

# Group targets SC carriage ride business

## Animal rights organization says downtown work is unsafe for draft horses

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*Animal Welfare*  
SANTA CRUZ — A horse-drawn carriage business that wants to expand in downtown Santa Cruz is being targeted by national animal-welfare groups that oppose using horses for profit and contend carriage rides are unsafe.

Redwings Horse Sanctuary is mobilizing national groups to oppose Draft Horses for Hire and Santa Cruz Carriage Company, owned by Randy and Chris Clayton.

The Claytons and their horses give carriage

rides in downtown Santa Cruz during the holiday season, in addition to providing carriage rides at weddings and other special events.

They are seeking approval from Santa Cruz to install a portable corral at their Santa Cruz Feed and Mercantile on Center Street so they can have a staging area and a place for the horses to rest.

That would allow them to expand the carriage rides beyond the holiday season and would give a safer place to change horses and let them stay between jobs, Randy Clayton said. One or two horses would be stalled in the portable corrals, which

would replace the horse trailer they are currently tied to during breaks.

"We're not asking for a place for the horses to live," he said. "They already have a place. We're asking for these work horses to have a place to go to work."

The city Zoning Board approved the Claytons' proposal in July over objections from Redwings, a Carmel-based horse-rescue group. Redwings has since appealed to the Santa Cruz City Council to

Please see HORSES — Page A12



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Carriage driver Randy Clayton, whose horse-drawn carriage is a fixture downtown during the Christmas season, has come under fire for the use of horses for profit.

## Horses

Continued from Page A1

overturn the approval. A hearing is set for Sept. 14.

Barbara Clarke of Redwings contends the carriage rides are dangerous for the horses, passengers and people in cars. "You just can't mix a slow-moving vehicle being pulled by a horse with cars," she said.

Clarke said a study she made of accidents nationwide involving horse-drawn carriages was "blown off" by the Zoning Board. But Clarke said she used the study to mobilize animal-welfare groups, including People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the Animal Protection Institute, against the carriage rides.

The Sacramento-based Animal Protection Institute issued an "action alert" this week that says "Santa Cruz has created a perilous situa-

tion by allowing carriage operations with absolutely no safeguards in place to protect the horses."

Carriage horses, among other things, work long hours with inadequate rest, pull heavy loads, and deal with high pavement temperatures, constant exposure to vehicle exhaust, improper horseshoeing and inadequate veterinary care, according to the institute.

"The operators are in business not because they love horses, but to make money. Horses who become worn out, sick, injured or unable to work will be sold for slaughter," the group said.

"That's ridiculous," Chris Clayton retorted. "They're not talking about Randy. He loves his horses like children."

"These are draft horses, and draft horses are happy when they're

working," she said.

Clayton abides by guidelines regarding horse care and working conditions set by the Carriage Operators of North America association, said Dave Vertin, a board member who also operates a carriage company in Northern California. Vertin has worked with Clayton on logging jobs using draft horses.

"I don't know anybody who cares about or loves horses more than Randy Clayton. He would never put a horse in danger." Vertin said. "The things that Randy has been asking from they city are all for the protection of his horses."

Santa Cruz veterinarian Chuck Kessinger also weighed in on Clayton's behalf. "When using his horses for pulling a wagon or using the horses in logging operations, he uses the highest level of humane

treatment," Kessinger said.

In more than a decade of carriage rides, Clayton has never had an accident, his wife said. He has given wagon rides and carriage rides to thousands of people at Wilder Ranch State Park, Roaring Camp railroad, and has given driving instruction to organic farmers and others, she said.

"What people need to know is that we're already doing the carriage rides. What we want to do is make it better for the horses," she said.

Clarke agreed that the Claytons' "horses are always in really great shape. I don't have any issue with that."

But she said the city should have regulations requiring things like health and work logs for horses and permits for drivers.

"You can't depend on the opera-

tor to do, on his or her own, what's right for the animals. It's a business and money gets in the way of decision-making," Clarke said.

Danger exists for carriage passengers, too, Clarke said. There are no seat belts, no child safety seats and the carriages are not reinforced to protect passengers from injuries, she said.

"It's not romantic. It's downright dangerous," Clarke said.

If the City Council approves the Claytons' request, Clarke said she is prepared to "go after his permits" and then "do a boycott of the downtown area."

She said she also has contacted the Animal Legal Defense Fund about a possible lawsuit.