

Belgard likes job enough to run again in 3 years

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

After a 35-year law-enforcement career that ended with his retirement as Watsonville police chief in 1988, Ray Belgard figured "I had put in my time" as a public servant.

But some of Belgard's friends figured differently and recruited him to run for Santa Cruz County supervisor in the 1990 election. Belgard defeated one-term incumbent Sherry Mehl, trading in retirement for 60-hour work weeks that began in January 1991.

Belgard, 61, isn't complaining.

"It seems like I just got here. I'm thoroughly enjoying it," he said of his first year in office as the Watsonville-area supervisor. "I'm intending to run for a second term in 1994."

People familiar with Belgard from his law-enforcement days will recognize his style as a supervisor: politically conservative, but not afraid to cast a "liberal" vote occasionally; hard-working; willing to take criticism but not adverse to sharply criticizing those who he thinks are out of line with their criticism.

The cop in Belgard still comes through. When he criticizes the county Planning Department, he compares it to the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office has 126 deputies; the Planning Department is authorized to have 128, although 20 spots are being left vacant because of declining revenue.

"If we were to cut out 30 percent of the Planning Department, it would not be that drastic," said Belgard. "People would rather feel safe and secure in their homes" than have the money spent on planning, he said.

Belgard's criticism of the Planning Department is not all-consuming; he has supported staff recommendations, even on a few split votes, and has met with the staff to learn about issues.

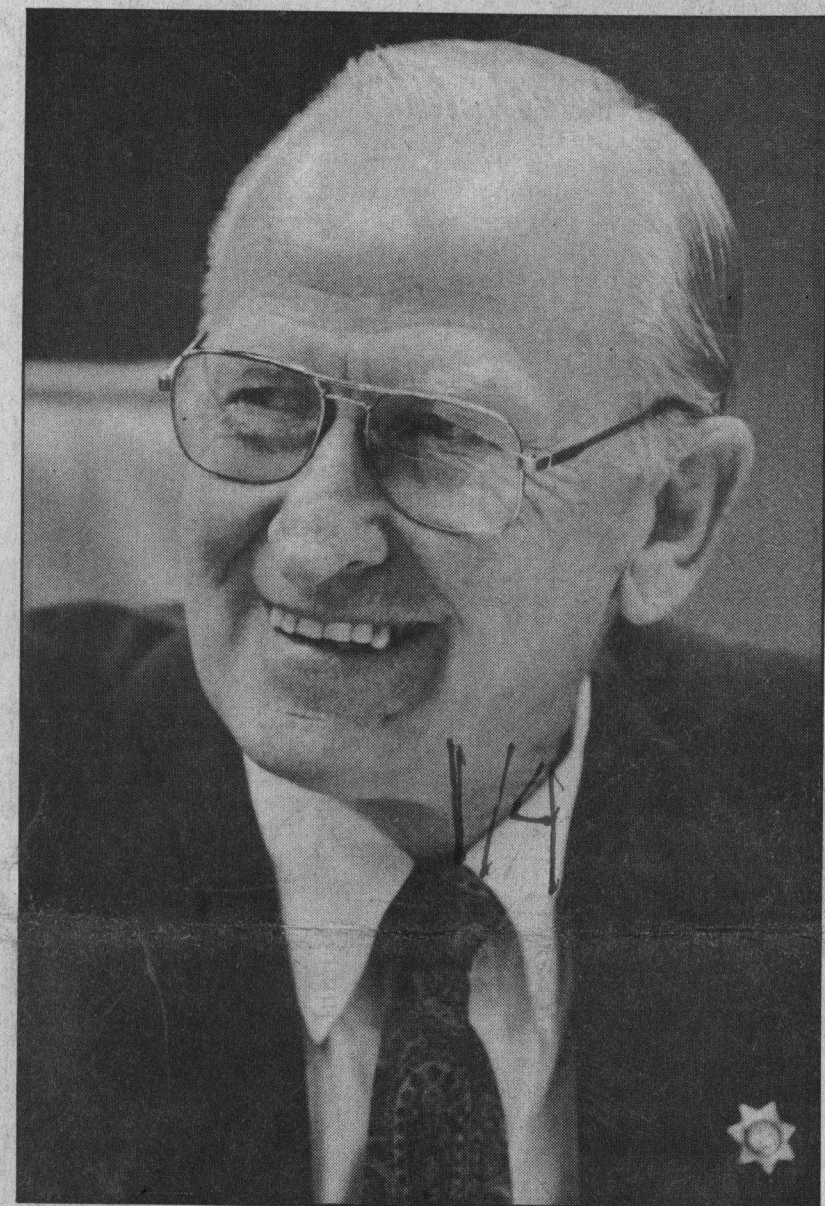
Critics say Belgard needs to do more for Watsonville's Hispanics

