

Tight budget keeps jail facility closed

Move saves money, but keeps County Jail conditions crowded

By STEVE PEREZ
Sentinel staff writer

3-26-96

SANTA CRUZ — Crowding at County Jail will not ease as long as a newly built medium security facility stays closed due to budget constraints, the head of the jail said Wednesday.

"We're overcrowded," said Wally Walker, chief deputy of the detention bureau, who recently completed a study of the inmate population from 1984 to 1992. "Everybody knew that ... we need to open our new facility, which is built and ready to go, but we don't have the funds to operate."

The new facility in south county was scheduled to open this month. But its opening has been put on hold until next year at the earliest because of the county's tight budget.

Keeping that jail closed saves an estimated \$1 million a year, Walk-

er said. But the trade-off is that County Jail stays crowded.

Built to hold 249 inmates, the jail on Water Street has been overcrowded since it opened in 1981.

"We have 150 people over our capacity right now in the the jail, and the (minimum security facility) jail farm," Walker said. "A new facility would take care of that."

"I know eventually the jail will open," Sheriff Al Noren said Thursday. "I'm quite sure, out of necessity. But when that's going to be, I don't know. It's going to take a certain amount of money to get the staff for that thing."

Noren said the current plan is to begin using the facility's kitchen to cook meals for jail farm inmates. "The minimum security facility has a very antiquated and worn out kitchen," he said.

The state, which also is suffering budget problems, may ask counties to absorb more cuts in state funds,

Jail bookings



The county's three detention facilities remain overcrowded even though the overall number of bookings has declined since 1990, from 22,677 to 19,767 last year. This chart shows the number of bookings in 1990 and 1992 by the type of crime.

Burglary	544	474
Auto theft	194	135
Robbery	97	116
Theft	2,178	1,886
Homicide	25	32
Narcotics	2,721	2,310
Disturbing the peace	7,101	5,795
Assault	1,604	1,414
Traffic violations	10,750	8,106
Sex crimes	193	161
Drunk in public	3,220	3,055

Source: Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office

Sentinel graphic

which could delay the opening further.

"It's the same old story," said Bud Frank, executive director of

Please see JAIL — A4

Notorious inmate sends poetry

By STEVE PEREZ
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — One of County Jail's most infamous inmates is former escapee and reputed gang member Johnny "Smokey" Zamarron, 34.

Zamarron, according to a poem he sent the Sentinel, remains "defiant" despite facing a sentence of life in prison for his recent conviction on charges of kidnapping a Capitola car salesman at gunpoint, intending to rob him.

He is scheduled to be sentenced April 19.

Now housed in the "Q-Pod," the jail's maximum security facility, the 300-pound inmate first made headlines when he escaped with his crime partner Richard Rubio in October 1991 in the midst of their trial on kidnapping charges.

The escape was blamed on a malfunctioning jail lock and staff negligence.

Rubio is serving a 90-year term in South Dakota for murder and robbery.

Zamarron was eventually recaptured and returned to county jail. During his second trial, he was



'I am but a creation of your ignorance, injustice and inhumanity.'

— Johnny Zamarron's poetry

heavily guarded and shackled to his chair.

He wrote a rambling letter of complaint to the Sentinel March 8, in which he mentioned having had "a few clashes with the jail staff," and said his constitutional rights had been violated.

He also sent along the following poem, which he called "Defiance."

"Once again I stand before you, and once again you will seek to sentence and condemn me to years of empty darkness in your man-made hells of concrete and steel.

And once again we are locked into a fierce battle for what is left of my sanity and will.

I embarrass and anger you because I show no remorse and I refuse to repent before your scales of justice which are unequally bent.

Yet I have often wondered what part of "innocent till proven guilty" do your guns and chains represent.

That you fear me is evident, by your guns and the shackles that you make me wear.

And yet, I am but a mirror into which by my defiance I have made you stare.

I am but a creation of your ignorance, injustice and inhumanity.

I have survived and only grown

Please see INMATE — A4

Jail situation

Continued from Page A1

the county's Criminal Justice Council. "We don't know what the state is going to do to us this summer and we need to know what the effects are going to be on our existing programs before we can start considering opening a new facility."

The study of jail bookings will be used to help answer questions from regulatory agencies and as a reference book for a council committee studying jail crowding, Walker said.

Frank's analysis shows the number of the bookings at the three county facilities have begun to level

off after steady increases since 1984.

In 1992, the number of people booked into County Jail was 18,561, a decrease of nearly 2,000 from 1991, when a record 20,422 people were booked.

From 1984 to 1988, bookings at the main facility steadily increased, from 13,959 in 1984; 14,623 in 1985 and 15,866 in 1986 and 18,066 in 1987.

In 1988, bookings began to level off: 19,803 in 1988; 19,781 in 1989; 20,418 in 1990; 20,422 and 18,561 in 1992.

"I suspect a lot of it (fewer bookings) is because some of our effort

at early intervention, prevention and crime suppression perhaps are starting to pay off a little bit," Frank said.

The Criminal Justice Council has been working on programs to address the root causes of crimes, such as those aimed at gang activity and drug users.

Other reasons Frank gave included:

- Legislation in 1992 that allowed officers to cite people driving with a suspended license as opposed to jailing them.

- The poor economy pushing people to concentrate on "taking care of more basic needs than par-

tying." According to Frank, more crimes were reported in this nation during the so-called "Roaring 20s" than during the Great Depression.

- An increased level of experience and sophistication among local law enforcement officers.

Noren also noted expansion of the county's work release program. About 250 people are in the program doing public service for agencies such as CalTrans.

"And in many cases that's almost more punitive to some people than sending them down to the farm and letting them shoot pool," Noren said.