

Hefty raise kicks in Jan. 1 for supervisors

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Santa Cruz County supervisors will receive an annual raise of \$3,260 beginning Jan. 1, which will bring their salaries to \$42,072 a year.

The supervisors will receive the same dollar-amount raise as the county's Superior Court judges, whose annual salary increase is determined by the state, said county Auditor Gary Knutson.

The supervisors decided about two years ago to permanently tie their own raise to that of the judges. In that way, they can avoid sticky political debate about the amount of the raises they award themselves, board critics have pointed out.

Since the raise occurs automatically, it need not even be mentioned publicly.

In terms of percentage increase, the supervisors' salary will grow at more than double the rate of the judges'. The judges will receive a 4 percent annual increase on Jan. 1, taking their salary from \$81,505 to \$84,765, said Knutson.

By awarding themselves the dollar amount of the increase instead of the percentage rate, the supervisors increased their salary this year by about 8.4 percent, said Knutson.

Last year, the supervisors ranked fifth in pay among 12

greater-Bay Area counties, according to a survey made by the Alameda County Taxpayers Association.

That survey found that Santa Clara County's supervisors earn

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top dollar for the region, allocating themselves \$59,545 each per year.

San Mateo County came in second, with an annual salary of \$44,748. Monterey County was third at \$41,408.

Monterey County payroll division chief Linda Olsen said yesterday the Monterey supervisors would be receiving a raise of about 6.7 percent on Jan. 1 that would bring their annual salaries up to \$44,184, with the chairman receiving \$46,184.

Sonoma County supervisors were the fourth-highest-paid last year, receiving \$40,932.

In addition to salary, Santa Cruz County supervisors receive fringe benefits at county expense, including health and dental coverage, life insurance, and a pension investment through the Public Employees Retirement System, Knutson said. He said the county also pays the employer share of Social Security contributions for the supervisors, who also contribute to that system through payroll deductions.

Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Robley Levy said she thought the supervisors were fairly paid for the amount of work they do.

"If you look at the supervisors' salary in relation to other county administrators, you will find that we are paid substantially less than most of the other administrators," Levy said.

She said, "Serving on the board is a full-time job."

Levy said if the county found itself in an extreme fiscal crunch, the supervisors might forgo their annual raise some year, but not this year.

Supervisors complain constantly of dwindling county funds and insufficient revenue from the state for county programs.