

Unable to pay the rent

Lesbian and Gay Community Center will close its doors

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SANTA CRUZ — The "Come on Out" sign on the door of the Santa Cruz Lesbian and Gay Community Center downtown is coming down.

Torn by internal debate and pressed for cash, the center's board of directors has decided to close the center when its lease expires at the end of February — maybe to relocate in less expensive quarters.

For the past two years, the center located on Commerce Lane has provided a meeting place for gays and lesbians, and rooms for 12-step programs, gay traffic school and Queer Nation meetings.

However, the \$2,000 a month in overhead and the lack of volunteers to staff the center have drained both the coffers and energy of the board members, said Griffith.

"It's coming down to the question of not being able to pay the rent," he said.

The center is closed more than it's open because of the lack of vol-

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unteers, Griffith said. Board members and a core group of volunteers have resorted to round-the-calendar fund raisers just to pay the rent.

"The board is just really tired of going from event to event to keep the doors open. That's not an appropriate way to fund the center," Griffith said.

At the same time, several internal debates have divided the board, according to Jessica Delgado, a board member who plans to resign along with at least one other.

Delgado said factionalism, a lack of knowledge how to run a non-profit center and lack of volunteer training contributed to the center's financial problems.

As board members tried to re-examine the center's roles, internal conflict worsened, she said.

"At the last meeting I was at, it just felt like things sort of fell apart," said Delgado. "We found ourselves dealing with such contrasting and conflicting images of what the center was."

Among the divisive issues, she said, was a debate whether to add "bisexuals" to the center's name. A majority of the membership approved the addition. But the by-laws required two-thirds approval, and the change was never made, creating hard feelings among members, she said.

Controversy erupted over a proposal for a lesbian-only day at the center. The proposal was never acted on by the board, but it stirred "a lot of factionalism," she said, and hostility from members who labeled the proposal separatist.

Both issues "sort of infiltrated our board so we were not able to do the hard work," said Delgado.

The center itself was the target of a spray paint war among gays and lesbians over whether to identify themselves as "queer." The issue has also become an undercurrent issue in the decision to move, according to board members.

The "queer" dispute centers around whether the term is an insult, as many older gays and lesbians contend, or whether the term should be a source of pride, as members of Queer Nation and other, mostly young, gays and lesbians feel, board member Merrie Schaller said.

During the past several months, the word "queer" has been erased, removed or marked out on posters and notices at center, she said.

In response, "queer turf" was stenciled with paint in front of the center. That, too, was painted over.

Griffith said the vandalism demoralized some board members who felt as if the gay and lesbian community was "attacking itself."

"I think it tired some people out.

It pushed some people who already felt tired and overextended," he said.

Some center members view the rifts and the tight money as an opportunity to make changes. It's a chance for the center to "reorganize itself and figure out what its goals are," said Jo Kenny, a member and consultant to the center.

Kenny said the controversy "indicates that our movement is growing enough that we have different generations" and diverse groups.

The question of what to do next is scheduled to be discussed at Tuesday's board meeting, according to Schaller.

"The question is, how do we open ourselves up so everyone feels welcome?" Kenny asked. "The people who set the goals have to deal with issues of diversity and how to set up a structure so people feel safe to come in and say, 'This is my center, too,'" said Kenny.

Griffith said that kind of reorganization is planned and can best be done "without struggling month after month to pay our overhead."

Then, the board can consider opening a new, smaller center, Griffith said. "I'm really optimistic there will be a center, maybe in another form."

Delgado, however, is not optimistic. "I don't think it's salvageable at this point. I think it needs to dissolve."