

# MAYORS Year of Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt

□ Women city council members say they are treated differently — **Page A4**

□ Current and past women of the Santa Cruz City Council — **Page A5**

*"Once you decide and say you're going to do something, you don't back down just because people don't like it."*

— Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt

By **JOAN RAYMOND**  
Sentinel Staff Writer

**S**ANTA CRUZ — As Mardi Wormhoudt steps down as mayor, there's plenty of disagreement about the wisdom of her politics.

The conclusion isn't exactly a mindbuster: her supporters like her politics; her opponents don't. Wormhoudt won a race for re-election Nov. 5 despite a tough, well-financed campaign to unseat her by moderate-conservatives.

She won a third seat in a three-seat race by a small margin.

The victory was sweet. It meant Wormhoudt — a "progressive feminist" — became only the second woman in the city's history to be re-elected to a second term.

No matter how they feel about her politics, Wormhoudt's opponents and supporters agree she is a woman of principle who is to be admired for her open-door policy at City Hall.

"Mardi is very straightforward. You know where she stands," said Councilwoman Katy Sears-Williams, whose political ideology differs from Wormhoudt's.

Added moderate Councilman Spiro Mellis, who served on the council with Wormhoudt: "Her main strength was she had this openness — would listen to all sides. She would even seek out advice from the 'opposite side,' not only on the council, but out in the community."



Pete Amos/Sentinel

## Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt

Another moderate on the council, Arnold Levine, commented, "I don't necessarily agree with some of her actions as mayor, but she is certainly a woman of strong principle who followed through on her convictions. You've got to give her credit for standing up for what she believes in."

Wormhoudt, 48, says she enjoys working with people and helping them to move through the bureaucracy.

But she realizes, "You can't please everybody."

What can be done, she said, "is assume you have some responsibility to do what you believe in, then take a leadership role."

"Either people will agree with you and return you to office, or they will not elect you."

Wormhoudt had an extremely busy year as mayor — not only taking care of council agendas, issuing proclamations (one supporting Cesar Chavez was used as a political weapon against her), chairing council meetings and writing official letters, but also making hundreds of public appearances.

She recalled one particularly jammed and diverse day on which she changed her clothes several times to match the occasion at hand. Her day started with a dedication of the renovated Municipal Wharf, moved to a march from Beach Flats to the county government center in protest of arrests of Mexican laborers by Immigration and Naturalization Service agents, then the installation of officers for the Democratic Women's Club, followed by a fund-raiser for coffee-bean harvesting in Central America, and finally, the opening of an Indian pow-wow celebration.

Despite the sometimes-grueling schedule, Wormhoudt said she believes in giving her best to each situation and making her speeches specific and meaningful to the occasion. "They care about their own event and they have a right to it. That's why you have to think about what you're going to say and do your best."

Her pet issues and accomplishments include the San Lorenzo River Task Force, a volunteer marine-rescue squad, a remodeling plan for the Civic Auditorium and the Front Street County Jail for cultural facilities, the La Familia Crisis Center in Beach Flats, and a land-use plan for city property at Neary Lagoon.

Please see **Page A4**

# Mardi Wormhoudt

Continued from Page A1

Wormhoudt authored the anti-off-shore oil-drilling initiative on the November ballot. Voters handily passed it. Her challengers supported it, but complained the measure was a political ploy to get liberal-progressive voters to the polls.

Early in their bids for re-election, Wormhoudt and Councilman John Laird made recommendations for an economic development task force and the hiring of a city economic-development consultant.

The council passed the recommendations, but minority members complained the beach area had been left out of the plan.

Complaints from the business community target Wormhoudt and the council majority as anti-business, or at least not aggressive enough in stimulating business. Wormhoudt's critics constantly note the fact the city is losing revenues from a migration of car dealerships out of town. The more open-minded critics admit the blame cannot all be left at the doorstep of the current administration and council majority.

Wormhoudt's most controversial action was probably the mayor's proclamation during the summer supporting Cesar Chavez' United Farmworkers boycott of table grapes.

The county Farm Bureau considered the proclamation a slap in the face to the agricultural community.

In retaliation, the Farm Bureau launched a boycott against Santa Cruz businesses and encouraged out-of-county agricultural groups to

eliminate the city of Santa Cruz from their list of sites for convention centers.

Fearing the business loss, the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce executive board asked Wormhoudt to rescind the proclamation, but she refused.

The Convention and Visitors Bureau, Downtown Association, Seaside Company, wharf and Beach Street merchants all joined the protest against the proclamation, but Wormhoudt did not back down.

Ultimately, the council majority passed a resolution giving more political teeth to the proclamation.

Challengers used the controversy as a weapon in the election campaign against Wormhoudt.

Members of the business community still resent the fact Chavez appeared at UC Santa Cruz the day before the election. Chavez told students to vote for Laird, Wormhoudt and unsuccessful candidate Mauricio Longoria of the Rainbow Coalition.

Wormhoudt denies claims she traded the proclamation for a pre-election appearance by Chavez. Her opponents say the Chavez appearance was orchestrated to garner more votes for Wormhoudt on campus — one of the liberal-progressive voting strongholds.

Chamber General Manager Lionel Stoloff commented Wormhoudt was responsive to requests from the Chamber except in the instance of the Chavez proclamation. Otherwise, "she was very helpful," he said.

Wormhoudt — along with majority members Laird, Jane Weed and Michael Rotkin — has also been heavily criticized for taking stands on labor, national and international issues, such as the Coors brewery boycott, United Farm Workers' boycott, Seaside Company union dispute and American intervention in Central America.

Critics like Downtown Association President and Sentinel publisher Fred McPherson III give Wormhoudt credit for following her principles, but believe she would wrongly "put the concerns of special interest groups ahead of the interests of the entire city."

Citing the council majority support for non-local and labor causes, Levine remarked: "I think she and her group have forced the council to take stands on very divisive issues" that he feels would have been better left at the hands of special-interest groups.

But Wormhoudt finds it "interesting" her critics say she should only take stands on issues representative of the entire community.

"I don't know what those issues would be. This is a very diverse community," she responded.

During the election, Wormhoudt defended her record, saying

challengers had exaggerated the amount of time the council majority spent on "foreign policy."

A week after the election, she was displeased to hear Rotkin was asking the council to make Santa Cruz a free port for the exchange of goods with Nicaragua in defiance of President Reagan's trade embargo against the Central American country.

Wormhoudt voted for the proposal, but made no speeches in its support.

Wormhoudt said she disliked the timing, not the issue.

"It looked like we were thumbing our noses at the people who lost the election."

She still believes, however, the council has the right to take stands on non-local and labor issues.

A troublesome aspect of her term as mayor was vicious and personal attacks against her, Wormhoudt said (see related story on women in politics).

There was a tone of hatred and violence to some of the verbal and written attacks against her, she said.

Her house was the target of a bomb threat several months ago.

"Someone threatened to blow up my house at noon. That was devastating to me. It really scared me, not only for myself, but for my whole family and kids. We live in a very violent society."

Despite the frightening and negative side of being a public official, Wormhoudt says she likes politics and liked her year as mayor.

Now she's ready to get out of the limelight. A new mayor will be selected by council members on Tuesday.

She says she's looking forward to working on issues "in a less-charged atmosphere."

Come the first of the year, she plans to start getting back to her job as an architectural design consultant and to start bringing home a paycheck.

"I'm looking forward to a more anonymous life."