

Women fill two top Santa Cruz offices

By JOAN RAYMOND
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — For the first time in the city's history, the City Council Tuesday selected two women for the top leadership positions at City Hall.

Mardi Wormhoudt, 47, who was elected to the council in 1981 with strong support from neighborhoods and feminists, was unanimously elected the city's 57th mayor.

Jane Weed, 29, who was elected one year ago, became vice mayor on a 4-2 vote, with Spiro Mellis and Arnold Levine dissenting.

John Laird experienced his final day as mayor dressed in a kimono, a gift from Santa Cruz' sister city of Shingu, Japan.

During a ceremony Tuesday afternoon, Laird donned the kimono, then Sister City Committee member Cynthia Schuette wrapped him in a long, striped sash, as someone from the audience commented, "It's like going around the Maypole."

"It a little like 'Let's Make Deal,'" smirked Laird. He continued to wear the kimono at the mayor's podium throughout the afternoon, much to the surprise of newcomers to the Council Chamber who had not seen the ceremony and wondered

why Laird was dressed in a robe, instead of his usual red down vest.

The election of Wormhoudt — the city's third woman mayor — and Weed secured the two top city posts for the council's liberal majority.

As expected, the council majority passed over Levine for the position of vice mayor.

Mellis joined in supporting Levine for vice mayor, to follow what Mellis claimed is a "tradition" that the top vote-getter in the last election becomes vice mayor. Levine was top vote-getter in the November 1983 election. Weed came in fourth.

But the so-called tradition has been broken in the past when conservatives have failed to give leadership positions to liberals. For instance, former Socialist Mayor Michael Rotkin was top vote-getter in the 1979 election, but the conservative council majority in 1980 chose Mellis as vice mayor over Rotkin.

Nevertheless, Mellis — although he said Weed was certainly qualified to be vice mayor — maintained the choice of Weed over Levine was "politicizing" the office of mayor and vice mayor "and getting away from tradition."

Mellis said bypassing Levine was "ignoring the votes of the last election and somewhat of a slap in the face to those who voted for Levine."

In an interview Wednesday morning, Rotkin called Mellis' argument "hypocritical and foolish," adding the selection of mayor and vice mayor is "always political."

During the selection of vice mayor in 1980, Mellis had voted for himself to be vice mayor, even though Rotkin had been top vote-getter in the previous election.

Weed, Laird, Rotkin and Wormhoudt said they voted for Weed because they believe the city's leaders best represent the will of the voters if the mayor and vice mayor are both members of the council majority.

Also the majority members said they had to support Weed in light of an ongoing lawsuit — orchestrated by conservatives — to challenge the election of Weed.

But Mellis commented, "Arnie (Levine) and I had nothing whatsoever to do with the court suit. Arnie, in particular, has urged dropping of the suit."

Katy Sears-Williams was absent because of business reasons.

In his last comments as mayor, Laird — who will continue to serve as a councilman until his term expires — called for higher wages for council members, who today are paid a token wage of \$50 per month for their services, even though they may work the position like a full-time job.

The lack of pay means that most residents would not be able to take enough time from their work to serve on the council, said Laird.

"I think it's really time to change the rules of compensation," he told the audience in the Council Chamber Tuesday. "You have been very lucky you have not had a council member who has been corrupt or had the incentive to take money under the table."

Wormhoudt said today's council is one that "works remarkably well together. Our common concern for the future of Santa Cruz is a very strong bond."