

World watches pot handout



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

ABOVE: Wayne Meyers, 50, of Boulder Creek, who has HIV, gets his marijuana in the City Hall courtyard Tuesday. **BELOW:** In the crowd were Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, arm raised, ex-Mayor Mike Rotkin, left, and council members Emily Reilly, right of sign, Tim Fitzmaurice, Mark Primack, partially hidden, in blue shirt, and Mayor Christopher Krohn.

'Typical' Santa Cruz gathering was a tightly controlled event

By **JASON SCHULTZ**
and **BRIAN SEALS**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITERS

SANTA CRUZ — Tuesday's medical-marijuana rally at City Hall drew a typical Santa Cruz crowd.

'If (medical marijuana) is right for you, go ahead, as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else.'

JOHN DARPINO,
ONLOOKER

There was a three-person theater troupe reenacting the recent federal raid of a local pot garden that triggered the rally. The crowd booed as an actor, dressed as a federal agent, busted a woman dressed as a doctor. She was pushing a wheelchair carrying a "patient" with aqua-colored hair.

One man played drums on the back of a trailer as he was driven around the block.

Joining them was an odd assortment of hippies, students, townspeople and the just the plain old curious.

"I've never been to one of these things," said John Darpino of Santa Cruz. "If (medical marijuana) is right for you, go ahead, as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else."

But while the atmosphere around the rally was loose, what they watched was a strictly controlled event.

The giveaway — cooperative members were the only recipients — was organized by the Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana, but had the support of the City Council. Six of seven members attended, as did a county supervisor.

City officials stressed before the

Please see **EVENT** on **BACK PAGE**



Medicinal giveaway at City Hall sends message

By **BRIAN SEALS**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — The medical-marijuana debate was thrust back onto the national stage Tuesday in Santa Cruz.

Two weeks after federal agents raided the Davenport pot garden of the Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana, about a dozen of the cooperative's members picked up their weekly pot allotment on the steps of City Hall.

The alliance always doles out its marijuana on Tuesdays, but this week had added significance. The group did so in front of about 1,000 supporters, a handful of opponents and a string of elected officials.

And the world.

There were at least a dozen TV crews, from national outlets including NBC News and CNN to local and regional stations. Reporters from The New York Times, Reuters and dozens of other publications were on hand, as were more than a dozen photojournalists.

The handout event was part rally, part publicity stunt, organized by WAMM to put a face on medical-marijuana users.

"Were we able to touch our legislators? Were we able to reach out to our leaders?" alliance co-founder Valerie Corral asked after the event. "I hope so."

While a DEA official said earlier this week that he was "shocked" by the planned giveaway, no confrontation materialized. An unmarked helicopter chattered hundreds of feet above, at times drowning out the speakers, but it was unclear if it was a DEA chopper.

DEA spokesman Richard Meyer would neither confirm nor deny if DEA agents were present.

"But we were monitoring the situation," Meyer said. The Santa Cruz Police Department, which has worked cooperatively with WAMM, had about a dozen plainclothes detectives at the event just to keep the peace,

Quotes from the crowd

■ "... We were monitoring the situation."

— Richard Meyer, DEA spokesman

■ "I am not the enemy. I am a person who happens to have a serious illness."

— Suzanne Pfeil, post-polio syndrome sufferer

■ "I think it would be noble of them if they felt the pain a little bit and did something for the higher good."

— Phil Baer, marijuana opponent

■ "This is the beginning of the end of the prohibition."

— Alan Brady, onlooker

Please see **MARIJUANA** on **BACK PAGE**

Marijuana

Continued from Page A1

said Sgt. Steve Clark.

Clark said other law enforcement agencies were present, but said he wasn't at liberty to say which.

WAMM co-founder Mike Corral said the group wasn't seeking a confrontation.

"It's to show the people of America the truth about medical marijuana," he said.

However, the DEA has a different version of that truth. While California and seven other states allow the sick to possess, grow and use pot for medical reasons, the federal government maintains it has no medical value.

That increasingly has pitted medical cooperatives and clubs in California against the federal government. Medical-pot clubs took a blow in May 2001 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled medical necessity is not a defense against distributing pot in a case involving an Oakland group.

To the federal agency, marijuana is an illegal drug, and the clubs are high-volume dealers.

"Marijuana is illegal," Meyer said recently. "Our job is to enforce the law, and we will. We have no choice."

Since the court decision, enforcement has increased. While the alliance and similar operations in California frequently work with local authorities, DEA agents have increasingly cracked down on high-profile medical-marijuana advocates and distribution clubs.

That led to the raid earlier this month in which the Corrals were arrested and their crop pulled up. No charges have been filed.

Speakers Tuesday said the federal policy was wrong-headed.

