

Living wage

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That's true for many city workers. Santa Cruz employees 628 temporary workers who perform about 650 jobs from custodial work to library shelving to parks maintenance, pool management and microfilm clerking. Many temporary city workers say they not only try to pick up odd jobs now and then, but work three or four jobs to meet cost of apartments, cars, insurance, food and families.

Security guard Daniel Dodge has been a temporary city worker since 1975.

"I've always had to have a second job," Dodge told the City Council at a recent meeting. "The support people who work for you are very united. Invest in your infrastructure, your workers."

Now that the City Council is considering a living-wage ordinance, most of those workers are eyeing potential raises from about \$7 per hour to \$11 or \$12. That and the prospect of a union naturally thrills the workers, many of whom are lifelong Santa Cruz residents who say they simply want to earn enough to stay in the expensive town they love.

"This is a dream job for me," said Errol Griffin, 28, who has groomed the baseball diamonds at Harvey West Park for the past five summers. "I used to play on these fields when I was a kid, so it's great to come back here for work."

Griffin lives with his parents because, he said, he can't afford a place on his own even with the state Parks Department job he holds in the winter. Likewise, Civic custodian Dave Kelly and the Gullo brothers grew up in Santa Cruz, surfing off the end of 26th Avenue. Now, they say, they pick up odd jobs, work at the Civic and just want to stay in their town.

The Gullos live with their parents, too, saying that if they got their own place, even with their extra jobs, they could afford rent and, well, that's about it.

"If I rented a room, I probably couldn't have a car, couldn't pay car insurance, and probably wouldn't have enough to live on," Nick Gullo said. "Nothing else. I'd be on the bike path."

Across the street from the Civic at the Central branch library, Sean Pullen has worked as a page for about a year and a half. He had worked in other libraries for 2½ years before that.

Pullen, an acupuncture student, said he moved to Santa Cruz from Oklahoma and now pays the same amount for a room in a house as he did for an entire house in Oklahoma. So his part-time temporary job at the library is essential to paying rent and getting through school. He also receives financial aid to make ends meet. And while he's not from Santa Cruz, he said he'd like to be able to say here.

"One of the reasons I wanted this job was so I wouldn't have to be stressed out about money, and that's not quite happening," he said

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MEGAN ZANINOVICH,

LIBRARY PAGE

while sitting next to fellow page Megan Zaninovich. "This living wage could be really exciting because it could allow the library to be more selective in hiring. Most of us are students, either at Cabrillo, UC, etc. But now, because the wages are so low, we're just getting high school students.

"Most of us are being lured away to higher-paying jobs. One thing that's really important is that all of us temporary workers want to do a good job for the city."

Civic worker Kelly agrees. And when he got hired on permanently — and his pay went from \$7 per hour to \$13 — he said he wasn't doing anything different. In fact, Kelly said he had the odd experience of doing the same job for two different salaries as he transitioned from temporary to permanent work. Half of his salary was being paid for at a union-negotiated rate for permanent employees and half at the lower temporary rate.

"I'd come in one day and be earning \$12.98 an hour and come in the next and earn \$7.50 an hour — and I'd be doing the same job," said Kelly, now a full-time employee. "It's the exact same work. And now I make way better money."

But Kelly is leaving city work at the beginning of August to take a job over the hill. He didn't want to do it, he said. And he said he'll continue to live here. But he said he couldn't wait for the city to pass a living wage for him to help support his family.

His wife, Leslie Kelly, is also a city temporary worker. She has two part-time temporary jobs and two jobs in town as a nanny. Now that she is pregnant with the couple's first child, the situation is too unstable.

"The thing is, all the guys here, all the temp staff I know, work just as hard as any of those guys across the street (at City Hall)," said Dave Kelly. "These guys are the nuts and bolts of this operation. If any one of them had called in sick this week, that floor we were refinishing wouldn't have been done. People don't think much of the work they do, or shelving books or life-guarding or cleaning the parks. They say, 'Why pay them so much. They're young, or they don't have lots of responsibilities.' This city couldn't function without them."