

Often in Santa Cruz, people with training in a specialized skill find themselves using those skills at wages lower than they could get elsewhere.

Ace, who didn't want her last name used, learned about electronics communication in the Air Force. She now works for a local company that provides phones and intercom systems to businesses, performing maintenance on their product. According to Ace, "the pay is not as good as it could be. In the year I've worked there, the company has doubled in size and I've only gotten a fifty cents raise.

"It's barely a living wage after food and rent. I do like the job, the people I work with are very professional, and the company is not a huge conglomerate faceless corporation.

"I'd rather be operating the equipment, but here I'm getting experience in maintenance, and as long as there are machines, maintenance will be necessary, so this experience will be a good thing to fall back on. But there are times when I'm really cranking ass out there, and when I think that I could do this job elsewhere and get paid more for it. If I worked at the Phone Company, I could slack off more and get paid better.

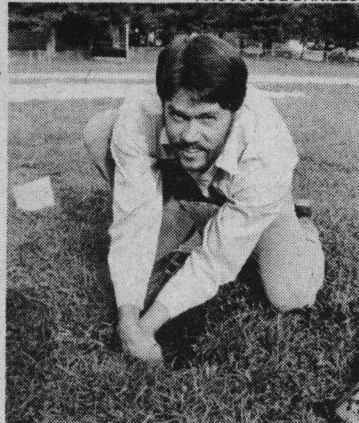
"I love Santa Cruz. I want to stay here, but it's tough in this town. If economic standards don't change I'll have to get another job, or moonlight, but I don't want to leave the company."

The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, the bus company, seems to have few faults as an employer, according to Carol Sharpes, a bus driver and mother of two. "For me, it's a really good job. The company is really good to work for. Mostly, it's the other drivers. I can't think of anybody there I don't get along with.

"The pay is good for Santa Cruz. When you compare it to other transit districts it's not so high, but the benefits we get are very good. Medical insurance that pays almost

100%, optical that pays 100% and really good dental coverage. And insurance for dependents of employees is paid for by the company

PHOTO: JOE DANIELS



**Park Worker  
Dan Barnett**

after the six-month probation period is over.

"I don't wake up and say 'Oh, God, I have to go to work.' Some days it's good, some days it's bad. The traffic can get hairy out there sometimes. The majority of the customers are really good.

"Fortunately, I have a low rent. For most of the drivers, they're just barely making ends meet. By the time they pay for rent and groceries, the check is all gone. I don't know the driver that doesn't have that problem. When it comes to supporting a family, it's tight. The highest paid driver makes \$20,000 a year, and that doesn't go far.

Restaurants take up a large part of the Santa Cruz County labor force. Many of them are fast food operations, like the one George Cohen manages in Capitola. "I left a \$7-an-hour job cooking down south and moved here three years ago. I then started working minimum wage jobs, and now I'm a manager.

"There's a crew of 24 people here, almost solely between the ages of 16 and 24; people whose families live here. The average applicant I get is a transient. Seventy per cent of the time I'll hire a person with local references that check out. I look for relative intelligence and a clean-cut appearance. I think of what I looked like when I looked for jobs at that age,

and my mother would say, 'Get a haircut!' I used to say, 'If they don't want to hire me the way I am, I don't want to work for them.' It's sure different now.

"Since most of my people are students and their families live here, I know I can count on them. They show up for work because they know I'll get rid of them if they don't show up without giving me prior notice.

"They produce at a minimum wage level and I don't really expect them to bust their balls for \$3.35-an-hour. I've got seven people here who've been here for two-and-a-half years. That's exceptional. The average is about six months. They'd probably stay longer if they got raises.

"Mostly I like my job. It's a lot of hours, and there's a burden of responsibility. Being responsible for other people's work is a pain in the ass. I do enjoy being in a position of power. And, it's the first decent living I've made in restaurants in years.

"I'll be managing a restaurant until I have enough capital to open one of my own. I'd open it in Santa Cruz, because I'm a gambler. It's got to be the worst place in the world to open a restaurant. But, if I've got to spend five-ten years of my life somewhere, I'd rather spend it in Santa Cruz."

Martin Taylor works at Togo's sandwich shop. As he puts it, the work is "just passable. Something you can handle and go to everyday. You're not there very long, and all of these people are friendly and easy to get along with.

"The pay is minimum wage to start, and never gets above \$4-an-hour. The employees are nearly all in college or between colleges. It's a highly educated staff for a fast-food shop. There's a shortage of jobs in the area, particularly if you want a job for a short term. Wages go on supply and demand, and there's a lot of people here willing to work for minimum wage.

"I'll probably work there for as short a time as possible. I'd like to get something more like a man's job with a wage that a family could live on rather than just one person exist on."

Playing a guitar on a sidewalk is a sideline for many people in Santa Cruz. Suzie Chong has been a street musician here and in New Orleans, and has this to say about Santa Cruz: "The harassment is low. There aren't as many drunks or loonies here. People listen to the music a lot. It's a lazy enough town that they don't mind sitting down for a while.

