

A label-hating mayor may be given a label nevertheless

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mayors

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SANTA CRUZ — Vice-mayor John Laird hates labels "because people use them as a substitute for politics."

But, if the City Council Tuesday follows tradition and selects its mayor on a rotating basis, the 33-year-old Laird will become Santa Cruz' first openly homosexual mayor.

The label will undoubtedly stick, at least for a while, the way the label of Socialist has stuck to former Mayor Michael Rotkin and outgoing Mayor Bruce Van Allen.

Laird says he's never made an issue about being gay before because "I've not considered that to be a part of my contract with the voters."

Since his election to the council in 1981, Laird's brand of politics has been labeled as progressive.

Now, on the eve of the mayoral selection, Laird thinks it's important to "be open" about the fact he is homosexual and "to help knock down some of the stereotypes."

Laird is friends with another gay California mayor, Bob Gentry of Laguna Beach. Laird named other state officials who are gay: San Francisco Municipal Court Judge Mary Morgan; San Francisco Supervisor Harry Britt and Tim Wolfred, an



John Laird

elected member of the San Francisco Community College Board.

"About 10 percent of the population of the U.S. is estimated to be gay or lesbian. As a result, almost everyone has someone who is gay or lesbian in their own family. I think this is one issue that will surprise people in how

it cuts across the spectrum politically," says Laird.

Whereas being a Socialist is a matter of choice, says Laird, being gay "is more of a civil rights issue."

"My personal belief is that (being gay) is just something that's established when you're very young that you really have no control over."

Laird, Gentry and others will lobby in Sacramento for the passage of legislation, introduced by San Francisco Democratic Assemblyman Art Agnos, to bar discrimination in jobs due to sexual orientation.

Laird said the legislation (AB 1) needs two more votes in the Senate by January for passage.

"The real issue in Santa Cruz is exactly that legislation. Basically, that somebody can do a good job in a position, including mayor, without (sexual orientation) being an issue."

The bearded Laird predicts that after his year of mayor is over "people will be amazed that such a big deal was made about it at the beginning."

Traditionally, the council selects the mayor on a rotating basis according to the amount of votes candidates chalked up at their election. The vice-mayor almost always steps up to the position of mayor.

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Laird

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If Laird is selected, he will be the 56th person to serve as mayor of Santa Cruz. William Cooper was the first mayor in 1876, the year that marked a changeover to the position of mayor from the position of "president of the board of trustees."

In 1971, Lorette Wood was awarded the label of being Santa Cruz' first woman mayor. The only other woman to serve as mayor was Sally DiGirolamo, in 1975.

Laird says "there's no label that adequately summarizes the experience and commitment that I will bring to this job. Although I label myself progressive, for lack of anything else, I prefer not to label myself, because I don't want anyone in Santa Cruz to think I have a predisposition on an issue that will prevent them from talking to me."

Laird's experience includes being a former Congressional assistant to Jerome Waldie of Contra Costa County; a manager for seven years with the County Administrative Office; founding member of Community Credit Union, as well as vice-chairman of the City Charter Review Committee.

Laird hopes the City Council may be dawning on a new age of cooperation.

Noting last week's vote for the new council was split between con-

servatives and progressives, Laird says, "The message is that this council is representative of the community, and we have a mandate to cooperate with each other for the best interests of the city."

Laird also foresees "less internal squabbling," as new appointments are made to city commissions to bring the commissions more in line with the thinking of the City Council.

A key issue this year will be water resources planning, says Laird, who is also chairman of the north county Water Policy Planning Task Force.

Other major issues will be renegotiation of a cable television contract for the city (the county is also renegotiating a contract) and the implementation of Measure A, the initiative passed last week by voters.

Measure A states that UCSC should funnel its plans for a new research and industrial park through the city planning department.

"I think we have to figure a way for the city and the university to cooperate," says Laird.

Looking once more into his political crystal ball, Laird saw possible increases in water and sewer rates.

On the council Laird joins veteran colleague Spiro Mellis, Mardi Wormhoudt and Rotkin; and newly-elected councilmembers Katy Sears-Williams, Arnold Levine and Jane Weed. Rotkin was re-elected last week for another term.