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Dee Murray, the county Planning Department's longest term employee, retires in April.

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Dee Murray retires from county post

By **ROBIN MUSITELLI**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — If they could, Dee Murray's colleagues would dump her memory into a computer.

"Her memory is more accurate than our records," explains Glenda Hill, Murray's friend and co-worker in the Santa Cruz County Planning Department. "We very often go to her when we need to do research.

"She's our history; she's our memory," said Hill.

As well she might be. Murray started working in the planning department in 1953, when she was just 18 years old.

In April, after 44 years, she will retire, not only as the longest term employee in the department but as one of the most knowledgeable.

"She was here before building permits, before the general plan, before zoning and on and on. She's been there to see all of it. I don't think there's anyone else who has but Dee," Hill said.

A native of Santa Cruz, Murray was born and reared on the North Coast, the descendent of Italian immigrants. She had ambitions of becoming a secretary,

but Bill Weybright, the county planning director, had different ideas.

"He approached me and said he had an opening," recalled Murray. "Of course, you know, I didn't know a thing about planning and didn't know what I was getting into.

"I wanted to be a secretary. He said, 'Dee, you're going to be a planner.'"

At first, Murray and Weybright were the entire department. Working on the first floor of the old county courthouse on Front Street, Murray learned the trade. In other words, she did it all.

It was less complicated, of

c o u r s e .

There were only three zones: A, B and C. A few years later, she helped establish the county's first interim zone district and interim zone ordinance that established a lot more zones, site standards and uses.

The county was still a few years off from a general plan. The first was adopted in 1960 and Murray helped write it.

She has worked assisting at the planning counter since the beginning. She still does. She's also

worked as a planning aid, technician, associate planner and senior planner.

She helped plan the Santa Cruz Small Craft Yacht Harbor. During her tenure, she has worked under 19 planning directors.

An immaculately groomed woman with upswept hair, Murray is a shy and private person, who was so devoted to her job that she wouldn't take a vacation, said Mary Atkins, who worked with Murray for 11 years. "Can you imagine having too many days vacation?" asks Atkins.

Murray particularly enjoyed working at the planning counter,

counter apparently ran both ways. The department's signup list often has requests from people who want to see Murray — just Murray, said Hill. "If she's unavailable, they'll just come back another time."

When planning department employees faced layoffs in the 1980s, clients wrote in, offering to pay Murray's salary just to keep her, said Hill. "I can tell you she's the only one they offered to do that for."

Hill estimates that during her 44 years, Murray helped about half a million people. And, she adds, "In all the years I was her supervisor, I never received one complaint about her. Not once, ever," said Hill. "I have seen her deal with the most irate, furious, crazed people, and by the time she's done, they're calm," said Hill.

Officially, Murray has retired. But she is working part time for another month or so to computerize the history of parcels.

When she's done, she hopes to spend more time on the North Coast, gardening on her father's property. She plans to take golf lessons travel to Italy.

Even after 44 years, she has some ambivalence about retiring. "I've enjoyed working," she said. "I've really enjoyed working."

A retirement party for Murray will be at 6 p.m. April 24 at the Cocoanut Grove in Santa Cruz.

For information or reservations phone Glenda Hill at 454-3216 or Carmen Locatelli at 454-3231.

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— *Glenda Hill,
Planning Department*

darting from file to file to get answers to questions. "She's like a hummingbird. ... hover, dash, hover, dash," said Atkins. "We're forever yelling at her, 'Don't run,' because she always wears heels," she added.

Devotion at the planning