"The money's fair, but you couldn't live on it. Unless you camped out and evaded rent. It's primarily a nice supplementary income.

"When you're on the street, you're performing, not rehearsing. The people know the difference and you have to electrify them. Sometimes it's fun, other times it can be real frustrating, like when

PHOTO: SYLVIA FOLEY



**Rock Musician  
Henry Hample**

you've just ripped off something really hot and nobody notices. You're not dealing with an audience that has to respond. They can just walk away.

"In New Orleans there's a lot of sleaze in the streets. Sometimes it gets in the way of the music. I'd rather be a street musician here than in New Orleans."

There is also a sizeable population of musicians here that perform professionally, or at least try to. Henry Hample, who describes himself as a "professional smart-ass," is a member of the local band the Scapegoats, and was once a promoter of new original music

here. Talking about the Santa Cruz professional music business, he says that "unless you're doing 'production music' you're not going to make it. People playing original music aren't going anywhere. There's more musicians in Santa Cruz than in any single place in the world. But the only thing that's selling is programmed dance music.

"There's a large percentage of the populace that just wants to go out and party. It's an extension of the attitude that existed throughout the '70s of apathy: not caring much about art, but just wanting to have a good time. A lot of bands tend to make more money at private parties than clubs. In financially bad times, the first thing people spend money on is entertainment."

There are rare cases of menial jobs that pay reasonably well here. Richard Giffin, who has a B.A. in Politics from UCSC, says "with a degree in Politics, what kind of job could I get? I could work for a local political organization or go to law school. I wanted to stay away from Santa Cruz politics.

"So I spent two years bouncing around in all the minimum wage jobs — Wrigley's, a stockclerk at K-Mart, and substitute teaching. I got tired of teaching, so I went job hunting again. A friend of mine at the Credit Union had a job at the Saga Food Service Company and was quitting. He told me it was open, so I went down there with my girlfriend, who was already working there, and she said great things about me, and they said, fine, here's the job."

Giffin cleans floors at the Cowell/Stevenson dining hall at UCSC for Saga, which provides food service to the schools.

"I got the job through connections, not because of my superior ability to clean floors. I make \$4.86-an-hour to clean floors. Not the counters. We have a 'division of labor.' I use a mop and a broom and a squeegee on the floors. They might eventually have me get into the 'finer details' of floor cleaning, like buffing and waxing. Right now, they bring in another service to buff and wax. I work at night, between eight pm and six am. I can

only work a maximum of six-and-half hours a night, so the scheduling is a little flexible.

"I've been there since May. I'll probably stay for a year. I'm saving money for my next move, probably to the Caribbean. This job allows me to maintain my semi-bohemian lifestyle."

**M**r. B. is a bricklayer and jeweler in Brookdale. He asked not to be named, because of some legal complications he is involved in. B. and his girlfriend have a six month old daughter.

"My girlfriend makes enough to pay the rent, and I try to make enough to pay the rest. I advertise my bricklaying business in the *Sentinel*, and I get a lot of repeat work from general contractors. I don't make enough, though. I've moved eight times in the area over the last 12 months just to be able to afford to pay the rent. I've been in the San Lorenzo Valley for about six years.

"There's not enough building permits now. Construction is slow. Four years ago, I was turning jobs down. I was running a crew of up to six people. Then, suddenly, it all stopped."

"I broke my back, and while I was in bed I started making jewelry. Once in a while, it brings in some money. I had a shop for about eight months about a year ago, but my inventory kept coming up short, so I had to shut it down. And the overhead was too expensive. I was paying \$80-a-month for PG&E.

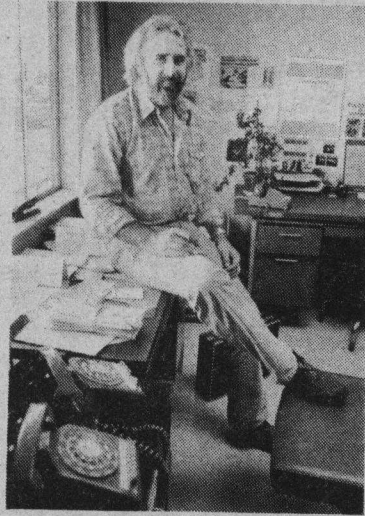
"Right now, I'm always behind as far as PG&E, water and assorted other bills — doctor bills, stuff like that. I just don't have the money to pay them."

Dan Barnett is a member of a vanishing species: Santa Cruz native. Barnett and his girlfriend have a four-month-old child. He works for the Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation Department at Harvey West Park.

"I have the responsibility of taking care of Harvey West Park. There's just two employees and the park is designed to accommodate hundreds of people. There's no way I can get to all of the work that has

to be done. Just the other day, I got a bad evaluation, even though I'd been running around all day working really hard to get to

PHOTO: JOE DANIELS



**Union Organizer  
Tim McCormack**

everything.

"I really enjoy that kind of work, but I can't keep up with the pace. There's been less and less money and more work. We really need more personnel, but no one is willing to pay for it.

