

Animal Welfare

Local

SPCA knocked in horse-cruelty trial

By JOHN ROBINSON
Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ — The SPCA was accused of trying to “financially soak” three brothers who are on trial for allegedly mistreating a herd of Arabian horses.

A woman who volunteered to help feed the 44 horses the SPCA seized last October testified Friday she was “outraged” by a conversation she had with an SPCA official.

The woman claimed that after the horses were returned to the Sabankaya family she offered to buy the excess buckets the SPCA had obtained. She said an SPCA official had told her

not to offer cash, but to offer a donation so that the SPCA could still bill the Sabankaya family for the buckets in an effort to “financially soak them.”

Portions of the woman’s testimony, including her recounting of the conversation, were kept from the jury on the orders of Municipal Court Judge Robert Attack.

Mustafa, Nezih and Semih Sabankaya are charged with neglecting and mistreating horses at their Bonny Doon ranch. The SPCA has maintained that the horses were malnourished and in ill health.

Chuck Kessinger, a veterinarian for the Sa-

bankayas, testified the SPCA called him about one month before the seizures to express its concerns about skinny and possibly ill horses on a ranch the Sabankayas leased in Bonny Doon.

The SPCA was concerned in particular that the horses might have stranglers. Kessinger said that he assured the SPCA that the horses did not have stranglers and told them the the Sabankaya family would take offense at having uninformed officers come on their property.

Kessinger testified that he was not called back and that relations soured between the Sabankayas.