

POLITICS AND GOV'T



John Laird said winners reflect city. Mardi Wormhoudt thanked family. Joe Ghio said it was nice to be back. Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Old faces on a new City Council

By MARK BERGSTROM
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SANTA CRUZ — There were no slip-ups Tuesday night as the three newly elected City Council members took their oaths of office. There was no reason the ceremony should have gone anything but smoothly since all three had been through it before.

John Laird and Mardi Wormhoudt reassumed their seats on the council. And, after a two-year absence, Joe Ghio reclaimed his chair.

Ghio, who first was elected to the council in 1975 and re-elected in 1979, replaced Spiro Mellis, who completed his second term of office.

Tuesday night's ceremony had no effect on the balance of power in the city. Laird and Wormhoudt returned to their seats alongside Michael Rotkin and Jane Weed to give the progressive/liberal faction a 4-3 majority over conservative/moderates Ghio, Arnold Levine and Katy Sears-Williams.

In his acceptance speech, Laird noted that he, Wormhoudt, Rotkin and Weed often are blamed for leading the city in a progressive direction. But, the truth is, he said, they merely reflect the progressive stance of the city.

"I knocked on thousands of doors

in the election to earn these five minutes," Laird said. He used his acceptance speech to analyze the election.

The results, he said, "show the voters generally approve of the direction of city government." This was the first time in 14 years, he said, that all incumbents were re-elected.

He noted that he and Wormhoudt won on strength throughout the city, not just at UCSC. The conservative faction in the past has claimed the student vote determines the direction of local politics. "People have not been complaining this time. I

think people realize this is not what decides our elections. Santa Cruz as a whole is generally a progressive city."

Laird made special mention of Wormhoudt's election. Opponents, he said, "threw everything in the book — anything that could be concocted — at her in the campaign. "It's a real tribute to her and her accomplishments that she was re-elected."

Laird thanked his campaign staff and supporters and even an opponent, Hilda Lans. Lans, who was born and raised in Estonia, a West-
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ern Baltic state occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940, wages advertising campaigns against progressive candidates.

"She ran an ad four days before my first election and I won handily," Laird said. "This time she ran her ad two weeks before the election and I was afraid it would make my campaign peak too soon," Laird chortled.

Wormhoudt said she had made enough political speeches in the past year, both as mayor and in her re-election campaign. So, she made a brief acceptance speech, thanking her campaign staff, supporters and especially her husband, Ken, and teen-age sons, Jacob and Zachary.

Wormhoudt said her goal for the next four years is "to continue the process of open and accessible government, in which everyone has an equal opportunity to have their needs heard."

Wormhoudt's year as mayor will end in two weeks when the new council chooses a successor.

Ghio also made brief comments, saying "It's good to be back" and setting an agenda of dealing with traffic problems and maintaining the intergrity of city neighborhoods.

The council also paid tribute to Mellis, both at the meeting and at a going-away dinner in between its afternoon and evening sessions. He was unanimously described as "a nice guy" who took the high road in politics. His departure, Rotkin says, will be a challenge for this and future councils to continue in a spirit of cooperation.

"We serve because each of us in our own way wishes to make this community a better place," Mellis said. He noted that in the past seven years, the council has faced numerous problems, including a water shortage and devastating winter storms. "We have improved our roads and the wharf. We have made landfill improvements and have begun a West Cliff Drive erosion program," he said.

Many more problems exist, he said, including traffic, housing, a cable TV contract, the Beach Flats and the economic viability of the downtown business community.

Before leaving, Mellis challenged the new council to tackle one more problem, that of appointments to city commissions and committees. He urged that politics be put aside and selections made on the basis of merit so that all viewpoints in the city can be represented.