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# 2,000 county workers begin strike today



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

County Health Educator Ali Hayes helps get picket signs ready at SEIU headquarters in Santa Cruz.

## Most offices will remain open, staffed by management

By **RAMONA TURNER**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — The first-ever county worker strike begins today.

About 2,000 employees from 22 departments countywide, excluding those in health and public safety, walked off the job and picked up picket signs in an attempt to get the county to award them salaries and benefits similar to those in surrounding counties. Santa Cruz County workers earn about 7 percent less than their counterparts over the hill.

The strike was called after last-minute negotiations between the county and Service Employees International Union Local 415, which repre-

sents the workers, broke down over the weekend. The workers' contracts expired Friday.

"I've been working for the county for 12 years and there's never been a strike," said Sandy Goodman, a public health-clinic worker. "We had a couple sick-outs hoping things would get better, but they didn't."

Goodman was among about 20 union members and community volunteers assembling picket signs at the union's office on Mission Street.

The room was filled with the sounds of duct tape being wrapped around the handles to protect strike participants against splinters; staple guns affixing

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## Strike

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posters that read: "High Paid Management, Low Paid Workers," "Parity Now" and "United We Bargain Divided We Beg" to picket posts; and plenty of chatter surrounding the strike, such as how the community is showing its support.

To help keep morale up during the strike, which is intended to last until workers see results they can live with, a union committee is gathering food donations and urging the public and fellow county workers alike to write to the Board of Supervisors.

"You can't bury people without a burial permit," Goodman said. "I told the morticians to contact the board in favor of a settlement. You don't want management, who don't know what to do, handling it. We want to be able to bury the dead."

While most county offices will be open during the strike, they will be

staffed by managers. The public is urged to call county offices with questions or comments before visiting them.

Offices that will be closed include the Parks Department's after-school programs; the Planning Department's Felton and Aptos service centers; the Probation Department's Water Street office; and possibly the Simpkins Family Swim Center.

While picket lines will be established at every county facility, no public-safety services will be affected by the strike. The courts also will be unaffected by the walkout.

A hot line with a prerecorded message is up and running with information on how county services are affected by the strike. The number is 454-3410.

To contact SEIU 415, send e-mail to [isupportseiu415@aol.com](mailto:isupportseiu415@aol.com) or visit [www.seiu415.org](http://www.seiu415.org).

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