

Chamber searches for new chief executive officer

By **MIKE DE GIVE**

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SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce board is using the resignation of its chief executive officer as an opportunity to reassess its goals, the chamber's president said Thursday.

Michael Schmidt, who had been the group's chief executive since 1997, stepped down last week to focus on his campaign to be elected as a county supervisor.

The board will begin looking for his

replacement this month, said Dianna Ligon, president of the chamber's board of directors.

"We'll be sitting down and deciding if we're on track with our members," Ligon said.

The chamber has more than 900 members.

One of Schmidt's assets was his ability to advocate for business owners with local government boards, said Jesse Nickell, who is on the chamber's community affairs committee. He wants the next executive to focus on the

chamber's budget and pay down some of the group's debt.

"We provide these services as a civic duty, but we need to do it in a way to chip away at our debt," said Nickell, who works for Barry Swenson Builders.

The chamber collects about \$180,000 a year in membership dues. The rest of its \$443,000 in rev-



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enues comes from its major events and Women in Business luncheons, both held quarterly.

One of the jobs awaiting Schmidt's replacement is handling relations with the Santa Cruz City Council, a group not always perceived as business-friendly.

"There's a voice that sometimes isn't heard, and that's the business voice," Ligon said.

Candidates for the job don't necessarily need chamber experience, but a background running a small business

would be helpful, Collins said.

The executive will be responsible for chamber activities. The group holds one major event each quarter, in addition to monthly networking mixers, said Greg Carter, vice president of sales and marketing for the chamber. The main events are the technology symposium, a business fair, a golf tournament and its community service awards.

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