

Shelter home ground broken

Homeless 5-19-90
Program to help homeless adults return to society

By KAREN CLARK
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SANTA CRUZ — A dream slipped off the drawing board and onto four gold-colored shovels Wednesday when ground was broken for the Community House, a transitional shelter program for homeless adults.

"What's exciting about this project is we're talking about self-sufficiency for the homeless ... where they can develop the kind of autonomy every human being deserves in this life," said Mayor Mike Rotkin before the ceremonial stabs at soil baked rock-hard by the recent heat wave.

The Community House will stand alone in Santa Cruz County as the only transitional housing specifically targeting single homeless adults who want to escape emergency shelters by learning skills that will get them back into the mainstream.

"It finally fills the last hole, instead of just doing emergency services," said Frank Pucelik, program director for the Community House.

It will sit in the vacant lot between the 8½-year-old River Street Shelter and Highway 1. The lot made news as the site of the ill-fated homeless campground that was ordered disbanded in December for safety reasons.

Besides providing housing for up to 40 homeless people, the program will coordinate support services, including job training. Each resident will stay between six and 18 months.

Potential residents will be screened to ensure only those who are either clean and sober or in appropriate recovery programs are accepted. Directors also will look for those who can thrive in a communal environment and are willing to learn skills that will make them self-sufficient.

"We'll have to be picky at first," said Pucelik. "The first group sets the stage for everyone else. ... A good strong base will pull people along. ..."

The facility actually will be made up of 10 20-by-50-foot modular homes donated for \$1 by Stanford University. Eight will be used for housing, one will be converted to a kitchen/dining area and another will be for the administrative staff.

In addition to staff members on site, there also will be 24-hour security.

Please see SHELTER — BACK PAGE

Shelter program

Continued from Page A1

Although work will begin immediately on the Community House — and the first clients could be accepted as early as this summer — money remains dicey.

Paul Marceau, executive director of the Citizens Committee for the Homeless, which owns the land and will run the project, said only about \$108,500 of the estimated \$250,000 construction tab has been banked.

Much of that, \$83,500, has been earmarked by the city of Santa Cruz from its Community Develop-

ment Block Grant program. Another \$50,000 came from a grant from the Packard Foundation, but only half of it can be used for construction. The rest is to be used to run the program.

Marceau estimated operating expenses will run about \$300,000 each year, and directors are pinning much of their hopes on winning a grant from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

A consortium of county and city care providers is working on the "super grant" request to HUD, and

if it is approved, local transitional housing like the Community House will get the lion's share, Marceau said. Approval could come as early as August.

He said he hopes the grant will provide some \$150,000 for construction costs, and another \$100,000 per year for operating for the first three years.

If HUD rejects the local grant application, said Marceau, the homeless committee simply will continue to find private and public funding sources. "We'll just keep casting bread upon the water," he said.