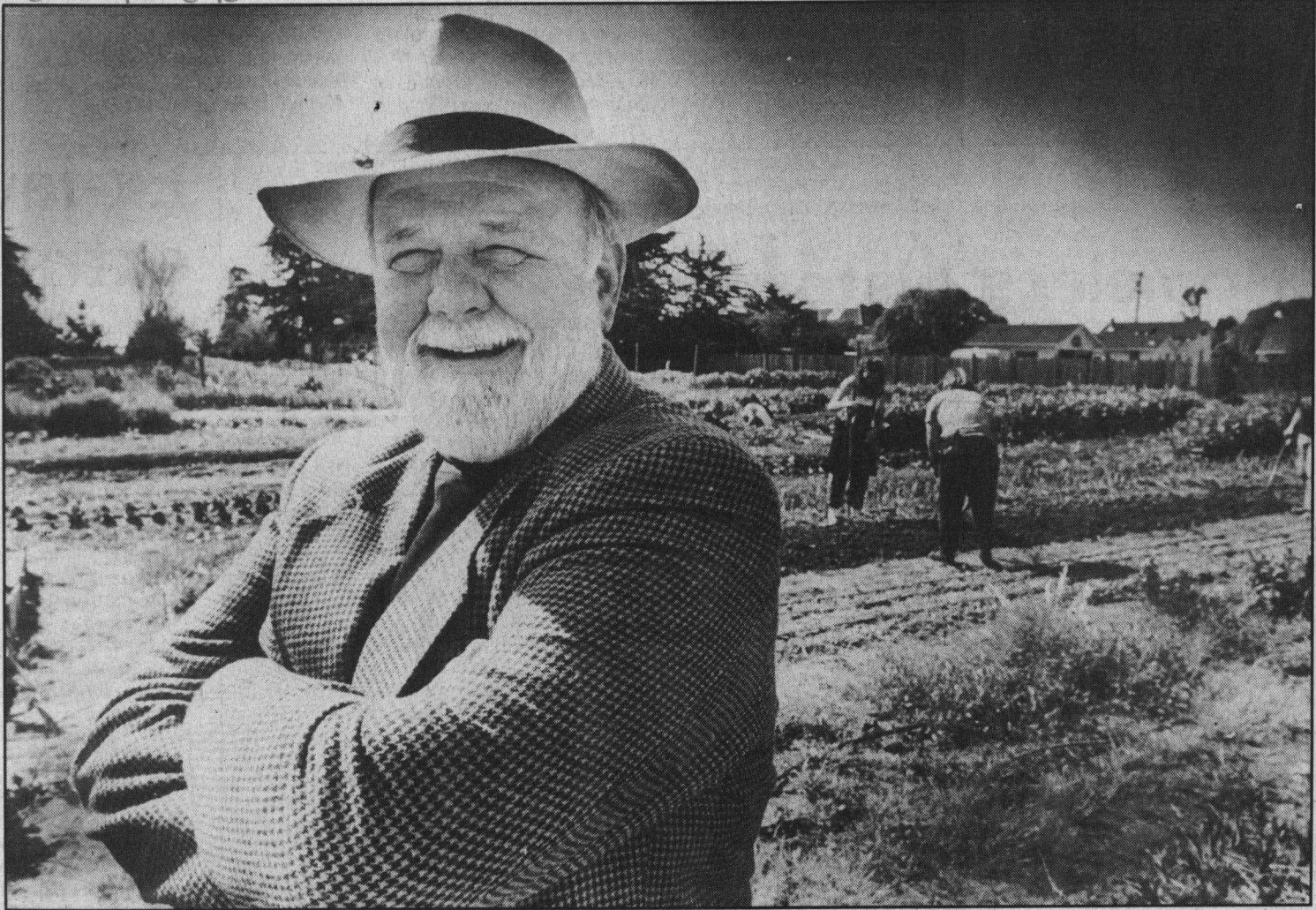


It was supposed to be a partial history on homelessness in Santa Cruz, but Paul Lee's book has caused a stir among the activists involved with the issue.

Authors - 1990



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The homeless garden is one of the many projects Paul Lee has been involved with, and writes about in his book.

## FIGHTING WORDS

By CHRIS WATSON  
Sentinel staff writer

**S**ANTA CRUZ isn't the kind of place you'd expect a book burning to occur. We're a little too New Age for such medieval stuff.

But some locals take their literature so seriously that any ill-thought phrase finding its way into print is cause enough to protest in a big way.

So, when homeless activist Robert Flory selectively burned pages out of Paul Lee's book "The Quality of Mercy" at an informal book burning a few months ago, Jane Imler, a stalwart Santa Cruz activist for the homeless and hungry, decided it was time for her to make a public statement too.

Which is not what Paul Lee intended when he wrote and published the book.

Lee wrote "The Quality of Mercy, Homelessness in Santa Cruz, 1985-1992," he says, as a personal history of the years he devoted to the problems of hunger and shelter in Santa Cruz. Because he had been involved in local community service projects since 1970, he didn't really think that his version of local history would cause quite the stir that it did. After all, the book was meant to be a memoir.

