

SPCA, county strike deal



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Animal-control officer Janet Goulette gets a little face time with a client during her rounds Tuesday afternoon.

Animal shelter will be run by government

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SANTA CRUZ

'We've done our best with what we had. It will be a very sad day when we have to give up the shelter.'

DOREEN LOZANO, SPCA INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

After providing refuge for the county's homeless animals for 68 years, the Santa Cruz SPCA will be homeless come Aug. 1.

Months of bitter argument appeared to come to a close Tuesday after the county and the SPCA struck a last-minute deal during budget hearings. Under the plan, area governments will buy the SPCA's Seventh Avenue facility and take control of the animal shelter.

"We've done our best with what we had," said Doreen Lozano, SPCA interim executive director. "It will be a very sad day when we have to give up the shelter."

Last month, area cities and the county agreed to form a public authority for animal-control services, which the SPCA willingly relinquished. But the question of sheltering the animals has been more contentious, with the SPCA demanding more money to continue providing the service than the county can afford.

Audits showing the SPCA misused \$715,000 in taxpayer dollars and owes area governments \$229,000 in animal-

license fees only soured negotiations, which came to a standstill earlier this month. Last week, the agency came close to losing its June payment when Supervisors Tony Campos and Jeff Almquist refused to give it more money. The payment passed in a 3-2 vote.

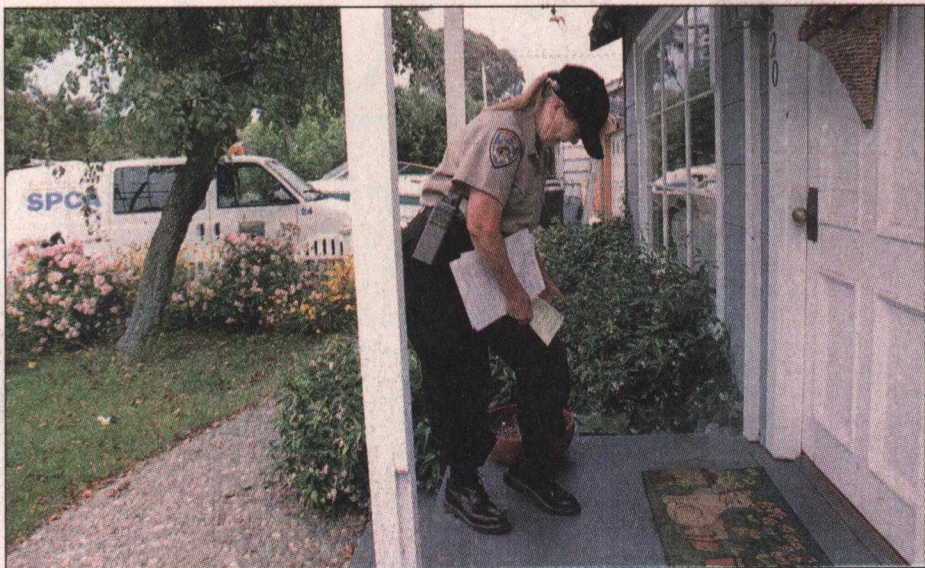
In the intervening week, Supervisor Ellen Pirie worked with Lozano and Jennifer McHale, SPCA board president, to hammer out the agreement presented Tuesday.

The county will pay the SPCA \$115,000 to continue sheltering animals through July while the transition takes place. In August, the county will move into the shelter and the SPCA will start house-hunting. Although the county suggested co-location of the shelter until the SPCA found a home, the SPCA declined the offer.

The SPCA plans to provide basic services such as animal education and mobile spay and neutering while it looks for a home. It will operate out of a temporary site that has yet to be determined, Lozano said.

The new public authority has committed to continuing the SPCA's holding policy, which keeps animals for an average of 15 days before euthanization. Most of the animals euthanized will be

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Goulette leaves a quarantine notice at a Pleasure Point home Tuesday.

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unadoptable, said Susan Mauriello, county administrator.

Only one or two SPCA employees stand to lose their job, Mauriello said. Most of the 12 shelter employers, save for administrative and SPCA foundation employees, will be offered jobs with the new public authority, she said. The SPCA's seven animal-control staff members have started moving in preparation for their July 1 start date.

Workers at the SPCA voted Tuesday night to unionize. They will join Service Employees International Union, Local 415.

Cliff Tillman of the SEIU said Local 415's existing contract covers the employees who transfer to work under the county.

Still unresolved is how much money the SPCA owes area governments. Mauriello and the county auditor are reviewing the SPCA's unauthorized spending to determine what costs could be excused for serving public purposes. Lozano hopes most of the \$715,000 will be excused.

The final total "presumably" will be subtracted from the shelter's agreed-upon price tag, Mauriello said.

The county will lease the shelter this summer until the purchase is final. Both the county and SPCA are getting certified appraisals of the property's fair market value.

The county plans to borrow money to finance shelter purchase.

The SPCA hopes to work with the county to protect animal welfare once it's up and running in its new home, Lozano said. It's too early to say what kind of partnership will be formed, she said.

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