

D.A. scramble switches gears

Supervisors brace for all-out lobbying campaigns

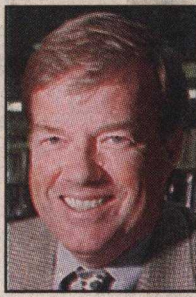
By MAY WONG
Sentinel staff writer

✓ SANTA CRUZ — The Board of Supervisors is prepared for an onslaught.

The lobbying that began two months ago for the impending District Attorney vacancy shows all the signs of heating up now that Art Danner, the man who held the post for the past 20 years, has been appointed to the bench.

"There is a lot of lobbying going on, I could assure you of that," board chair Jan Beautz said Wednesday. "From the candidates, from the people who know candidates, and from people who know people who know candidates."

An estimated 25 percent of the



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phone calls pouring into the board's office Wednesday were related to the D.A.'s job. And supervisors expect they'll be getting more calls, letters and visits until they appoint a replacement.

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visor Jeff Almquist said. "They've sent the lieutenants out on the street."

Board members meet next Jan. 12 and are not under any timeline to

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appoint a successor. They also have "broad discretion" in the process of making the appointment — from a majority vote on any board member's proposal for a successor to a public hearing with candidate interviews before the full board, County Counsel Dwight Herr said.

Beautz said she thinks the board will vote Jan. 12 on some kind of selection process. "I foresee a very public process," she said. "I think it's important that everyone has a chance to express themselves and say why they think they'll be good for the job ... It's the board's job to rise above the political maneuvering and choose the right candidate."

Some D.A. hopefuls and their supporters began positioning themselves and politicking last month — seven weeks before Gov. Wilson announced his appointment of Danner to the Superior Court bench Tuesday.

Danner is scheduled to be sworn-in during a private proceeding today to make the appointment official before Wilson leaves office. A public ceremony will be held later in January.

So far, the growing list of candidates vying for the D.A. post totals eight. Among them is Jon Hopkins, whom Danner fired this week so his other chief deputy, Kate Canlis, will automatically become acting D.A.

Canlis, who also wants to be D.A., would be in charge of the District Attorney's Office until the board appoints a successor for Danner. The appointee would serve until voters get to choose their own prosecutor in the March 2000 election.

Hopkins said his termination has only bolstered his fledgling campaign efforts. "It looks like I'll have full time to seek the appointment of the board now," he quipped. Hopkins said he also plans to start organizing a campaign for the 2000 election.

Hopkins said his phone rang off the hook Wednesday, mostly from callers who didn't approve of his termination. "It's really kind of heartening to know so many people support me and that they're in support of my candidacy," he said.

While Danner's termination appeared abrupt, Danner said Hopkins knew for over a year his job was on the line. In addition, Danner has publicly made it clear that he is endorsing the person he thinks is most qualified to take his place: Canlis.

But Danner's endorsement has done anything but quell a debate on his successor.

With five prosecutors from within the District Attorney's Office and three lawyers from the outside vying for the job, county supervisors said they've been busy meeting individually with candidates and talking to people in the legal and law enforcement community who either support or oppose

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them.

Former sheriff Al Noren was among the callers Wednesday who wanted to tell board members who he was endorsing: Assistant District Attorney Christine McGuire.

"I think she's the best choice of the people coming to the fore," Noren said. "I think she'll be a good manager ... someone who could keep the office together."

Supervisors said they've heard many sides already — the good, the bad and the ugly.

"It's gotten to be a huge amount of information that you have to filter through," Almquist said.

And supervisors expect they'll be getting more information: not every candidate who has publicly expressed interest in the D.A. job has personally approached board members yet, and Beautz suspects that still more candidates will come out of the woodwork.

Assistant District Attorney Bob Lee was among the D.A. hopefuls who opted to hold off on meeting with any supervisors until Danner actually received the judgeship. "I didn't think it was appropriate," he said Wednesday. "But now I intend to inform the Board of Supervisors of my unique qualifications and broad-based support that I've received from citizens in the community."

In addition to Lee, Hopkins, Canlis, and McGuire, the fifth internal candidate is Assistant District Attorney Ariadne Symons. The outside contenders are former D.A. Peter Chang and defense lawyer Ron Ruiz. And the latest candidate to emerge is Steve Muni, a deputy district attorney in Amador County who worked as a prosecutor in Santa Cruz County from 1977 to 1987.

Muni said, however, he would pull out of the D.A. contest as soon as it appears Chang is the front runner. "I would support him," Muni said Wednesday. "He's a good leader and one of the best attorneys around. I won't campaign against him."