"People are really critical of park workers. They think that they don't work, but many of them are skilled landscapers who work very hard.

"I'm feeling a lack of time. I work hard, I'm tired, I've got a kid now, and it's difficult to find time to pursue my other interests. I'm pressed for resources. It's hard to get ahead in life if you don't have the time to what you want to do.

"People here are getting a lot more property-oriented. They'll sell the crummiest shack for \$70,000 after putting a few flowers around and give it a new paint job. Rents are getting so high. I used to live in a house on Pearl Street for \$200. The last time I looked at it a few years ago it was \$375 a month. God knows what it is now. I was just looking at a house that had two bedrooms and cost \$600. That's just too much.

"It costs money to do anything here now. The town is as beautiful as it ever was, but more and more things are off-limits. I used to dive off the wharf. You can't do that

now. All of the real natural fun spots for kids have been eliminated. Everything has a price tag. Even Harvey West is eventually going to have to charge people for admission.

"The people that have the property are the only ones getting by. They're getting a wage for letting people live on their property.

"I've spent the past two years working for the City, and I don't really have all that much to show for it. I can't get into the market. The costs here are going nowhere but up.

"The *Good Times* life is over. It's out the window for me. I'm interested now in what's less expensive, what's not in the fast lane. Santa Cruz is becoming very consumer-oriented. The 41st Avenue Mall is consumer heaven. The regular job, 'hard-work ethic' doesn't exist here anymore.

"I pay half my income on rent. And the rest goes fast; doctor's bills for the baby. I still owe the hospital a lot of money. I'm in debt and I shouldn't be. I don't blame the welfare/foodstamp/Medi-Cal people for evading the stress. Why should people want that stress? The rat-race? People like to work, but you have to make it worth their while.

"I'm getting older, I'm going down a path and the doors aren't opening. I have certain responsibilities that are very important to me. I'm probably going to leave this area. I want more time to myself, and lower expenses. This area is great if you have the money. I love this area — it's my home — but sadly, I'm going to have to move on. This is no place for me if I'm going to continue to exist.

"That Santa Cruz spirit has always been for me a mellow, accepting spirit. It's not anymore. I'm getting away from this consumer gig. I don't want to be part of a consumer world. I was concerned about it too much for too long. Now, I'm against it."

**S**anta Cruz has never been a stronghold of organized labor. According to Tim McCormick, of the Hospital and

Institutional Worker's Local 250, AFL/CIO, the biggest problem has been the high turnover rate, the transient nature of Santa Cruz workers.

McCormick says that unions also meet strong opposition here from employers. "When they're threatened with unions, they'll go out and hire consulting firms to stop the union. They break out the big guns. The money they'll spend on blocking unions is astronomical. And when you consider that the union is allowed to try organizing the same shop a year later, you'd think it would be beneficial for the employers to let the workers decide on their own."

Organizing activity is increasing here, he believes. "The trend is towards unionizing, especially in the service industries. The soft

PHOTO: JOE DANIELS



**SC Chamber's  
Lionel Stoloff**

industries, like electronics, will get organized. Culinary workers here are a different picture. They've been losing ground, but the strike in Monterey has sort of tossed the ball to them now."

Lionel Stoloff, the general manager of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce says that the largest industry in Santa Cruz alternates between the government and the retail trades. Citing statistics from the Employment Development Department (EDD), he says that the retail trades usually hold first place. "The greatest number of jobs are as salespeople,

which usually pays minimum wage or just slightly above. A large segment of the employable people here are working for the retail stores."

But Stoloff points out that the EDD figures do not distinguish part-time from full-time employees and that the full impact of the statistic might be slightly misleading.

Regarding jobs that require a skill, Stoloff says that "the high tech and food processing industries tend to pay a higher wage scale, but there is a shortage of people here that are skilled in those fields."

The make-up of the area's labor force, he says, has changed since "UCSC brought a large number of students here. They didn't want to leave when they graduated. They 'discovered' Santa Cruz, and now you have overqualified people doing menial jobs. They're willing to take these menial jobs in order to stay in Santa Cruz."

As for the future of the Santa Cruz worker, Stoloff does not expect to see much more industry moving into the City of Santa Cruz because of growth control measures. "Scotts Valley will continue to grow, but it will be inhibited by a housing shortage. Watsonville will probably see more of these high tech companies moving in because of the availability of land making housing costs lower. But, the people of Watsonville will have to take a good look at their agricultural land. That's something that can't be replaced. It's up to the people of Watsonville to make that choice."

Making a living is not easy for most, but it is unavoidable. The people of Santa Cruz do what they have to do to get by, and sometimes it's not enough. These interviews are by no means a complete picture of the situation here, and not necessarily a completely accurate representation of the "average Santa Cruz worker." But each one is a true voice, and expresses the spirit of its speaker. They prove that contrary to popular opinion, Santa Cruz is not a community of food stamp recipients, but a community of workers who believe in the value of work. □