

Aptos crime-fighting plan gets cool reception

By BOB SMITH
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A proposal to spend upward of \$200,000 on a pilot juvenile-crime prevention program in Aptos received a cool reception from the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.

The project was proposed by the Aptos Community Alliance, a group which formed after a wave of juvenile crime including vandalism, burglaries and auto break-ins hit the area this last winter and spring. The Alliance suggested the county add two deputy sheriffs, one patrol car and another probation officer, and asked employees of the county's parks and recreation department to open the Aptos junior and senior high school gymnasiums for after-school and evening recreational activities.

Although the board finally adopted a motion by Supervisor Walt Symons to have the County Administrative Officer report back at budget time as to the board's options, Supervisor Gary Patton verbally dueled with Aptos High School principal Ron Severson, who is also the Alliance president, over the fairness of a pilot program that targets "a well-to-do community" such as Aptos and ig-

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nored other supervisorial districts, including Patton's 3rd District.

Patton's thrust during the back-and-forth questioning was that if the board was going to fund a crime-reduction program for Aptos, then there had to be money — \$1 million or more — for similar programs in each of the five supervisorial districts.

Severson said juvenile behavior problems in the Pajaro Valley school district have risen dramatically in the last 14 years.

For example, the school district had 12 expulsions in 1980; 67 in 1993; and 100 so far this year.

"At a time when there has been a national decrease in crime, there has been a 22 percent increase in California crime," Severson said.

"There really isn't much for teens to do in Aptos," Severson said, referring to after-school, evening and weekend hours. "There is no teen center, after-school recreation programs, etc."

Public safety is the most important service government can offer

its citizens, he said.

Patton had two lines of questioning: Where would Severson's group cut from the \$169 million general fund budget to fund the pilot program, and would Aptos residents be willing to pay more in taxes for this "special" program?

Severson said Aptos residents shouldn't have to pay any more because they are already paying more this year for public safety through Prop. 172's sales tax increase than they did last year. Santa Cruz County is getting about \$9 million from Prop. 172.

That shouldn't count, Patton said, because the state Legislature took \$11 million in revenues away from the county last year and the \$9 million backfill leaves a \$2 million "deficit."

Symons tried to get Severson partly off the hook by offering, with the consent of his fellow supervisors, to go through the proposed 1994-95 budget and find \$1 million in cuts for a countywide pilot program.