

Family law court moves from Santa Cruz to Watsonville



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Work continues on the new Watsonville Civic Plaza (center) which will include three courtrooms, one of which is family law.

Courts
✓ **New offices to bring juries, revenue to downtown location** *RP 5-16-06*

By LAURA NORTON
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Santa Cruz County residents getting divorced or mediating childcare will have to travel to Watsonville for their court appointments beginning next summer, superior court officials announced Monday.

The new family law courtroom will be housed on Main Street — in the downtown library and courts structure currently under construction.

The two other courtrooms in that building will allow for jury trials, including a misdemeanor court and a felony department.

Misdemeanors and felonies that occur south of the Freedom Boulevard and Highway 1 intersection

will be tried in south county.

"It provides optimum services. We had the chance to build something that would do the best possible," Judge Michael Barton said of the move and new building, which he said would have parking advantages and state-of-the-art courtrooms and offices.

Barton said the building could see three jury panels each week, a development he said would be economically beneficial to the downtown area if jurors stop in a local business for a cup of coffee or quick lunch on their breaks.

"There are economic advantages for the city that come with having more juries," he said.

Building designs also include space for family observation, a

play area and comfortable, family-oriented offices.

The goal, Santa Cruz County Superior Court Executive Officer Alex Calvo said, was to minimize the stress that families go through when they go to court.

But family law attorneys accustomed to practicing in Santa Cruz are not won over by the move.

"I think it is a sucky idea," said family law attorney Michael Cougar, who has a practice in Santa Cruz. "It is inconvenient for clients and for everyone that has a law practice here in Santa Cruz. There are no benefits to moving the court to Watsonville."

Cougar said he thought very few

See COURT page 2

COURT

From page 1

Santa Cruz attorneys would move their offices to Watsonville and fewer would open satellite offices near the new courthouse.

"Who would want to go to Watsonville?" Cougar said.

Calvo said he talked to several

court employees and attorneys about the move and was working out some negotiations to make the transition easier.

The court may permit remote appearance from Santa Cruz to Watsonville via a videoconference system for some court matters, could adjust times so court proceedings begin later than 8:30 a.m. to allow for commuting, or could bundle court appearances so attor-

neys do not have to attend for short periods of time every day, but instead one or two full days in court.

"There are advantages for the community to move the court. But we want to find the way to make those advantages for everyone that are the least disruptive," Calvo said.

The family law court is expected to open in Watsonville in July 2007.