

Feud re-fueled by comments by Mrs. Liddicoat

By BUD O'BRIEN

Sheriff Al Noren said Monday morning he was mystified by Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat's charge that his department suspects Supervisor Chris Matthews of "being involved in gangs and encouraging criminal activity."

"I don't know where she got such information," Noren said, indicating he had no knowledge of any such "suspicions" in his department.

But Mrs. Liddicoat, who is chairman of the board, as well as the representative of the Second (Aptos-Capitola) district, insisted her charge was accurate. Suggesting that Sheriff Noren couldn't discuss the matter because it would compromise the investigation, Mrs. Liddicoat said: "I can tell you that my source was not frivolous. They (the sheriff's office) are concerned." She refused, however, to name the source.

Mrs. Liddicoat made the charge originally in the course

of a conversation with Watsonville Mayor Bill Johnston at a meeting Thursday of county and city officials. The remarks were overheard by a reporter for the Santa Cruz Sentinel and printed in that newspaper, along with some other disparaging remarks about Matthews' personal character made by Mrs. Liddicoat.

Matthews reacted with outrage: "You would think the chairman of the board of supervisors . . . would act with some degree of responsibility and truthfulness. To say I encourage crime is outrageous. I have devoted the last five years to curtailing crime. To keeping men and women from committing crimes," Matthews responded.

(Before he was appointed to the board, Matthews ran the PROJECT HOPE program in Watsonville which helps ex-convicts return to a productive role in society. He is himself an ex-convict,

having been convicted of smuggling marijuana when he was in the Army, but his conviction was overturned on appeal.)

Mrs. Liddicoat refused to back down on any of her accusations Monday morning; she repeated and elaborated on them. She did say she believed the press had blown the issue out of proportion and repeated a charge she makes frequently, that the press in general and the Register-Pajaronian in particular, are protective of Matthews while portraying her as "the wicked witch."

"It was kind of a casual comment," she said of her remarks to Mayor Johnston. (Johnston said this morning he didn't remember that Mrs. Liddicoat had said Matthews was linked with criminal activity in Watsonville, but he said, "I never tied Chris with any gangs.")

Then Mrs. Liddicoat made some casual remarks about the Watsonville supervisor.

Among her accusations: "He's an immoral, drunken bum . . . he drinks in the morning and is always in the bars . . . he has a whole pattern of protecting criminals. . . ."

She conceded that, since "I don't go to bars," she hadn't

personally observed his drinking habits, but she said she had heard about them from good sources. She complained that the press ignored these peccadillos, pointing to an occasion on which Matthews was late for a board meeting ("He is always late") and gave as an "excuse" that his car had broken down on Larkin Valley Road.

"What was he doing on Larkin Valley Road?" Mrs. Liddicoat asked rhetorically. "That's not on the way to the meeting." (A look at the map would indicate that it would be a very practical route from Matthews' home on Dutchman Road to Santa Cruz.)

In his original reply to Mrs. Liddicoat's accusation's, Matthews suggested that she was in need of "medical attention."

"That's old Communist tactic No. 1," Mrs. Liddicoat said, "to describe your opponent as having mental problems."

Aside from his personal character, Mrs. Liddicoat said, "I think his performance (as a supervisor) is abominable; he's (Supervisor Gary) Patton's puppet . . . he doesn't understand the issues."

Matthews said this morning

that he was becoming increasingly frustrated in his efforts to cope with the personal attacks of Chairman Liddicoat. Responding to the charges of "immorality" and his drinking habits, Matthews repeated his statement that "I really believe she needs medical help" and added that "I'd more than welcome any type of investigation" into all the charges.

The Pajaro Valley supervisor said he was particularly outraged by her charges that he was encouraging crime.

"That really upsets me," he said, indicating that he is particularly proud of his community service in that field. "It's just real outrageous. I think she has done more to degrade the office than anybody I can remember."

Matthews said that in his opinion, Mrs. Liddicoat has fatally compromised her ability to act as chairman of the board, but he said: "I'm going to continue to try to act as a county supervisor. I would hope Marilyn would start trying to act like a chairperson of the board."

The reaction of other members of the board to the situation could best be described as somewhere

between discomfiture and embarrassment.

Neither Supervisor Pat Liberty of the San Lorenzo Valley-Scotts Valley district, nor Supervisor Dan Forbus of the Live-Oak-Soquel district, would say that Mrs. Liddicoat had compromised her position as chairman. But they both made it clear that the situation created by her remarks is not conducive to harmonious relations among the supervisors.

"When I read the paper," Mrs. Liberty said, "I put it down and dreaded the thoughts of next Tuesday." (Supervisors meet every Tuesday.)

"I would not like to make any comment at all," Mrs. Liberty said. "It would only rupture whatever hope that we may have to be able to work together. Our first function is to represent the people, and you can't do that unless you can talk to each other."

Forbus was extremely cautious in his comments, saying only that "It seems to be a personal matter" between the two supervisors. He said, however, that the chairman of the board has to be able "to segregate personal conflicts" from board business.

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