

County OKs deal to repair Vets Hall

San Carlos firm scores job
after three lower bids rejected

By JASON HOPPIN

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SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors has awarded a \$2.4 million contract for a seismic retrofit of the historic Veterans Memorial Building, but not after an unusual process that saw three lower bids rejected.

San Carlos-based Gonsalves & Stronck won the contract, after the board deemed it the lowest qualified bidder even though the company's proposal came in nearly \$500,000 higher than one from Sea Pac Engineering, a Los Angeles contractor with a long list of federal jobs under its belt.

"We're looking forward to getting (veterans) back in the building in the fall," said Nancy Gordon, director of the county's General Services Department, which is overseeing the contract award.

Sea Pac's \$1.9 million bid was disqualified for failing to list subcontractors or provide certification for its asbestos contractor. Under the county's bid request, that disqualified Sea Pac from consideration. A representative of the company could not be reached for comment.

SEE VETS HALL ON A3

AT A GLANCE

COUNTY AWARDS RETROFIT CONTRACT

1. Sea Pac Engineering \$1.86 million (rejected)
2. West Bay Builders \$2.29 million (rejected)
3. Strawn Construction \$2.36 million (rejected)
4. Gonsalves & Stronck **\$2.39 million (WINNER)**
5. D.L. Falk Construction \$2.44 million
6. Garden City Construction \$2.49 million

SOURCE: Santa Cruz County

VETS HALL

Continued from A1

"Sure we'd have liked to go with the lower number, but on the other hand if you can't pay attention to that level of detail, what does that mean for the project?" Gordon said.

Other bids were more in line with the county's \$2.3 million construction estimate, part of a \$3.5 million retrofit meant to bring the historic 1932 building up to code and end several years of controversy that began when the county shuttered the building in 2010. The county is funding the project through bond proceeds, spreading the cost over 25 years.

The project has taken far too long for many local vets, who were skeptical that the building needed as much work as the county determined. Cost estimates spiked after the project was

first proposed, with work now including a new roof, new electrical system, new boiler and replacement of much of the basement.

"Our worst nightmare in the beginning has been surpassed as of the 20th of January," said Bob Patton, an officer with the United Veterans Council of Santa Cruz County, noting the third anniversary of the building's closure.

Patton would like to see veterans groups now housed at the county's Emeline Avenue campus return in time to host a Thanksgiving dinner, but he is skeptical of any county timeline.

"We'll be lucky to be in there by the end of the year, very lucky," Patton said.

Gonsalves & Stronck has experience with historic projects, including winning several awards for its renovation of the 1905 Folger Estate Stables in Woodside, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. One was a

prestigious California Preservation Award in 2011.

The company also built the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, and did a seismic retrofit and renovation of the historic San Mateo County Courthouse. Company President Bill Stronck said he is still in the early stages of determining when work on the Santa Cruz veterans building can get under way.

Construction bids frequently are disqualified for failing to comply with bid requirements. However, seeing a contract fall to the fourth-lowest bidder is rare.

"It's not unusual to have something wrong with a bid, and it moves one position or two positions," Stronck said. "But in this market, it's so competitive people are protesting bids for anything and everything."

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