

'Heaven-sent' deposits lead to man's arrest

Stanton Powers, the man who claims God answered his prayers and credited \$4.4 million to his account, was arrested by Capitola police last Wednesday evening.

Powers surrendered to Capitola police after the District Attorney's office obtained an arrest warrant, charging him with grand theft by withdrawing \$2,000 from a County Bank of Santa Cruz checking account when he had a balance of only \$1.17.

The warrant, signed by Municipal Court Judge Richard McAdams, carried a bail of \$5,000 but Powers was released on his own recognizance at 1:30 a.m. on Thursday. Powers, 39 and an unemployed pen and ink artist who lives at 226 Mar Vista Drive, Aptos, said he prayed outside one of County Bank's automatic teller machine for money, and that God answered him by making the deposits to his checking account.

Police and bank officials said the "deposits" were fictitious; that they had been made by someone entering numbers into the automatic teller machines, and then making cash withdrawals before the deposits had been verified by a bank employee.

Ziglar said that County Bank, unlike some of its larger competitors, has a policy of allowing withdrawals through its automatic teller machines (ATMs) of up to \$500 on the basis of deposits made into the machines that have not yet been verified by a human teller.

Powers used the County Bank policy and his access to the ATMs to overdraw his account by \$2,080, Ziglar said.

ATMs at other banks in Santa Cruz County, an informal survey of their depositors show, accept

is not actually credited to an account until it is verified by a bank employee — hours, and in the case of weekend deposits, days later.

"We have not changed our policy on withdrawals," Glenn Dodd, the bank's counsel, said Thursday morning.

The County Bank policy is the result of a survey of state banks showing that a majority allow the provisional credit, Dodd said.

The attorney said the bank tries to make the operation and policies concerning the use of the County Bank ATMs as much like dealings with the human tellers inside the branches.

"When you make a deposit (by check) in a branch, you get provisional credit and can withdraw funds against the deposit," Dodd said. That is the philosophy behind allowing a limited withdrawal on the basis of the unverified ATM deposits.

"We don't want to restrict the use of the machines," he added, "or you inhibit people using them."

Dodd said the bank has approximately 80,000 ATM transactions each month at 13 machines (soon to be 14 with the opening of a new Watsonville branch at Main Street and Green Valley Road) and in five years experience with the machines, have had minimal problems.

"Frankly," the attorney said, "we had only two minimal problems in five years experience of machine use.

"It is not a significant factor in the statistical sense in the use of the ATM machine."

Dodd said the bank screens its customers and controls the use of the plastic cards allowing access to its

that any relationship we have is with good, creditworthy customers, people who aren't prone to try something like this," said Dodd. "But you can never guard against someone doing this, but (we) see no reason for a complete policy reversal. Powers made the withdrawals on Sept. 9, Dodd said. Normally, safeguards built into the bank's computer system would have limited the amount of money Powers could have obtained, even with the provisional credit provision to \$500.

But the bank's computer was shut down on Sept. 9, which is a bank holiday because it is Admission Day. Bank records, Ziglar said, showed that Powers had deposited five envelopes in the teller machine. Two envelopes contained \$5 deposits, the other three were empty.

But the deposits punched into the ATMs by someone using Powers' card and code numbers were for far more: The fictitious entries were for \$444.44, \$500, \$475,444.44, \$4,444,455.55, and finally \$555,555.55.

"What he did was just stand there and punch in the numbers," said Ziglar. "He never put any money in the bank."

He made withdrawals at five County Bank ATMs before his card was finally "captured" by an ATM at the bank's Deer Park installation.