

Campus forests, vans are home for students

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By JOHN McNICHOLAS

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — There may be as many as 100 students camping in the woods or living illegally in vehicles and dorms on the UCSC campus, said a student voter who testified Tuesday in the City Council election trial.

Housing officials who testified in the first few days of the trial said they doubted many students were staying in the dorms without their knowledge and campus police officers testified they found few apparently permanent camps. Only one UCSC official, Oakes College Provost Hermann Blake, said he knew of students living illegally in dorms.

Plaintiff's attorneys Tim Morgan

and John Bohrer have scoffed at the defense contention there may be large numbers of students on campus who are unaccounted for by official records.

But some of the eight students called by defense attorneys Mitchell Page and Bob Taren Tuesday gave a different picture.

They told of staying for several weeks with friends in dorms, especially in the apartment-style dorms at Kresge College; of sleeping in vans and cars during the first weeks of school while they looked for permanent lodgings; and of living with groups of people in the woods behind the colleges.

Please see back of section

Student squatters

Continued from Page A1

Jeff Westergaard, 21, an environmental-studies student, reluctantly told the court that four weeks ago he was ordered out of the woods behind Kresge College, where he said he's been living since October and where he may return in the future. Each fall for the past three years, he has made his home in the woods, he said.

Westergaard testified he and a "core group" of seven to 10 people had lived cooperatively deep in the redwoods on campus. All of those people voted in the contested election, he said.

Westergaard was not grubbing out a pioneer's existence in the wilds behind Kresge. In his camp, before it was raided by campus police officers, Westergaard lived in a Sears family-sized tent with a cooler, a two-burner stove, bookcases filled with books, a typewriter, a table and lamps — nearly all the comforts of a more-conventional home.

And for those comforts he lacked — a shower, for instance, — he used school facilities, he testified.

He and others like him are very careful not to get caught, he said. He told the court he was uncomfortable about testifying because "it's a possibility" he will return to live in the woods. He also said the illegality of the situation made it difficult for him and others to come forward, although

they regarded it as a something of a joke that their votes were being questioned when they, in fact, lived in the precinct.

Outside court after his testimony, Westergaard estimated there are "certainly 50" and may be as many as 100 students living illegally on campus in dorms, married-student housing, vans and campers, and in the woods.

The numbers fluctuate, he said, depending on weather, availability of other housing and heat from the campus police. Last spring, he said, as many as 45 students were living in what is termed "College 9," a collection of vehicles parked in the East Remote parking lot. A police crackdown cut that number to about five in the fall, he said.

Westergaard, a senior, said he chose to live in the woods for financial reasons — he said he receives student aid — and because "It's wonderfully beautiful there — I love the woods. You wake up to the sunrise and go to sleep to stars."

Defense attorneys Page and Taren said Tuesday they have contacted 25 of the 161 students plaintiff's attorneys said they could not find.

"All they had to do was look in the phone book," Taren said.

Morgan and Bohrer contend 459 voters who did not live on campus cast ballots in the four UCSC precincts last November and that those 459 votes are illegal.