

Furloughs mean closures of government offices

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SEIU votes to take unpaid time off over next 12 months

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SANTA CRUZ — The county's largest labor union voted this week to accept unpaid time off for its roughly 1,800 employees, sparing the jobs of more than 50 government workers. The smaller work force that will result, however, will mean temporary closures at many offices.

County leaders intend to shut down the Governmental Center on Ocean Street and the campus on Emeline Avenue for 13 days during the next 12 months to accommodate work furloughs. This means no food stamps or counseling, no building permits, no access to official records and few other public services on the fourth Friday of most months and several days in December.

"We're just like the cities and other agencies that are having to cut back hours," said Chris Hirsch, senior administrative analyst with the county.

She said county administrators tried to select dates that would be the least inconvenient for the public, like over the holidays.

The Sheriff's Office and some other agencies will remain open during the closures.

The county is wrestling with a \$25 million budget shortfall. Spending on everything from public safety to public works to public health is being scaled back as is much of the labor that goes with it.

SEE FURLOUGH ON B14

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

Furloughs of county employees will prompt the shutdown of the Governmental Center at 701 Ocean St. and the Emeline Avenue campus for 13 days.

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| ■ July 24 | ■ Jan. 22 |
| ■ Aug. 28 | ■ Feb. 26 |
| ■ Sept. 25 | ■ March 26 |
| ■ Oct. 23 | ■ April 23 |
| ■ Dec. 28-31 | ■ May 28 |

FURLOUGH

Continued from B1

Most employees not represented by Service Employees Union International already have conceded to unpaid time off, beginning July 1.

Last week, roughly 150 employees in the Sheriff's Office came on board,

exchanging short-term pay cuts and furloughs for raises four and five years out.

In elections held this Tuesday and Wednesday, SEIU Local 521 members made their concession, voting overwhelmingly in support of a 104-hour work furlough over the next 12 months. The vote count was 905 to 196.

"I was hoping it would

pass," said Crystal Bertheau, an elections analyst and union member. "I want people to continue working and I want to save jobs. I hope that's what will happen."

Before the deal, county management had said it was necessary to eliminate 212 positions, or nearly 9 percent of the total work force. About a third of those jobs were unfilled at the begin-

ning of the year.

With the concessions, about 80 jobs remain on the chopping block, though Personnel Director Mike McDougall said Thursday that positions vacated since January likely will reduce the number of layoffs ultimately to 50 or fewer.

Union leaders acknowledge that job cuts are likely for members, but said the

terms agreed to this week struck the right balance between the loss of jobs and making sure employees are earning enough to make a living.

The 104-hour furlough means employees will make 5 percent less than if they would have worked full-time. The cut in pay, though, will be offset partially by a scheduled 2.5 percent raise in September.

"We're still looking to save the positions that are out there and hang in the balance," said chapter president Lisa Giles who hopes the county Board of Supervisors will find money in the budget to retain some employees.

County supervisors are holding budget hearings this week and are expected to finalize a spending plan next Thursday.