

Sommerhalder won't come here

By KATHARINE BALL
STAFF WRITER

State parole officer confirms decision

Richard "Blue" Sommerhalder will not be paroled either to Santa Cruz County or Monterey County, a state parole officer said today.

Ronald Y. Chun, regional director of the the Department of Corrections Parole and Community Services Division in San Francisco, said this morning, "We've considered all factors and think perhaps we can develop a more positive parole

program (for Sommerhalder) in some other jurisdiction."

Chun said the parole division had not yet decided where to place Sommerhalder and probably would not decide before Friday, but had definitely ruled out Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. Sommerhalder is scheduled for release from Soledad Prison Sunday.

"It's one of those cases where

it's difficult to place him in someone else's back yard," Chun said.

Sommerhalder was convicted of two rape-murders committed in Santa Cruz County in 1976 and two other rapes the same year. He served 8 1/2 years before being released on parole to Monterey County two years ago, where he almost immediately violated parole by threat-

ening his parole officer and a Monterey County deputy sheriff.

State Sen. Henry Mello, who worked with Santa Cruz County District Attorney Art Danner and Monterey County District Attorney Michael Bartram to prevent the parole in this area, said the state Department of Corrections had decided not to place Sommerhalder here

because he would be near witnesses whose testimony helped convict him, the families of his victims, and several people whom he had threatened.

Chun refused to specify why the parole division had decided against placing Sommerhalder here.

Bartram, the Monterey County district attorney, said he has also been communicat-

ing with the San Benito County district attorney on the matter.

Bartram, who prosecuted Sommerhalder when he threatened his parole officer, said the officer works in these three counties, and that putting Sommerhalder in San Benito County could endanger the officer again.

The decision not to place Sommerhalder in the two bay-side counties came after strenuous protest not only from local

district attorneys but from local politicians and several thousand Santa Cruz County residents, who signed petitions against the parole.

Danner estimated this morning that at least 6,000 Santa Cruz-area residents had signed the petitions since Monday. Danner, together with Mello, had planned to present the petitions tomorrow to Gov. George Deukmejian and the director of the state prison system, Danner and Mello said.

But Mello said he believed the presentation would now be unnecessary.

"If the department (of corrections) has made the decision on the parole, it would be redundant to present the petitions," Mello said.

Mello also said he thought current state parole law was adequate.

He said current law, while it emphasizes placing paroled criminals in the counties where they were convicted, provides enough exceptions to the rule to make it workable.

Those exceptions include placing the criminal in proximity to victims or their families, witnesses, or people the criminal has threatened.

"The only thing I think is difficult (about the law) is the emphasis on (placing the criminal) where he has strong family ties or acquaintances," said Mello. "That could also work the other way," and lead to further crimes, he said.

REFERENCE

MATSONVILLE
Register-PACIFIC JOURNAL
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