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# Youth center honors 'local heroes'

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If the battle over the name of the new youth center could have been cast as old Watsonville vs. new Watsonville, then the new met the old last night in the name chosen by the City Council.

After listening to 2½ hours of

testimony, the Council voted unanimously to name the center the Gene Hoularis and Waldo Rodriguez Youth Center, as suggested by Councilman Todd McFarren.

The majority of the people who spoke last night favored naming the center for labor leader Cesar

Chavez, and many of them were college and high school students who had collected nearly 1,000 signatures supporting the Chavez Youth Center. Additionally, representatives from Salud Para La Gente and Fenix Services, the two agencies that will run programs along with the city in the new

center, said they wanted the center named for Chavez.

Most people favored Chavez as a good role model for the youth who will use the center. Several young people testified to the inspiration they had derived from Chavez's life and dedication to nonviolence. "Our youth need to

believe in someone who believed in non-violence," said speaker Felipe Hernandez.

But about six of the people who spoke last night in favor of naming the center for Gene Hoularis also spoke of the inspiration and direction the late director of the old Watsonville Boy's Club gave to

them.

Rick Noble, a fire captain at the California Department of Forestry station at Pajaro Dunes, said he still has vivid dreams of walking up the stairs to the Boy's Club, and waiting for the club to open up.

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Hoularis "did teach me to be honest," he said. "Gene was really the only adult who spent a lot of time with us." **MAR 23 1994**

"We were constantly in search of role models, heroes, words of encouragement," said Jose Guerrero, also remembering Hoularis. "The one beacon of light for us was Gene Hoularis ... We'd count the hours (until the Boy's Club opened). That was our haven, our refuge."

Supporters of Hoularis also submitted pages of signatures and dozens of letters of support for naming the center after him.

Tension between groups had been high at a meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission last month, and one commissioner admitted last night that she had been frightened by the Chavez supporters who came in large numbers with red flags and loud cheers for Chavez.

The commission recommended that the center be named The Watsonville Youth Center. Those who favored naming the center after Waldo Rodriguez, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit that brought district elections to Watsonville, were not as numerous or as outspoken as those who favored either Chavez or Hoularis. But several people spoke on his behalf last night, including former City Council candidate Dan Dodge.

"Heroes are people who dedicate their heart and soul to the community," Dodge said. He ran down the long list of activities Rodriguez had been involved in, including participation in the lawsuit.

"Many of you on the council received the opportunity to be elected because of Waldo," Dodge said. He pointed out that the majority of the youth who will be using the center will be Latino, and suggested that it would be fitting to name the center after a leader of that community.

McFarren, in explaining his reasoning for wanting to name the center after both men, said he thought the purpose of naming a building after someone was public remembrance. Chavez will be remembered for a long time, he said, "as long as farm workers struggle."

"But, there is a danger of Gene Hoularis or Waldo Rodriguez being forgotten. I knew Waldo, I had a great respect for Waldo ... however, I have also listened to (the people speaking for Hoularis), I can see the emotion in their voices. These are two local heroes."

Other council members voiced their support of naming the center after someone local. Council members Betty Bobeda and Tony Campos said they supported naming the center for Hoularis, but didn't have a problem with the double appellation.

Only Councilman Oscar Rios spoke in favor of naming the center for Chavez.

He challenged the reasons given for passing over Chavez, and suggested that when it came to naming the next park or building the issue would come up again, and Chavez's name would again be passed over.

Rios also said he was concerned that the council was not going along with the wishes of the youthful Chavez supporters. He said it was important that youth believe that they're listened to and important in the decision-making process.

"I am concerned that the youth have come to us here, they have put out their views," he said. "The youth need leaders they can relate to."

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In the end, however, Rios voted with the rest of the council.

After the meeting, Watsonville Police Sgt. Eddie Rodriguez, Waldo's younger brother, said his family members, many of whom were in attendance last night, were extremely happy with the name.

"This never would have happened a few years ago," he said, reaching out to take the hand of a Chavez supporter offering congratulations, "This is great."