Santa Cruz physician Arnold Leff, a deputy director of drug policy in the Nixon administration, said marijuana has medical benefits, including easing nausea and increasing appetite.

While homemade protest signs dotted the crowd, contributing to a near-circus atmosphere in the City Hall courtyard, there was a more somber mood on the front steps, where about a dozen cooperative members picked up their weekly allowance of muffins and other forms of medical pot.

"I just wanted to show my support for Valerie and Mike and for WAMM," said Levi Castro, who was left a quadriplegic in 1999 after a surfing injury.

He has been a cooperative member for about two years.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

A crowd estimated at 1,000 jammed into the City Hall courtyard Tuesday afternoon.

Patients with AIDS, cancer and other ailments came before and after Castro. A few were in wheelchairs. All had a similar message for the federal government.

"I am not the enemy," said Suzanne Pfeil, a Santa Cruz resident who suffers post-polio syndrome and uses a wheelchair. "I am a person who happens to have a serious illness."

Supporters from around the region joined the local group.

Kay Mitchell, 82, drove with her son from Sebastopol to show support. The cancer patient said she takes seven different kinds of medicine and uses marijuana to bolster her appetite and decrease nausea.

"It's not psychological, it's a fact," she said from her wheelchair, with a faux marijuana-plant lei in her hands. "I don't know why I should be deprived of it."

With the Sept. 5 raid taking 167 plants, some WAMM members said they were worried about the future.

Santa Cruz attorney Ben Rice and Santa Clara University law professor Gerald Uelman said they plan to file motions, possibly this week, seeking return of the pot.

"I'm absolutely convinced it has been destroyed, but we will bring that motion," Rice said.

With a few exceptions, the crowd was decidedly pro-medical marijuana. Santa Cruz resident and City Council candidate Phil Baer was one of a handful of people protesting it. He was not sympathetic to the plight of people using it.

"I think it would be noble of them if they

felt the pain a little bit and did something for the higher good," Baer said.

He held up a sign decrying connections he sees between marijuana use and heroin problems in the city's Beach Flats neighborhood.

Another woman held a sign reading, "City officials, stop teaching my kids that illegal is OK."

Leff, the physician, said, "There's a difference between recreational use and medical use of a lot of drugs. That doesn't mean we're sending the wrong message."

The local politicians certainly agreed. The list of leaders who came to offer support for WAMM read like a Who's Who of Santa Cruz County — county Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, Santa Cruz Mayor Christopher Krohn, and council members Tim Fitzmaurice, Ed Porter, Scott Kennedy, Mark Primack and Emily Reilly. Also introduced to the crowd were former mayors Mike Rotkin, Celia Scott and Jane Weed.

"As an elected official, I am committed to changing social policy and bad law through the legislative process," Wormhoudt said. "But when our government becomes the aggressor against powerless people, I feel I have a moral obligation to stand with the powerless."

Few elected officials seemed worried about any negative publicity.

"I'm glad the spotlight is on something as positive as this," Primack said.

Contact Brian Seals at
bseals@santa-cruz.com.

Event

Continued from Page A1

event that it was not city-sanctioned and that officials would handle no marijuana, and that's how the event unfolded.

The public stood in the hall's courtyard, facing the front of the building. A horde of media people was corralled on the steps to the left of the entrance, with politicians facing them on the right. Alliance patients sat behind the columns of the porch in the middle.

About a dozen plain-clothed police detectives could be seen, some hanging around the edges of the crowd in black shades and shiny black dress shoes, watching the event as others mingled in the crowd.

About a dozen members of the cooperative — chosen by drawing names out of a hat — were on hand.

They proceeded to the front, one by one, collected their weekly supply of marijuana and briefly shared their story. Then it was on to the next one.

Members do not pay for the marijuana. Santa Cruz homeowner George Mead said he showed up to see the spectacle. He did not think the national attention the event was drawing would help Santa Cruz's image or the local tourism industry, but said at least it was taking media attention away from the city's problems with panhandlers on Pacific Avenue.

Woody Carroll of Santa Cruz said he showed up to support the patients. He said he came, in part, because he believes marijuana will one day be legal and his two young daughters will ask him about the days when it was outlawed, and he wants to be able to share that history with them.

Tony Madrigal said he would like to see the city use the negative national publicity the Drug Enforcement Administration has been receiving from its raid on the garden earlier this month as leverage to get the DEA to crack down on the problem of heroin dealers in the Beach Flats.

Alan Brady of Santa Cruz said he thinks the confrontation between medical users in California and the federal government could change national marijuana policy.

"This is the beginning of the end of the prohibition," he said.

Contact Jason Schultz
at jschultz@santa-cruz.com.