For Ray Belgard, the honeymoon of victory has lasted all year — he's received little public criticism in his first year as a Santa Cruz County supervisor.

When tax protesters tried a recall of supervisors this spring, they went after everybody on the board except Belgard, the newest supervisor and only conservative.

What little criticism Belgard has received has come from the expected sources: those who disagree with his philosophy.

Letters to the editor criticizing



Kurt Ellison

Ray Belgard is the lone conservative on the board of supervisors

"Land use is 80 percent of my job. It's a lot more complex than I realized," said Belgard. His experience as administrator for the District Attorney and later as police chief covered most aspects of government and budgeting, but not land use.

The Planning Department has

drawn criticism for what Belgard calls "doing everything you can to limit growth. We're limiting growth by the (restrictive) permit process. Building a better road doesn't have to be a growth inducer."

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Belgard have come from Celia Organista, active in Latino affairs, and Mike Kostyal, active in various liberal causes.

"From the Latino perspective, there was not high expectations, and we got what we expected," Organista said. She said Belgard "has not taken a leadership role" in issues affecting Latinos, such as housing and employment.

Organista called Darlene Lopes, one of Belgard's aides, a "major cheerleader" against a proposed \$216 million redevelopment project

for the Pajaro Valley.

On the weekend before Belgard made the motion to kill the project, Lopes circulated petitions against redevelopment. Lopes did the campaigning on her own time, with Belgard's OK but not at his direction.

"I may not have satisfied the Celia Organistas and Rebecca Garcias," Belgard said, referring to Organista and another Latino activist. "I'm aware there are some housing needs. I went out to

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Belgard finds land use is 80 percent of job

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Belgard would like to see some of the policies changed, but as the only conservative on the Board of Supervisors, he said he doesn't foresee any substantial change under the current board.

Rather than always being on the short end of 4-1 votes, Belgard has occasionally compromised to get at least a little of what he wants.

When supervisors were considering a fee on developers to help pay for child care, Belgard fought for reducing the fees for certain types of businesses. After the changes he sought were made, Belgard voted for the fees.

"If they (other supervisors) are willing to give me concessions, I'm willing to vote for it," Belgard said, adding that the alternative is no concessions and a single opposing vote.

Belgard's philosophical opposite on the board is Gary Patton, known for his low-growth attitude. While they disagree often, Belgard and Patton have never gotten into anything resembling an argument on the board. Both say their relations have been cordial off the board, and that they've been able to work together.

The biggest issue for Belgard in 1991 was a proposed redevelopment plan that would have spent up to \$216 million over 40 years for a variety of public improvements in Freedom, Green Valley and Interlaken. The proposal was made by the county's Redevelopment Agency.

In October, Belgard said he felt

Belgard said. Residents pointed to such proposed projects as a community center and library and said they couldn't afford redevelopment.

Although redevelopment is dead, there is one aspect of it that Belgard wants to see accomplished — improving the infrastructure, government jargon for such things as

repair, and Belgard said he's confident this one will last.

In December, supervisors approved what Belgard said was one of his top priorities for the year — establishment of Zone 7, which will assess property owners for flood-control projects in the Pajaro Valley's major waterways. The federal government will pay for 75 percent of the work.

