

Watsonville Kiwanis ready to admit women

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WATSONVILLE — The Watsonville Kiwanis are breaking the rules and upholding the law, they say. Thursday afternoon the traditionally all-male business club will swear in five women members in defiance of the by-laws and constitution of the organization.

But according to former chapter president Phil Lawrence, to do

otherwise would be in defiance of California law.

"When these women approached us we had an attorney go over the club's bylaws," said Lawrence. "He found that they (the bylaws) are in violation of California law. These five women are extraordinarily well qualified, and would be welcomed with open arms if they were men."

The Watsonville club was chartered by the Kiwanis International organization 60 years ago and has never admitted any women before because "none have ever applied," according to President David Hemrick.

"When they did (apply), we considered it, and voted to change the bylaws," said Hemrick. "The vote was by no means unanimous but more than two-thirds of the membership voted to change the rules."

One of the five applicants, Margaret Boe, is the general manager of Farmers Cold Storage.

"I've been a member of the Business and Professional Womens' Organization for more than 20 years," said Boe, "and we accept men. This is just turnabout. They're open to new things here and this proves it,"

she said.

Filice Owens, who has run Watsonville Travel for nine years, was pleasantly surprised by the club's vote.

"Watsonville is not usually thought of as a really progressive place," she said. "But in this instance I've felt very welcome."

"I hope that (the Watsonville group) will stay pretty much the way it is," she said. "I don't want the men to feel that their territory is being invaded; I just want men and women to work together without all the stereotypes and sexism."

Administrators of the Kiwanis International organization are not happy with the Watsonville action, but have decided to ignore it.

According to Lawrence, earlier attempts to revoke a group's charter for admitting women resulted in a lawsuit, which Kiwanis International lost.

"We will do nothing," said Howard Dull, Governor of the California, Nevada and Hawaii district of the Kiwanis. "We won't take (the women's) money or accept their membership. Their names will not be on the rolls."

"We would not, could not accept women members under the current bylaws. Kiwanis International will still remain open only to those of the male gender," said Dull.

Women are allowed to join Kiwanis-sponsored student organizations such as the Key Club and the Circle Club, but once out of school they cannot join Kiwanis.

According to Dull, there will be a

meeting of all the Kiwanis Clubs in California next month to discuss replacing the Kiwanianes, an auxiliary group, with an organization identical to the Kiwanis but restricted to women.

"Some of the women would like to join Kiwanis, but the majority would rather set their own destiny," said Dull.

If the International organization

persists in refusing to recognize Watsonville's women members, "we would have to go to our attorneys and see what they advise," said Lawrence. "It's a changing world; women are working in professional fields and this is an area that we're not tapping. We're looking for good members, and there is a lack of men in the professional areas we're looking at."