

✓ CF Animal Shelter R.P. 3/6/89

Farm Bureau urges probe of SPCA

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A Santa Cruz County audit of the SPCA's books has prompted the county Farm Bureau to accuse the SPCA of mismanaging public funds, but the SPCA director says those charges are false.

The SPCA, a private non-profit agency, contracts with the county and the city of Santa Cruz to provide animal-control and shelter services. It also provides shelter services alone for Capitola and Scotts Valley, which employ their own animal-control patrols. Watsonville operates its own pound.

An audit conducted by the office of county Auditor/Controller Gary Knutson found that when the SPCA did not use up public contract funds in providing shelter and animal-control services, it put the surplus into the SPCA's private account.

The SPCA account money pays for other activities than the animal pick-up and shelter business the public agencies contract for.

For instance, the SPCA recently called for a boycott of fur clothing, and has spent some of its private funds to promote the boycott. The audi-

tor's report reveals that public funds have been put into that account.

The total surplus amount from public-agency contracts between July 1, 1985, and June 30, 1988, came to \$88,287, Knutson's report said. The total amount paid to the SPCA by the county and cities during the same period came to \$3.9 million.

Knutson said it could not be determined how much of the surplus was owed to the county or cities, and therefore the county and cities should forego any refund.

He said putting the surplus funds into the SPCA account resulted from "contract ambiguities" rather than contract violations.

That is, the contract does not say what should be done with surplus shelter funds, said Doug Fakkema, executive director of the SPCA, this morning.

forecast

Rain tonight and tomorrow. Overnight lows in the 50s.

Details page 5.

Fakkema said that putting surplus shelter funds into the SPCA account was not "mismanagement," as the Farm Bureau alleges in a March 2 letter to Supervisor Gary Patton.

Fakkema said the SPCA subsidizes its contract with the county and cities with its own funds.

"The SPCA has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of its own money to directly benefit the contract (with the county and cities)," he said.

"We're getting zinged for using the carryovers, but we're not getting any credit for ten times that amount that we put in (to shelter and control services)," Fakkema said.

He said he could not at the moment document whether the SPCA actually subsidized the county/cities contract to the tune of \$800,000, but was going to figure the amount out and present it to the Board of Supervisors.

The audit faulted the SPCA for overall sloppy accounting procedures, and even carelessness in locking up its cash at night, but Fakkema said many of those faults had already been corrected. He said the SPCA had hired an accountant to help

devise a new, more accurate accounting system.

While the Farm Bureau praises Knutson for his exposure of SPCA accounting flaws, it is also demanding further investigation of the SPCA.

In his letter to Patton, Farm Bureau President Steve Siri demands that the Board of Supervisors establish a task force that would conduct a general review of the SPCA, apart from its finances.

The Farm Bureau has been at loggerheads with the SPCA for years now over such issues as an SPCA-supported ban of leg-

See SPCA page 2 ►

inside

BUSINESS	8
CLASSIFIED	17-19
COMICS	7
CROSSWORD	19
DEATHS	5
EDITORIAL	20
LIVING	4
MOVIES	6
SPORTS	12-14
TELEVISION	7

✓ CF ANIMAL SHELTER

SPCA R.P. 3/6/89

► From page 1

hold animal traps, and slow response times in rural areas of the county.

The review proposed by the Farm Bureau would include such items as average response time, adoption procedures, disposal of carcasses of euthanized animals, and comparison of the Santa Cruz SPCA to animal-control services provided in other communities.

Fakkema said he thought the task force proposal was a stunt to gain media attention.

"They (the Farm Bureau) haven't bothered to talk to me about the task force, which is kind of curious," he said. "Why hasn't the Farm Bureau come to the SPCA board of directors to talk about the issues if they're dissatisfied?"