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War protests continue

Vigils draw small crowd every night

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

THEY'RE THERE every night in front of the City Plaza on Watsonville's Main Street, holding up pro-peace signs to the cars that go by.

The 15 or 20 people who show up every night are part of a small but dedicated group taking a public stance in a city where people are more likely to show their support for the troops than the protesters.

Dick Bernard, a member of the Watsonville Peace Coalition, which organizes the protests, said it's remarkable that there's

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a peace movement in Watsonville, considering "the conservative nature of the town."

Neither Bernard nor the Rev. Jim Bradford, another member of the coalition, expect Watsonville's pro-peace efforts to match those of Santa Cruz, where there are some 30 peace events every week.

But, they say, the coalition is having some impact. Bradford, pastor of the First Christian Church, said he is putting together information on the military draft that might be used by the schools.

Bradford said the coalition is planning a major event in March; the details haven't been worked out.

"I think the impact (of peace efforts) will grow when the first (local) soldiers come back," either as victims or when the war is over, Bernard said.

The coalition draws between 35 and 40 people to its weekly meetings; the members take turns on the protests at the Plaza. The coalition voted last night to cut back its lunch-hour protests at the Plaza from every day to Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Bernard said he expects the coalition will continue to deal with returning servicemen after the war. People will welcome them home, Bernard said, but they will be coming back to a depressed economy.

"We have tried to make it clear that we support the troops," Bradford said. "We just don't support the government policy."

One war-related event begins tonight in Watsonville: draft information for the Spanish-speaking. The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. at the offices of

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Kurt Ellison

Jean Piraino and her pet Bo were part of the nightly peace vigil at the Watsonville Plaza last night. She says Bo is part of a growing organization of dogs called 'Pups for Peace.'

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Project Adelante, an agency that helps the poor, at 18-B West Lake Ave.

The event is put on by the Santa Cruz Resource Center for Nonviolence, which has been drawing between 60 and 80 people to its thrice-weekly draft counseling sessions in Santa Cruz.

Monica Larenas, who is organizing the event, said laws regarding the draft are "murky," even to those who speak English.

All men aged 18 to 26 living in the United States are required to register for the draft, which has not been instituted. The military only takes enlistments from people who can pass a standard test given in English.

Larenas said the information sessions may be valuable for Spanish-speaking parents with English-speaking children who may be eligible for the military.

Celia Organista, Adelante's director, was careful to use the word "informational" about the draft sessions, objecting to it being called "counseling."

People "aren't going to be told what to do," Organista said.

Larenas said plans call for holding the draft sessions weekly, with meetings in English added soon.

Larenas said people attending the draft counseling sessions in Santa Cruz have been coming from as far away as Salinas and Pacific Grove.

Doug Rand, of the Resource Center for Nonviolence staff, said the center had been counseling between 12 and 24 people a month before Iraq invaded Kuwait in August.

People interested in the peace movement in Santa Cruz have plenty of programs to choose from. Among the offerings this week, there are forums on civil resistance, media and the war, the role of Jews and Palestinians in the war, a poetry reading for peace, a nightly vigil at the Town Clock in Santa Cruz, and prayer vigils at local churches.

At an organizational meeting for peace groups last week, 400 people turned out to a room that seated 250, Rand said.

The peace events in Santa Cruz are helping people understand the impact of war beyond the headlines, Rand said. What the headlines don't show, he said, is the war's impact on humanity.

"There's an element of humanity that's being violated" by the war, Rand said. Even when the shooting stops, he said, there will be long-term effects on the population.

Rand questions the polls that have shown strong support for the U.S. military effort.

"Just because some people wave a flag doesn't mean they want to kill people or go to war," he said.

While protesters for peace are against the U.S. involvement in the war, "We support the troops," Rand said, realizing it was not their decision to enter the war.