

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Neal Coonerty is sworn in as Santa Cruz County's 3rd District Supervisor Monday by Judge Jeff Almquist.

All eyes are on Coonerty

Observers wonder if he will follow Wormhoudt's agenda

Board of Supervisors

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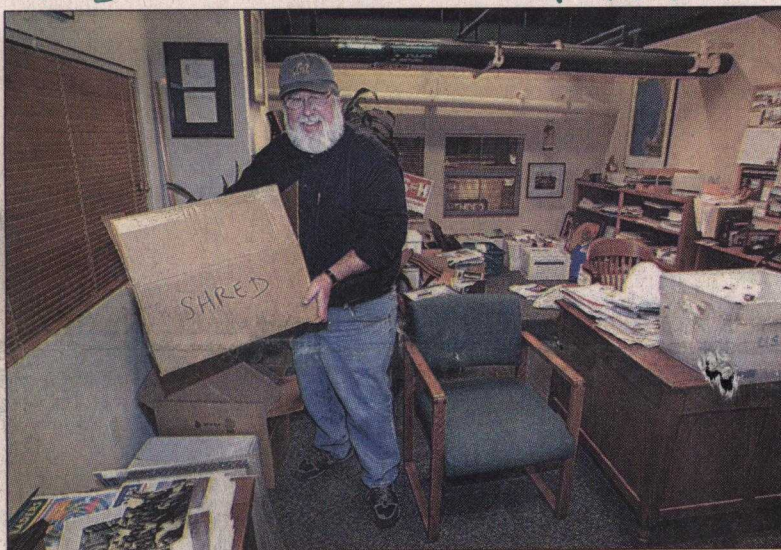
By GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — The walls have been painted and the rug shampooed in the 3rd District supervisor's office. Today, for the first time in 12 years, someone new will retreat to its confines after the Board of Supervisors meeting.

Bookshop Santa Cruz owner Neal Coonerty was sworn in Monday afternoon to represent Santa Cruz, Bonny Doon, Davenport and the North Coast on the county Board of Supervisors. With his arrival come high hopes from some that he will uphold the seat's tradition of conserving the environment and limiting development. Others expect his business sense to provide what they deem a more balanced approach to jobs and housing than what has been offered from the post in years past.

Coonerty will take over from Mardi Wormhoudt, a political veteran both revered and reviled for her staunch environmental values and slow-growth stance. Coonerty won more than 50 percent of the June primary vote to beat fellow candidates Chris Krohn and Jonathan Boutelle for the seat. Wormhoudt did not seek reelection.

"I think that any differences



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

As Neal Coonerty packs up his office at Bookshop Santa Cruz, he sees the humor in being a politician photographed while moving a box labeled 'shred.'

between the two of us will be differences of emphasis, not values," Wormhoudt said on Monday. "I've known Neal for years and I think our values are very similar."

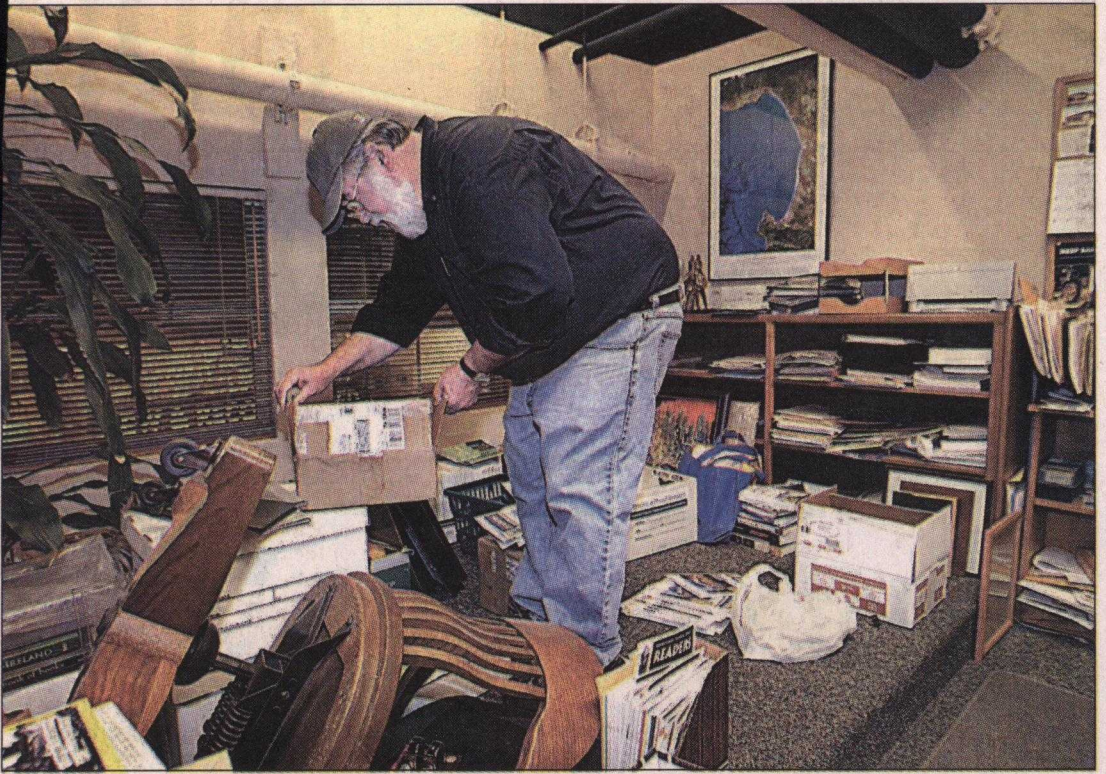
Others had a different take.

"Bienvenido, Coonerty!" said Watsonville city councilman Oscar Rios. "It's about time there was a change

there. Mardi did everything she could to stop us from making better situations economically for our community."

As for Coonerty, he plans to walk the fine line between drawing commerce to the area and protecting the

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Neal Coonerty packs his office at Bookshop Santa Cruz on Friday as he moves to the County Government Center to serve as 3rd District supervisor.

Coonerty

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environmental beauty that those who live here expect.

"There were times when progressives in Santa Cruz lumped businesses into one pot and saw that it threatened the environment," Coonerty said. But there's a big difference, he added, between developers who want to build on the North Coast and independent shops downtown.

"I think the community is starting to separate those and see their value," he said.

Coonerty's other priorities include restricting growth at UC Santa Cruz; providing affordable housing to the county's service workers; and addressing the water supply in Davenport, which is so contaminated in the winter that residents face a boil order.

Meanwhile, as a supervisor Coonerty will help find sites fitting of affordable housing; as a member of the Regional Transportation

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NEAL COONERTY

Commission he will help decide whether to widen Highway 1 and buy the 32-mile Santa Cruz branch rail line for a hiking and biking trail along the tracks. So far, Coonerty has come out against widening the highway and in favor of buying the rail line.

While Coonerty lays out his top issues, Supervisor Ellen Pirie said it will take constituents a while to decipher how he will vote on other matters.

"It will be six months to a year until we have a sampling of all the issues that come before the Board of Supervisors," Pirie said. "How will he be different (from Wormhoudt), how will he be the same, it will be a long time until we know the answer to that question."

Still, many in the community greet his tenure with optimism.

"He's just been very clear that he understands that priority that his constituents place on environmental protection," said Kaitlin Gaffney, Central Coast program manager for the Ocean Conservancy.

As for Rios, he's looking forward to more of a discussion.

"I don't want to see the beauty that we have be paved," Rios said. "On the other side, we're now faced with some of the highest costs of living in the whole country."

"We're in a very tough situation."

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