A supervisor's job involves more than sitting through board meetings and making speeches. There are hundreds of little decisions every week: whether to back this or that legislation, how much time to invest checking out a citizen's complaint, and dealing with officials of other government agencies.

As a supervisor, Belgard says his only boss is the people who voted for him. There's no city manager or City Council that can tell him what to do.

"I like the freedom of choice," said Belgard, adding that he likes to get opinions "right from the people."

But Belgard doesn't expect everybody will like him.

"You can't please everybody," he said. "I gave that (idea) up a long time ago."

Belgard and his philosophical opposite on the board, Gary Patton, have not gotten into anything resembling an argument.

the redevelopment plan had some good points, but wanted to hear public comments at two meetings in early November before voting.

After more than 500 people turned out for the meetings to almost unanimously oppose redevelopment, Belgard made the motion to kill formation of the project. His fellow supervisors made it a 5-0 vote.

"We got the taxpayers — the property owners — out to the meetings. I feel really good about that. We need to listen to them,"

roads, lighting, sewers and storm drains.

"We've got to find a way" to make the necessary improvements, said Belgard, who will make that effort a priority.

Two infrastructure projects have been approved since Belgard took office. One is the most visible problem in the Pajaro Valley: the collapsed roadway on Green Valley Road near Freedom Boulevard, where repairs have failed twice in the last decade. Funds have been allocated for a third

Few criticize Belgard during his first year

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Murphy's Crossing (labor camp) to hear their concerns."

Kostyal, who urged further study of the redevelopment plan, criticized Belgard for "not going out to allay the fears" of residents.

Kostyal said Belgard "has to appear staunchly conservative" when he's in Watsonville, but has voted more liberally at board meetings in Santa Cruz.

Kostyal, who fought to extend the Pacific Bell's toll-free calling areas for Watsonville phones, said Belgard's office helped, "but they didn't take the ball and run with it" like Monterey County did. "Ray Belgard listens to a select few," Kostyal charged.

Watsonville Mayor Oscar Rios, a staunch advocate of Latino causes, has not been publicly critical of Belgard, but did criticize him when contacted for this article.

Rios said Belgard "is not taking Latinos into consideration" in his

actions. He acknowledged that Belgard supported spending \$35,000 in county funds for social programs aimed at Latinos in South County, but said Belgard could do more for such programs. That came from a \$77,000 county allocation for social programs.

Rios isn't giving up on Belgard,

ing toward bringing jobs to Watsonville, said Bob Dwyer, executive director of the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce since July.

Dwyer said Belgard has helped with a city of Watsonville effort to establish an "enterprise zone" that would give tax breaks to those who create jobs in a designated

Santa Cruz.

Another who has been impressed with Belgard is Jeff Brothers, president of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. There was some concern among farmers, Brothers said, because the Farm Bureau had endorsed Belgard's opponent, incumbent Sherry Mehl, a former Farm Bureau president.

Belgard has established good communication with farmers, Brothers said, and has played a key role in two agricultural issues. One was a dispute between owners of Matthew Mushrooms on Buena Vista Road, who complained of the noise and smell from the plant, which Belgard's aides helped solve, Brothers said.

The other was a proposal that new greenhouses pay \$1.87 a square foot in traffic-impact fees. "Ray's staff got that down to 2 cents," Brothers said, adding that the original fee would have made construction prohibitive.

—Lane Wallace

Belgard has a 'darn tough job' because of the diverse needs of the community.

—Bob Dwyer, Chamber of Commerce director

though. "He is still learning the process," Rios said, adding that he'd like to see Belgard involved in developing affordable-housing projects and in bringing jobs to Watsonville. "The doors are open. He has shown he wants to cooperate," Rios said.

Belgard has indeed been work-

area. Belgard has also been supportive of job-training programs, said Dwyer, whose office is in the same downtown building as Belgard's Watsonville office.

Dwyer said Belgard has a "darn tough job" because of the diverse needs of the community and the distance from the county seat in