

Who's running the show?

Santa Cruz leaders seek to end control by union of money-losing Civic Auditorium



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

The Cabrillo Music Festival Orchestra rehearses in an acoustically refurbished Civic Auditorium in August 2003. City leaders are contemplating ways to turn the Civic into a money-maker for the city, or at least not a money-loser.

Popular downtown venue losing \$230K a year

✓ **'We want to take control of the Civic Auditorium and not have it run by the union because we're losing money.'**

S.C. MAYOR
MIKE ROTKIN

By SHANNA MCCORD
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — City leaders want a financial overhaul of the money-draining Civic Auditorium — the city-owned downtown venue that's hosted popular figures such as filmmaker Michael Moore and comedian Bill Maher.

To boost entertainment bookings and keep costs competitive, the City Council decided this week to terminate an already-expired agreement with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage

Employees, the union that provides all technical work for Civic shows.

"Nobody is trying to replace the union," Mayor Mike Rotkin said. "But the shows that used to stop here on their way from San Francisco to L.A. keep driving.

"We want to take control of the Civic Auditorium and not have it run by the union because we're losing money."

When an act wants to perform at the Civic, it's the union that determines how many people are needed to hang lights, turn on microphones, build sets and perform other "dan-

gerous and technical" jobs to run a show. The union also sets the price the promoter pays for such work.

In recent years, bookings have declined and the auditorium is running \$230,000 in the red, city officials said.

They blame some of the Civic's financial problems on the stagehands union for overstaffing shows and limiting promoters from using their own employees for less technical work, such as unloading and loading trucks.

See CIVIC on BACK PAGE

Civic

Continued from Page A1

Ed Hills, IATSE's business agent, said the cost of operating each show at the Civic is a "negotiation and collaboration" between the union and promoter.

"It's a common argument and completely untrue that we overcharge," Hills said. "We work diligently to keep labor costs within the scope of their projects."

A two-year agreement between the city and the union expired in March 2004, though union workers have continued to run shows at the Civic without a formal agreement.

In attempting to reach a new deal during the past year and a half, both sides have failed to see eye-to-eye on the hiring of a technical director.

On Tuesday, the council decided in a 5-2 vote to hire a technical director to act as a liaison between the stagehands union and promoters.

When a show books the Civic, the technical director would figure out how many union workers are needed and a fair price would be.

However, union representatives have been fighting for the technical director to be a union member.

In negotiating with the city, union representatives said they've agreed to a 10 percent cut in their rates and would allow promoters to use some of their own staff.

Councilman Tim Fitzmaurice sided with the union and called the council's move merely "symbolic" because IATSE will continue to be the hired experts who run the Civic shows.

"This seems like an anti-union vote to me," Fitzmaurice said. "I couldn't do it."

Councilman Ryan Coonerty, a member of a council subcommittee that reviews operations of several city facilities, wants more "clarity and reasonable rates" at the Civic to help it break even or make a profit.

"As I look at it, there's no reason the Civic can't be a revenue-producing engine for the city," Coonerty said.

The subcommittee is aiming to increase the number of events at the Civic. During the past five years, there have been up to 100 events there every year.

Other ideas for increasing revenue at the



Teens and young adults, above, party at the Civic, right, during First Night.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Civic, which was built in 1940 and seats 1,900, include corporate sponsorship.

"If it meant being able to maintain city services and programs and it was done tastefully, absolutely I'd support that idea," said Dannettee Shoemaker, Parks and Recreation director.

Union representatives said it's possible they'll organize an informational picket in protest of the council's decision during dance recitals at the Civic today and Saturday.

Contact Shanna McCord at smccord@santacruzsentinel.com.