But in February of this year, during Lee's appearance at

Capitola Book Cafe to sign copies of his book, Imler and two fellow members of "Bag Ladies Revolt" and "Hungry Women United" disrupted Lee's book signing with banners and fliers asking for a boycott of the book. The author and book, they claimed, were misogynist, inaccurate and knowingly misrepresentative of the role of local homeless activists.

"The book is the best example since the Gutenberg Bible of powerful men rewriting history in their own image," Imler said recently, explaining her reason for the bookstore protest.

"Lee uses the sweat, tears and soup-stained aprons of the homeless and activists to polish his halo, much like the Catholic missionaries who built their empires on the backs of the Ohlone Indians."

Lee, however, defends his book. "The book was never meant as the complete story about anything. It's only a partial history — it's what we've done, what I've done, what the Citizens Committee for the Homeless and the William James Association have done for the homeless in Santa Cruz."

In the book, Lee does indeed paint a sweeping panorama of the development of homeless services in Santa Cruz since 1985. His role and the role of the non-profit agencies he has directed are also given a large share of the book.

Scattered throughout the book are a handful of inflammatory remarks about some local activists and city officials. In the book, Lee levies some tart words at homeless activists Imler and Robert Norse, former Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt, former City Councilman John Laird and property rights activist Carolyn Busenhardt, all of whom, Lee says, often thwarted efforts to establish homeless facilities.

"Jane and her ilk don't want to operate in the system and Mardi and Laird (got angry) when the county built a shelter in their front yard."

"On the one hand, you have Robert Norse and company and, on the other hand, you have the right-wing backlash of Carolyn Busenhardt and her group. We were in the middle, not on the lunatic fringe either way. If you're going to have effective programs, you can't be on the fringe."

At the book-signing, Lee took the opportunity to apologize to Imler for the passage where he wrote, "She failed to distinguish between us and the City and County. I started to think it would have been better to have let her starve to death and then opened a shelter."

It was a joke, Lee says, it wasn't meant to be taken seriously.

"I knew he didn't mean it," Imler said, laughing about it during a *Please see HOMELESSNESS — A8*



# Homeless history causes a stir

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recent interview. In the book, Lee himself credits Imler and her fast during the winter of 1985 as the impetus for the Cedar Street Shelter, Santa Cruz's first public homeless shelter.

But while Imler found the personal remark hilarious, she took umbrage with important facts she says were omitted from the book.

"There are too many other people that Paul just didn't give credit to in his book: Peter Carota, Mardi Wormhoudt, Paul Brindel, Bob Campbell, Jack Bassett. He should have talked to everyone if he were writing a historical account of the movement in the county.

"While I respect Paul's book as a personal memoir, I think it does a great disservice to the community, the movement and to future organizers.

"The book is, basically, just a massage of Paul's ego."

**D**ESPITE SUCH vocal outrage over Lee's version of local history, even his detractors tend to agree that Lee's community vision was a vital link in the formation of such programs as The River Street Shelter, A Free Meal, The Homeless Garden Project, the Interfaith Satellite Shelter Program and the Homeless Resource Center, scheduled to open later this year.

While diplomacy may not be his strong suit, Lee can take justifiable

credit for having served community interests from as far back as 1970. That was the year he and a handful of pastors, colleagues, students and downtown businessmen formed the University Services Agency.

Formed to promote educational, cultural and charitable service projects, USA spawned non-profit groups such as Campus Childcare, the Community Switchboard and The Whole Earth Restaurant, its very first project. Such early programs whetted Lee's appetite for non-profits.

Part of the allure, he says, was trying to set up programs where the people who profited from the services also operated them. And, in fact, the same spirit of community investment marked many of the projects of the William James Association, another non-profit, which Lee and friend Page Smith formed after they left the university system in 1972.

"The William James Association was my first real introduction into community work," Lee says.

"William James was a philosopher who believed that voluntary work service was the moral equivalent of war. Page and I helped Jerry Brown re-establish the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1976. And we opened the Cedar Street Shelter in 1985 — the first *public* shelter. We still have a prison arts program and we operate A Free Meal

soup kitchen and we'll be the umbrella agency for the homeless service center when it opens later this spring."

The Homeless Garden Project, though, is Lee's favorite program, a pet project that blends community service, training and a marketable consumer product.

"The goal of the homeless garden project is to become self-supporting. We want to further develop the idea of community-supported agriculture: members pay, in advance, for a season's produce and get a weekly box of organic produce. You can save 50 percent of your organic grocery bill this way. And the homeless get paid and learn skills they can take into the job market. This way, they have some minimal basis for becoming productive."

Even as his last major program, the Homeless Service Center, is getting ready to open, Lee continues to hatch new ways to invest in what he calls "an economy of gift, not an economy of greed."

"I'd like to resurrect USA for some new projects: a Circle Walk — a permanent, 17-mile trail that would unite west Santa Cruz; getting electric car shops organized for ghetto high schools; a 38-room community house offering permanent habitation for the homeless so they aren't kicked around from month to month."

While he may have generated a

batch of disagreeable publicity, Lee has also generated, over the years, many community projects that anyone would be proud to be associated with.

And Imler, for all her fault-finding, says she still considers Lee a friend, someone she could sit down and have a cup of coffee with.

"But there are still so many people out on the street," Imler protests one last time.

"It would have been better to take the money Paul spent on printing his book and used it to set up some transitional housing."